

Walking Into My Purpose

I remember when I was five years old, in kindergarten. The school year was 1996-1997, and I randomly told my parents that Black people ruled the world. My mother looked at me and said, "No, we did not." I never questioned my parents, but at that moment, I felt it in my gut that I was right and they were wrong. Then and there, I made a promise to myself that someday I will be able to articulate what was put inside of me. Throughout grade school, I only attended predominately Black schools until I enrolled in college. Still today, I appreciate my elementary school for making every day about Black history; no matter the day or time, teachers shared historical histories about great Black inventors, explorers, and mathematicians. They poured self-love into us by expressing affirmations that instilled us with confidence. We were driven by the understanding that we are greater than what society portrays us Blacks to be. Bond Elementary gave me a sense of pride; I did not feel uncomfortable being Black because of the knowledge I was learning and the Black excellence I saw from the representation of my teachers. Every day on my way to school, my parents listened to this world-famous radio Disk Jockey by the name of Tom Joyner, on 96.1 JAMZ. He made it his mission to educate his listeners about the rich history of Black people. He also partnered with McDonald's to create a Black history book called *Black 365*. With every McDonald's 'happy meal, I had the option to get a toy or the book. As a kid, I loved when my parents stopped to get us a happy meal but without any hesitation, I gravitated to the *Black 365* book rather than the toy like most other kids. I was surrounded with Black history, and I made it up in my mind that I would never stop wanting to learn more about my heritage.

As an African American man, when it comes to learning about my heritage, I have noticed how our history tends to begin with enslavement rather than the great civilizations in Africa, such as Kush and Kemet. History books do not speak about the great institution of Timbuktu that taught Greek Philosophers or the Queens who led their people to victory over the Roman Empire. Yes, enslavement did occur, but historians leave out the revolutions that transpired on Atlantic slave ships. The awakening of enslaved Haitians who did not accept slavery and defeated Napoleon of France is a whisper in Western history. These revolutions sparked many other revolts throughout the Caribbean and the East coast of the United States. It is important that society understand that African people did not roll over for colonizers like history books portray. We are not inferior to Europeans, and it is crucial for African descendants to know how spiritually, mentally, and physically powerful we are as a people.

Seeking a history degree with the concentration in African Diaspora is a continuation of learning myself, understanding my culture, and becoming a bridge that connects African descendants and non-African descendants. I want to pour information into others, connect bridges, and spread self-love amongst other African descendants. I want to be the change I want to see in my community. In order to do this, it is imperative for me to become more enlightened about my history of Africa and Africa's Diaspora. We are living in a time where the government is trying to erase black history, minimized us as a people and belittle the great impact we have made on this earth. I want to keep the rich African history unburied before society puts its last shovel of dirt on my heritage and erase the great contributions we have given to civilizations around the world.

My freshman year of college was a huge cultural shock for me. Up until then, I never saw Blacks in white fraternities, Blacks in white sorties or in-person interracial relationships. I did not view it as if I should frown upon it. However, I did notice the impact of acculturation on African students, who were losing their identities to fit into other cultural realms. Their

assimilation to life showed the lack of knowledge about who they are as a people because of society's perception of Black people. I began to notice Black students adopting others' cultural beliefs and mastering the history of those who have and currently colonize Africa. Western society uses these mechanisms to bury African culture so that descendants forget their past and ultimately believe the whitewash inferiority complex that African is not good enough. The more I developed my academic and professional career, I recognized the need for change, so I began to share history lessons I was taught over the years in school. My wife saw the determination I have to learn about history, and she led me to read books, such as *The Destruction of African Civilization*, written by Chancellor Williams, and *Stamped from The Beginning*, by Ibram X. Kendi, *Our African Consciousness*, by Edward Bruce Bynum, and *Black Skin White Masks* by Frantz Fanon. I have also watched documentaries by notable scholars, such as *Africa's Great Civilizations*, by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. I have shared the knowledge I have gained from these books and films with my community. The program will help me advance as a future professor because as a Black professor teaching Black history, I will help my community build pride in their culture as they navigate Western society.

Finally, obtaining my degree in history with a concentration on the African Diaspora will further my credibility, which will be a useful tool in combatting white supremacist policies and notions surrounding people of African descent. We as African descendants are often given history from the views of what political leaders want; that is, from past times to present, American institutions have sought to wipe out enriching education regarding African diasporic people in order to push the status quo in favor of European interests. In 2022, Florida's governor Ron DeSantis decided to hide and distort the truth about America's accountability in oppressing African descendants with the "Stop Woke Act." Color blind laws like this open doors for more discriminatory policies that negatively impact people of African descent. This law, and numerous others like it, seem to have one goal: to obscure the mental, spiritual and physical oppression we as a people experience as a result of colonization and anti-black efforts. This realization further increased my interest in learning more about my African history, philosophy, religion, and spiritual beliefs. Despite the pervasive myth of Black inferiority, my ultimate goal is to empower others through knowledge, to amplify Black voices, and to correct the disfigured, one-sided narratives that hegemonic society continuously purports about us. We did not 'benefit' from slavery — we fought against it, risking our lives, sacrificing our young, and still today, we continue this fight out of necessity. This understanding is crucial for African descendants to know, and it is equally important for others as well. I understand that knowledge is power: the more I know about my heritage, the more I can teach others about the rich history of the African Diaspora, and in the long run, creating a more equitable and humane society for all.

In my community, many of my brothers and sisters lack a sense of pride in our African roots because colonialism and engrained racism deters many of us from seeing value in our own heritage. This subconscious conflict has taken a toll on us, creating an unstable psyche that cripples our sense of self-worth — we are literally and figuratively dying because we do not understand where we truly come from, that our lineage truly begins with kings and queens, innovators, scientists, and scholars. We are originators. For this reason, pursuing a higher education in Africana studies has a divine purpose for me, especially as an African American male and first-generation college graduate. Not only will this degree allow me to get closer with my ancestors and learn more about who I am, but it will also allow me to continuously grow into the being I am meant to be. I truly believe the purpose of my academic journey is greater than I, which is why I consistently strive to enlighten others in my community through knowledge.

I know if history lessons are coming from someone who mirrors their experiences, they would gravitate to them because representation is everything. Giving back in a way that helps my community build confidence in our heritage matters, which is another reason getting accepted into Jackson State University's History program means so much to me.