

Chapter 7

Reclaiming Spirit: A Call to Educators of Color Healing From the Trauma of Schooling

Altagracia Montilla
A.M. Consulting, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the concept of reclaiming spirit as a pathway towards healing from racial trauma for educators of color committed to racial justice. It addresses the devastating impact of racial trauma within schools, which perpetuates white supremacy and spirit murders, resulting in a lost sense of self. The chapter advocates for educators to engage in intentional healing by drawing on ancestral knowledge and focusing inward. The chapter proposes that true liberation is achieved when educators embrace ancestral ways of knowing, doing, and being beyond traditional schooling. The chapter concludes by introducing the “characteristics of a healthy community,” an afro-indigenous lens to community care, offering guidance on creating transformative and revolutionary spaces within schools and personal lives.

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CASUALTY OF SCHOOLING: A LOST SENSE OF SELF

“School is where you get initiated into the white man’s way of knowing.”

- Malidoma Patrice Somé, The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual, and Community

White supremacy is woven into the fabric of schooling through various institutional and systemic practices that perpetuate racial inequalities and favor the dominance of eurocentric ways of knowing, being, and doing (Montilla, 2020). Collectively, schools function as bootcamp for white supremacy as students are implicitly and explicitly expected to immerse themselves in, and assimilate to white-dominant norms. Those best at assimilating are rewarded, while those who “fail” to assimilate are punished.

This process of assimilation in addition to the denial of inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance robs Black and Brown students of their humanity — a process better known as spirit murdering (Williams, 1982; Love, 2013). Spirit murdering in schools is pervasive and the impact scars Black and Brown youth. As Love (2016) notes, spirit murdering is rooted in a system that openly destroys the minds, bodies, and souls of Black and Brown students beyond repair. The devastating impact that schools have on Black and Brown children is a form of racial oppression. Hardy (2013) defines racial oppression as “a traumatic form of interpersonal violence which can lacerate the spirit, scar the soul, and puncture the psyche”, the impact of which are wounds like: internalized devaluation, an assaulted sense of self, and internalized voicelessness.

The result of schooling for Black and Brown youth is a terrifying disconnect from self and spirit that can only be repaired through intentional healing. To heal is to become whole again (Menakem, 2017), a transformative process and a form of liberation. I borrow Harro’s (2000) definition of liberation as “critical transformation”. The critical transformation in this case being the process of healing from the traumas of schooling with a restored sense of self.

Unfortunately, we are rarely given the opportunity to heal, let alone taught how to heal from racialized oppression. That is by design. People that are whole are threats to the systems that oppress them. In the words of Assata Shakur, “The schools we go to are reflections of the society that created them. No one is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them.” The young person who navigates schools with a lacerated spirit eventually ages into adulthood still burdened by the weight of unmetabolized trauma.

Black and Brown educators, particularly those committed to justice in schools, channel this unmetabolized trauma when we enter the educator workforce. We enter with the intention of making a difference, eager to protect Black and Brown students

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