

UC Merced 2nd Annual Black Excellence Symposium

Black Research Fellowship Recipients

Breaking the School-to-Prison Pipeline



Nyjah Robertson

UC Merced is surrounded by prisons: at least five state and federal prisons sit within 50 miles of the campus; these prisons disproportionately incarcerate black and brown human beings. My project addresses racial justice and black liberation at UC Merced by conducting research on the pressing need for effective rehabilitation and re-entry strategies and resources for the future release of currently incarcerated human beings. Pathways to academia and education, such as early intervention support programs for at-risk youth, break the school-to-prison pipeline within black communities, and increase black enrollment at universities and colleges.

UC Merced Black Scholars and a Sense of Belonging



Jarschire Dennis

This project addresses the promotion and advocacy for racial justice and black liberation here at UC Merced by deeply looking into the relationship between how our Black scholar population feels about current issues here at UC Merced and do current support systems accurately address and understand these issues? Do Black students feel a sense of belonging here at UC Merced and how much? This project hopes to create more awareness, language, and infrastructure that includes/supports Black culture and identity here at UC Merced.

The Exploration of Black Holistic Wellness at UC Merced



Tatiana Howell

Colonialism is embedded in almost every fabric of this country's being. The extermination of indigenous folks and the importation of enslaved Africans is literally what this country is built upon. The co-optation of land, culture, and freedom has led us to where we are today. Like many other popularized trends, the pursuit of "Holistic Wellness" has been socially deemed as only accessible to white people with money. For so long the media has framed wellness as eating at places like Whole Foods, attending a weekly spin class and doing yoga. While these activities are wonderful and great to partake in, they make wellness seem inaccessible. Not only is it an issue within the media, the media often influences and affects reality, and the reality is that wellness is inaccessible for many. There are systemic factors set into place as well that make it difficult for Black folks to pursue their own wellness prior to a diagnosed sickness or disease. It is absolutely critical that we as an institution do everything in our power to make wellness accessible. The lives of students depend on it.

Chancellor's Inclusive Excellence Fellowship Recipient

Social Movement Repertoires of Contention in the Struggle Against Anglophone Marginalization in Cameroon



Eliana Fonsah

Anglophone Cameroon social movements deployed repertoires of contention beyond the binary social movement conventional and unconventional protest tactics in the fight against the second-class citizenship and marginalization of Anglophones in Cameroon. This model involves the use of both conventional and unconventional repertoires of contention and another category of repertoires of contention (traditional and cultural repertoires of contention) drawn from the cultural and traditional beliefs and practices of the different ethnic groups in Anglophone Cameroon.

The Black Experience at UC Merced

"I Didn't Know What Anti-Blackness Was Until I Got Here": The Unmet Needs of Black Students at Hispanic-Serving Institutions

By: Dr. Whitney Pirtle, Breanna Brock, Nonzenzele Aldonza, Kaline Leke
& Dallas Edge



Amidst institutional reckonings with anti-Blackness, minority-serving institutions (MSIs) are thought to be an intervention. But, how do Black students perceive being served at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)? Analyzing focus groups (n=33), we find Black students perceived anti-Blackness at an HSI from the overrepresentation of white personnel in power; lack of culturally attuned and financial support; racially hostile climate; and little solidarity from non-Black Latinx and

other peers. We show that HSIs contend with anti-Black institutional embeddedness, too, and argue that the goals of HSIs to serve racially minoritized students will not be achieved unless they address institutional, organizational, and interpersonal anti-Blackness.

Black Alumni Panel

Following Dr. Pirtle's presentation, we will welcome back the following alumni to share insights into their experiences of being Black at UC Merced:

- Nonzenzele Aldonza
- Daveon Smith
- Deja Augustus
- Mercedes Tawiah
- DeVonyo Bills
- Kalene Leke
- Dallas Edge

Right to Rest



Charah Coleman

Becoming a vibrational acoustic (sound) practitioner is my part in contributing to the healing justice that is required for Black liberation. Practices and behaviors that dehumanize and oppress Black people have been woven into the fabric that founded America. In this oppression our rest, joy, and well-being are collectively withheld from us. In recent years, our community has seen repeated trauma aired nationally and on social media. We did not have time to pause, process, or recover from the global dark night of the soul called 2020. We are expected to be strong, resilient, to hustle, to get the bag. We are expected to do anything but rest. Yet, rest is Black Liberation. Protecting our well-being and joy are two of the greatest acts of resistance. Our ancestors wildest dream was to rest and relish in the love, safety, and vibrancy of family and community.

Sound therapy involves sound vibrations with the intention of relaxing specific parts of your body and mind. The frequency of sound is able to activate brainwaves and lower our body's distress responses. There is growing clinical evidence that vibrational therapy can lower stress levels, blood pressure, improve sleep, and when used in medical grade devices, can even be used to heal specific areas of the body. Sound therapy is simply another healing modality that can lead to Black rest and a heightened well-being. Our rest and well-being is our liberation.