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Leadership Development

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### Sankofa Journey

The Sankofa Journey is a pilgrimage that takes place in various locations throughout the United States, organized by the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference (SDPC), a faith-based organization committed to social justice and liberation. The journey is designed to enable participants to connect with their African heritage and history, and to deepen their understanding of the ongoing impact of racism and oppression on African Americans and other communities of color.

The Sankofa Journey involves visits to historic sites such as plantations, museums, and monuments that highlight the legacy of slavery and racism in the United States. Participants get to engage in reflection and discussion about their experiences, and are encouraged to use their newfound knowledge and perspective to contribute to the struggle for justice and liberation in their own communities. One of the key strengths of the Sankofa Journey is the way in which it enables participants to connect with their history and heritage in a deep and meaningful way. Many participants describe feeling a sense of spiritual and emotional transformation during the journey, as they confront the legacy of slavery and racism and their own place in the struggle for justice.

Going on the Sankofa Journey took me through a range of emotions. To be able to essentially walk through history is an experience like none other. Before even getting to the different destinations, the pre-trip work is already impactful. I found that it was already

challenging any stereotypes or negative thoughts I may have had. It also humbled me because it made me realize that I did not know as much as I did. On multiple occasions I had to catch myself from being so caught up in my emotions to the point that I would not receive the information that I did not know before this journey.

The way the Sankofa Journey is designed, it is set up to challenge every aspect of what you thought you knew about conversations of race. One example being the group's diversity. The group that I had the privilege to go with was a variety of races and ages. Through that diversity was a multitude of opinions, takeaways, and experiences. At times we can get so caught up in our own experiences that we never fully understand what the people around us are going through too especially when the conversations of race come. It is easy to keep the conversation about black and white but the reality is that this affects everyone. The racism and discrimination that is threaded into society affects more than just the one community. Being on the trip and hearing about people experiencing different forms of discrimination yet they did not look like me made me take a step back to be mindful of others that are being hurt too. The Sankofa Journey helped to foster that cross-cultural understanding and solidarity. Although we all came from diverse backgrounds and experiences, the journey provided an opportunity for us to learn from one another and build relationships based on shared values and goals.

On the trip we were able to connect with History on a different level. One of the examples was with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. We had the opportunity to learn about a lot of different civil rights leaders on all different levels, but we were able to see a lot about Dr. King and how he grew up. One of the monuments that we were able to see was the very house that Dr. King grew up in. For one of the first times in my life it made history feel real. So many times in school we learn about these great people and their impact but there is a sense of disconnect.

Beyond visiting sites like that, the book “Testament of Hope” added on to the experience too. Testament of Hope" is a book that brings together the speeches, essays, and writings of the civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. It was compiled and edited by James M. Washington, a historian and professor of religious studies. The purpose of the book is to provide a comprehensive overview of King's thoughts and ideas, as well as to demonstrate the depth and breadth of his vision for social justice and equality. The book had the ability to provide me with an understanding of the historical context where Dr. King lived and worked. It included speeches and essays from throughout Dr. King's career, allowing me to see how his ideas and beliefs evolved over time. The book also includes contextual information and introductions to each section, which gives the historical background I need to fully understand Dr. King's words. Being able to not only read his words but be in the places where they were written or inspired connected me to it on a personal level.

One of the main things that “Testament of Hope” did alongside with the Sankofa Journey was allowing me to see the call to action. Dr. King's speeches, writings and emphasis on nonviolence, love, and justice inspired me to work towards creating a more just and equitable society. Honestly speaking, there are many times where I wonder about how I can get involved or what else I can do with where I am already at in life. Learning about how all these amazing people before me stood up and put their lives on the line can admittedly make me feel as though what I am doing is nothing in comparison to them. I know that others share that same thought but I also know that it is not the final say. If there is anything that I learned through the Sankofa Journey is that the fight never stopped, the way we fought just looks different. I think one of the key things that is crucial before stepping into the fight is learning history. Learning the true nature of what America is and not just relying on the image that is spoon fed to students across

the country. Once we are more educated with those things, it then gives us the power to see how these same acts of discrimination and racism have just put on a new mask in a modern time. And I think that is one of the main things that really surprised me throughout the journey. Seeing how much of the history of minorities is pushed to the side and spoken about as if it is ancient history frightens me because it continues to disconnect people from the sacrifices of the people before them.

I think through it all there is a lot to take in and think on but I think that is where the theme of community shines even more on the trip. The amount of emotions you go through and how heavy it feels is something very hard to deal with especially if you were to do it alone. Throughout the trip you are partnered with someone to have times where you sit and digest what you experienced throughout the day and even the group as a whole has time for that too. On multiple occasions there was silence but you can sense the presence of everyone around you on one accord. The moments where you would walk through a memorial and tears would start to fall down your face, there would be the hand that comes to comfort and stay with you without having to say the word. I think that through these moments we got to experience the same type of community that our ancestors upheld so highly. Where we can share in each other's pain with the intent to grow closer so that we can continue to push on. Through the journey, we gained a deeper appreciation for the ways in which the struggle for justice is a shared one, and we were encouraged to see ourselves as part of a broader movement for liberation and justice.

Honestly speaking, the Sankofa Journey was one of the most impactful experiences I have had the chance to go through. There is something for everyone to take away from this regardless of who you are and where you come from. It is not easy to go through but neither was what our ancestors went through and the intentionality behind that increases the connection that

you feel throughout the trip. It is a powerful tool that can push people to create the world that our ancestors truly dreamed of. The fight continues on till this day and going through this course showed me that everyone has their part to play no matter how big or small it may be. It can be through the conversations we have in our communities, it can be incorporating new rules into our workplaces, it can be hosting small groups in schools and educating students on things like critical race theory and things along those lines. Whatever it may be, it is a part of something that is bigger than all of us.

In conclusion, the Sankofa Journey is a powerful and transformative experience for many who participate. Through the journey, you are able to connect with history and heritage, deepen your understanding of the impact of slavery and racism, and forge connections with others committed to the struggle for justice and liberation. The journey provides a powerful platform for reflection and action, and can serve as a catalyst for ongoing advocacy and activism.