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Crossing Boundaries to Engage in Difficult Dialogues

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Crossing Boundaries to Engage in Difficult Dialogues

Abstract

Crossing boundaries that lead to difficult dialogue touches upon the core of my academic existence. I teach about Africa and the world of Africans on a small predominately white campus outside of a major metro area. The topics that are introduced in my classes cross over many academic areas. With Africa as the starting point of all discussions, students gradually develop an "Afrocentric" perspective per the discussions of Asante. Not because it is the focus of the class, but because Africa is the origin of civilization according to Diop and others.

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Crossing the academic boundaries established by European education allows me to introduce the scholarship of an African people throughout the Diaspora. The following books have been adopted as texts for my classes:

- 1) Free People of Color
- 2) The Turbulent Voyage
- 3) I Am Because We Are
- 4) Early Negro Writings

Students leave my classes with an awareness of scholarship not discuss in their Sociology, Psychology, and History classes that did not exist prior to their enrollment into the classes that I teach. They now discuss the people by names that were in this country as free Africans during slavery.

The scholarship of Dr. Andrew Billingsley, Dr. Wade Nobles, Dr. Cornel West, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Dr. Franz Fanon, Dr. Angela Davis and others is discussed. Many of my fellow instructors find it alarming when students ask them to discuss the scholarship of African scholars, such as; Sociology -Andrew Billingsley or in Psychology -Franz Fanon.

There is always difficult dialogue when students quote what has been taught in another class, especially if that class is taught by an African American about an African people. The doors are then opened, discussions will begin.

Presenter

Judy Purnell is southern born. She entered the world of "Jim Crow" as a third generation "free born". Prof. Purnell teaches: African and African American Culture and Understanding Non-Western Culture at Columbus State University, in Columbus, Georgia. Both of these courses are Interdisciplinary. These courses require that all students enrolled in these classes have a broad understanding of the world. These courses open up the African's world-view in an environment where it is hard for students and faculty to conceptualize anything that is not Eurocentric.

Prof. Purnell is a 1971 graduate of Tuskegee (Institute) University, Tuskegee, Alabama with a B.A. Degree in English. She earned a M.S. Degree from Troy State University, Troy, Alabama in Criminal Justice Administration. She has completed the course work for the DAH, Degree in History (African), Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia.