Dismantling White Supremacy: The Role of Ubuntu Epistemology and US Universities

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The new millennium brought with it necessities for new paradigms that facilitate transformative and restorative social justice initiatives for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and other People of Color) youth and children. This commentary chronicles an instance of the application of Ubuntu epistemology within the African diasporic community as a means of dismantling White Supremacy. The primary tenet of Ubuntu epistemology is communalism. This project articulates the autonomy and liberation of African descended children/youth, reinforces their resilience and resistance, underscores the importance of authentic BIPOC child/youth joy, healing and community awareness, and promotes political activism. Ubuntu epistemology serves to empower BIPOC children/youth on a micro level. Ultimately, it facilitates the dismantling of white supremacy by decentering whiteness and by prioritizing ethnic ideologies and paradigms.

The heightened incidences of civil unrest and revolutionary stratagem led by BIPOC youth sparked a renewed interest in and commitment to a more than 2,000 year-old African-centered philosophical theory of knowledge. Ubuntu epistemology disrupts racial injustice and accentuates self-advocacy among BIPOC communities (Tavernaro-Haidarian 2018). In the Xhosa tradition, *Ubuntu*, or humanity, translates to *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu:* "A person is a person through their relationship to others" (I am because you/we are). It is symbolic of the inter-relatedness of human beings (Tavernaro-Haidarian 2018) and pushes the social justice paradigm for young people beyond performative measures and posturing by exposing Black children and youth to an epistemology that empowers them, by giving them access and onus.

BIPOC children/youth often suffer the greatest impact of racial injustices and oppressive tactics. The cities of Chicago, New York, and New Jersey are prime examples of the longitudinal impact of decades-long policies perpetuating institutional racism, structural inequalities, anti-Black rhetoric, and opportunity deserts. However, Ubuntu offers alternative possibilities under this context. In the summer of 2019, a group of fraternity brothers from the Montclair Kappa League of Kappa Alpha Psi Incorporated took a group of six high school mentees from New Jersey to Ghana, West Africa (Watch the Yard, n.d.). The Montclair Kappa League hosts an annual international travel series and the Kappas wanted to make sure that youth from the area that they serve had a chance to experience *The Year of Return* hosted by the Republic of Ghana that year (Watch the Yard, n.d.). *The Year of Return* is an African diasporic initiative designed to reconnect historically displaced/dismembered African descended individuals with Africa. For example, the *Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Homecoming Initiative* seeks to create an inter-university exchange between HBCUs and African universities. It is a part of the largest, most successful, and comprehensive reorientation/cultural/socio-political revolution throughout

the African diaspora. *The Year of Return* was a clarion call for African descendants across the diaspora to "return" home. They could metaphorically revisit the place of their ancestors' birth through interactive conferences, diasporic academic initiatives, or transnational symposiums. There were opportunities for collaborative business investments, technology-based partnerships, and artistic and Afro-futuristic expressions. Acquainting these youth with the African origins of their history through the *Year of Return* trip had a powerful effect on the Kappa Leaguers. One of the Kappa Leaguers stated, "Walking down the same path some of our ancestors followed to their last bath (before being sold into slavery) I felt connected" (Watch the Yard, n.d.). Connecting these young men to their history can help them become the change agents of tomorrow, empowering them to be the authors of a new narrative that uplifts, unifies and edifies Black children/youth.

Ubuntu epistemology is rooted in humanness. The Montclair Kappa League applied Ubuntu epistemology by creating the bridge that connected the youth to their ancestry. They displayed Ubuntu by acting on the behalf of the youth in their community. Ubuntu epistemology can further grow this group's efforts by partnering with other Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) to host more students in a wider array of African nations. Another initiative that connects Black youth to their African roots is the Divine Nine (D-9), a group of BGLOs whose traditions include "stepping" and "calls" (DeGregory 2015), both traditions that can be traced back to their African roots and are examples of Ubuntu, connection, and community. These ancestral connections build and solidify the African-ness in African American youth, empowering them to dismantle White Supremacy and live a life of true Ubuntu.

References

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