On the Permanent Forum for People of African Descent and Why Our Doctorates Matter:
Considerations for Future Work
Stakeholders Report for the Permanent Forum for the People of African Descent
Geneva, Switzerland, December 5-8, 2022
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This response includes recommendations that contribute to the expansion of dialogue on doctoral education research on the People of African Descent in consideration of its role as a human rights issue informed by the first ever United Nations Permanent Forum for People of African Descent (PFPAD) in Geneva, Switzerland December 5-8, 2022. In response to the call from the PFPAD to "Connect the Past to the Future" to facilitate "Equality for All People of African Descent" the concept of Sankofa provides guidance for understanding why the need to examine systems of doctoral education is critical to: addressing systems of racial discrimination, challenges to reparatory justice, and initiatives that promote, protect in the full respect of human rights of people of African descent. This response emphasizes the People of African Descent in the United States and South Africa with consideration of this work in the broader African Diaspora, as represented in PFPAD.

Sankofa, *Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi*, is an Akan philosophical tradition of the Adinkra cultural heritage system and a way of knowing for the communities of Ghana and throughout the Diaspora (Temple, 2010). It translates into "it is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten" and "offers a solution to reconstituting a fragmented cultural past" (Temple, 2010, p. 128). This cultural way of knowing is the inspiration for this work of interrogating and (re)interpreting doctoral education with consideration of the experiences of historically marginalized doctoral students. In the case of experiences of historically marginalized doctoral students, resources typically available to support an understanding of academic achievement, doctoral student success, and degree attainment are fragmented due to systemic exclusion and misrepresentation. The process of Sankofa in this work represents its explicit acknowledgement to honor its function as a cultural philosophy for addressing this fragmentation in doctoral education research. It is a way of looking back on previous literature on the doctoral experience by using well-cited cultural dimensions of diversity and critical race theory (CRT). In doctoral education research, acknowledgement of Sankofa is not widely used as a lens for understanding the contributions and experiences of historically marginalized doctoral students. In the United States, South Africa, and other countries around the world, oppression, like slavery and apartheid, has shaped policies and practices influencing national systems of education and the way historically marginalized students experience academic processes within doctoral education.

Systems of Racial Discrimination

In the United States and South Africa, doctoral education research and practice are represented by several significant trends shaping current and future developments in doctoral education for both countries. For example, in the United States, research on diversity, race, and culture has evolved considerably over the past thirty years to influence the development of policy, institutional contexts, institutional leadership, and an understanding of student experiences and student identities (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; D. Smith, 2016; W. Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002). This research has led to the application of cultural frameworks that interrogate the influence of systemic exclusion within institutional environments to examine racial and cultural aspects of student experience (Antony, 2002; Barker 2012; Ellis 2001; Felder 2010; Felder & Barker, 2013; Gildersleeve, Croom; & Vasquez, 2011). An underlying goal of this work is to identify perspectives addressing barriers to academic success to increase degree completion and transition into the professoriate and other career pathways.

Since the democratic transition in South Africa in 1994, doctoral degree attainment has increased and student participation has become increasingly diversified (Sefotho, 2018). As such, researchers have inquired about the identities of Ph.D. graduates and their disciplinary interests. In South Africa, the first published

comprehensive study on doctoral degree attainment by the Academy of Science of South Africa in 2010 represents a watershed movement towards improving the representation of PhD recipients in the country. Scholarly observations of South Africa's national capacity to provide evidence-based advice to government has led researchers to examine critical partners for collaborative research endeavors, the development of innovative programs, strategic investments, and collaboration across sectors (Nerad, 2011).

Challenges to Reparatory Justice

Doctoral student socialization continues to be a critical concept for examining the process of doctoral degree attainment and serves as a key framework for understanding the impact of racial and cultural issues in various disciplines and industries around the world. As research on race and culture evolves, understanding this work within the context of doctoral education will be important to institutional diversification efforts that serve to transform academic environments towards inclusivity. Research on the student aspects of socialization (Gardner, 2008; 2010; Gardner & Barnes, 2007) and the organizational elements of socialization have been cited widely (Tierney, 1997; Weidman, 2006; Weidman & Stein, 2003; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001) but more research on the racial and cultural aspects of the doctoral process is needed to provide guidance on creating strategies to increase participation and degree completion from underrepresented groups (Ellis, 2001; Twale, Weidman, & Bethea, 2016).

While scholars have considered the ways that racial experience complicates the doctoral process when students must address discrimination and racism including academic preparation, parental educational background, interactions with faculty, and advisement (Antony & Taylor, 2004; Barker, 2011; Cleveland, 2004; Ellis, 2001; Gay, 2004; Green & Scott, 2003; Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1991), additional empirical study is needed to understand why there has been little increase in doctoral degree completion and transition into the professoriate for Black/African Americans and other underrepresented groups. Research regarding observations of psycho-social issues at the doctoral level is at the center of many institutional diversity efforts and is the goal of transforming academic environments away from historic legacies of exclusion towards environments that are more inclusive. For instance, C. R. Snyder (2014) cites Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen and Allen (1999) in an examination of women of color in South African doctoral programs. She considers four areas where historically marginalized students face barriers to degree completion: challenging race and gender roles, balancing multiple roles, managing financial concern and access to resources, and finding support.

While there are many critical issues to consider when examining the racial experience, the practical strategies attempt to prioritize supporting the psycho-social aspects of the racial experience and how student perception is a guiding feature in the multiple processes associated with doctoral student socialization. In examining the differences in doctoral student success among Black, Hispanic and White students, Nettles (1990) discusses the severe (and systemic) underrepresentation of Black doctoral students and asserts that Black and Hispanic students perceive more feelings of racial discrimination and receive less research and teaching assistantships than their White counterparts. He notes that out of three groups, Black doctoral students require the most intervention for support due to challenges with undergraduate preparation, availability of research opportunities, and the reliance on personal resources to finance doctoral study. Nettles' quantitative study does not identify specific psycho-social issues regarding the racial discrimination experienced by Black students. However, his work underscores that perception that experience is essential to understanding the role race plays in the doctoral process.

Morehouse and Dawkins (2006) also discuss the severe underrepresentation of Black doctoral degree recipients as a long-standing pattern and suggest that more research must be developed to understand how students could be supported once they are enrolled in doctoral programs. Their work with the McKnight Doctoral Fellowship program demonstrates the importance of seamlessness as an effective approach to supporting African American degree completion and success beyond the doctorate. They assert that opportunities should facilitate a connection between research activities and student interests and suggest that these research interests may be related to the African American experience. A seamless approach also considers the environmental constraints associated with the African American student experience in

predominantly White spaces where accounts of indirect discrimination and racism may occur about their participation as students as well as the ways in which their research interests are supported.

Consideration of these experiences can inform program organizers of practices that have typically served to complicate intellectual development that emerges from student research interests. A seamless approach involves a series of activities that serve to counteract racist norms through supportive activities designed to embrace students' research interests and empower their intellectual development. In addition to these important motivational elements, Morehouse and Dawkins (2006) also discuss program essentials such as providing funding for doctoral study and mentors who are willing to provide guidance on research activities. Taylor and Antony (2000) find that motivation about research was directly linked to the racial experience for doctoral students. They assert that African American doctoral students feel pressure to respond to stereotype threats of not being able to meet standards of academic achievement and feel the need to prove themselves. Furthermore, the need to prove themselves often puts them at risk of responding to false standards that do not encourage their intellectual development. Taylor and Antony note that African American students carry the weight of wanting to improve education for their communities and this obligation is deeply intertwined with their research agendas. Moreover, African American doctoral students' obligation to social justice is often correlated with an objective to strengthen historically underserved marginalized communities (Hopp, Mumford, and Williams, 2003). In fact, for some doctoral students their racial experience may extend beyond the goal of degree completion towards a commitment to a broad agenda of social justice where racial politics are central to life-long obligation of service, research, and teaching -- serving to uplift the very communities they represent. To understand doctoral student socialization holistically, race must be considered an aspect of doctoral students' research orientation in an effort to facilitate meaning-making of the learning experience, strides towards greater intellectual development, degree completion, and success.

Furthermore, considering the racial experience will serve to inform faculty and administrators who are interested in strengthening their capacity to support marginalized doctoral students, enacting our commitment to uplifting our community. Since this work examines race from a psychosocial perspective it's important to acknowledge scholarship on racial identity/ideology and its significant contribution to the discussion on the psychosocial experiences of Black/African Americans, including Cross' (1991) Shades of Black: Diversity in African American identity and Helms' (1990) perspectives on racial identity theory in her work, Black and White Racial Identity, Theory and Practice. Cross and Helms present measurement scales and interventions regarding the ways African Americans perceive their identities in relation to their personality development, interpersonal interactions, and environment. Within the context of doctoral student socialization, Cross and Helm's perspective on personality development may be aligned with scholarly intellectual development (scholarly personality or scholarly voice), interpersonal interactions may be aligned with the student-faculty relations (or relationships with other academic community members), and doctoral students' academic setting might be considered for environment.

Relevance of Cross's (1991) and Helms' (1990) work brings to bear on the significance of psychology on the racial experience being a critical aspect of socialization for African American doctoral students. Perspectives on the role of racial identity within the doctoral experience are addressed in the examination of doctoral students' interactions with faculty mentors and curriculum design (Felder, 2010; Hall & Burns, 2009). Furthermore, the concept of racial identity is relevant to Black doctoral students' perceptions on their struggle to persist towards degree completion (Gildersleeve et al., 2011) and in understanding their experiences in cross-race advising relationships (Barker, 2012). These perspectives are consistent with the process of Sankofa as they centralize the importance of race and culture in consideration of academic success, degree completion, and transitions into career pathways.

The student-faculty relationship is essential to socialization and academic success for historically marginalized doctoral students in both contexts. In comparing the experiences of historically marginalized students in the literature, a key distinction of the student-faculty interaction is the difference of how authority is managed. In the United States faculty members are typically seen as advising students on the development of their research and are often formally known as faculty advisers. When considering policy research suggestions focused on the academic advisement of historically marginalized doctoral students in the United States and South Africa,

two important issues should be considered: how to advise students regarding non-academic career pathways and preparation for future faculty roles. In terms of advising Black/African doctoral students about non-academic career pathways, strategies must be multifaceted to advise students about opportunities (Barker, 2012; Felder & Barker, 2013).

In addition to traditional gatekeeping systems, supportive and holistic advisement must involve reviewing prospective networking and professional development opportunities within one's institution in addition to students' relevant disciplinary and industrial communities. Students must be aware of the ways their knowledge and skills can be honed to contribute in ways that align with the way they make meaning of their academic experiences, disciplines, and practices. For many Black/African American students this may involve acknowledging and understanding the ways their racial and cultural perspectives inform their research and practice agendas and incorporating this into advisement strategies (Ellis, 2001). Realities about the availability of faculty opportunities must be considered to address the racial and cultural interests of students. These realities may include advising students about faculty opportunities related to a student's research interests, the ways they may or may not be supportive of these interests, and identifying other opportunities where a student may be able to thrive both professionally and personally. For instance, if a Black/African American student's research agenda prioritizes race and culture, an adviser should consider how this agenda will be supported in post-degree completion within a faculty role. Furthermore, professional development at the doctoral level must address students' ability to hone transferable skills and the ways these skills might address their interest in racial and cultural issues. Sefotho (2018) discusses the process of identity development for emerging faculty supervisors in South Africa, their role and contribution both on the world stage and within their country.

The relational aspects of interest convergence and the racial and power dynamics involved in this negotiation are essential towards the building of racial equality awareness in the relationships between faculty and historically marginalized doctoral students. Within HBCU contexts these relational aspects within the student-faculty relationship have served to support historically marginalized student transition into doctoral education For most of the 20th Century, these institutions were the primary providers of opportunities for graduate education for Black/African Americans (and continue to make substantive contributions). Research on HBCUs as baccalaureate origins, as well as, producers of doctoral degree completers for Black/African American doctoral degree recipients, provides foundational background information for understanding the institutional cultural traditions fundamental to academic success at the doctoral level. Policy research suggests our graduate education system is vulnerable regarding the recruitment and retention of students from historically marginalized backgrounds (Council of Graduate Schools and Educational Testing Service, 2010). HBCUs facilitate opportunities for graduate schools to identify and attract talented students in the United States, South Africa, and other parts of the world. Furthermore, these institutions specialize in creating interventions that increase degree completion for Blacks/African Americans. In this way, these institutions are key national assets in facilitating institutional diversity and building capacity to support historically marginalized doctoral students by minimizing vulnerability in the graduate education system.

Initiatives in the Full respect of Human Rights of People of African descent

Disciplinary areas focused on education, social sciences, and humanities have been identified to have strong representation of Black/African American doctoral degree completers (National Science Foundation, 2006), while doctoral degrees in the sciences have been an academic priority for doctoral students in South Africa. Therefore, understanding trends about career opportunities related to these areas is essential to supporting academic success, degree attainment, and transition beyond degree completion. An understanding of these trends must involve consideration of the racial and cultural aspects of the doctoral student experience. To maximize interest in disciplines of students from underrepresented backgrounds, grant programs that leverage the interests represented by the academy and industries should consider the ways racial and cultural issues inform research and practice. In doing this they will be better positioned to understand and support contributions from doctoral students from historically marginalized communities.

The doctoral experience is multi-faceted and complex, with numerous issues to consider for understanding how to develop holistic support efforts/strategies for historically marginalized doctoral students. There are three areas of socialization that are critical to the ongoing support of Black/African American and South African doctoral student success and degree completion: 1) *Prior socialization,* how race and culture can inform the process of preparing students for doctoral study, 2) Augmented *advisement* strategies create support for developing new opportunities for building cultural wealth*,* and 3) understanding the ways *disciplinary interests* are expanding and transforming in response to shifting societal needs. Strategies that increase awareness and understanding of these issues can serve to strengthen institutional/organizational diversity initiatives. How and why these students persist through to completion can be integral for learning more about their persistence in other disciplines. Strategies for future analysis should lay the groundwork for deeper examination through interrogation of literature with the use of questions based on a culturally-focused dimensional framework for diversity. Sankofa embodies the application of these questions. That is to say, this philosophical approach promotes an underlying premise to continually engage permissiveness in freedom for representation in spaces of our past, present, and future where there is a right and need to exist. Findings address four dimensions: legacies of exclusion, structural diversity, psychosocial aspects of student experience, and student faculty interactions through the practice of advisement in the United States, and supervision in South Africa.

There are several benefits to studying the racial and cultural aspects of the doctoral experience as they relate to understanding Black/African American doctoral students. First, issues contributing to racial and cultural inequities in doctoral education that relate to a student's prior socialization, advisement needs, and institutional commitment to supporting students' interests, inform our understanding of how to support academic success, degree completion and transitional experiences beyond the doctoral process. Second, looming socio-historical factors and the existence of racism and exclusionary policies in higher education have contributed to systemic educational marginalization.

Critical race theory and interest convergence provide important foundational philosophical frameworks for building practical strategies that align with the historical and intellectual needs of Black/African American doctoral students related to historic legacies of exclusion. Third, the study of racial and cultural experiences at the doctoral level contributes to the existing body of knowledge about the ways Black/African American students experience the doctoral process by examining issues that have contributed to the underrepresentation of Blacks/African Americans. Research on the racial and cultural aspects of the doctoral experience must expand to support the value of story-telling and narratives about student experience. These efforts emphasize the racial and cultural experiences associated with socialization for historically marginalized students.

Conclusion

In conclusion it is recommended the PFPAD consider the development of a committee composed of scholars who conduct research on the doctoral experience for the People of African Descent, across the multiple disciplines within the PFPAD, to review and consider the impact of this work on the overall mission of The Forum.

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