



Collective Liberation Depends on You

A Call to Decolonize Your Life

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The Ancestor Project is a Black-led psychedelic collective focused on providing accessible education, ceremony, and integration rooted in ancestral wisdom. We provide training to clinicians and facilitators on how to decolonize their personal and professional wellness practice as a means of harm-reduction for modern journeyers.

Charlotte James has been a harm reductionist and psychedelic explorer for over 10 years, but her path through this work has certainly not been linear. After leaving harm reduction years ago because of rapid burn out, she is returning to this work with a new energy - thanks to the power of healing with Sacred Earth Medicines. Charlotte is fascinated by communication, has a love of language, and is captivated by the power of human connection. She has been in fearless pursuit of her passions since she can remember, always gifting herself new experiences and opportunities to expand her mind. Charlotte works to create a world in which everyone is able to live in fearless pursuit of their radical transformation. She uses her skills as a digital strategist, coach, and space holder to build and engage a community focused on pursuing equitable liberation.

At this point, you have most likely heard the terms collective liberation and decolonization work thrown around in the burgeoning psychedelic space. Usually, these terms are accompanied by academic observations and theories, yet less commonly, are they accompanied by actual steps one can take to catalyze this process on a personal and then collective level. You may even be questioning how one begins this seemingly massive undertaking of decolonizing themselves, and more importantly, why does it even matter?

First, it is helpful to set a basic framework of the process of colonization and how it unfolds at a systemic and social level. I think it is important to note here that this is a process we can observe globally; before exporting violent and widespread conquest to the global South, groups found in present-day Europe were busy plundering and colonizing each other. Think, the Greeks and Romans, the Crusades, or the Anglo-Saxon conversion of Pagan Nordic tribes, who were seen as more savage because of their animist practices. This era was just the practice round.

When we analyze this repeating pattern in history, it is clear that there are four primary stages of colonization as it relates to psychedelics, Sacred practices, and practitioners:

1. Demonization

The first step of colonizing Indigenous medicine practices and animist traditions was to demonize the practitioners, beliefs, and rituals associated with the practice. This was most often done in the name of conversion to “save the souls of the savages.” There were often severe or even fatal punishments for disobeying the colonizer’s law.

2. Suppression

Through consistent violent oppression, practitioners of these traditions and entire communities were forced to practice in secret, or not at all. Over time, it became easier to assimilate to the ways of the colonizer as a means of survival. Through this process, profound sacred knowledge of entheogens, and overall understanding of communal care, have been lost or forgotten across the world.

3. Appropriation

Over the passing of time, we have watched as many of these previously demonized traditions have become a part of the mainstream wellness industry. We have watched this process play out with tea, tobacco, chocolate, Cannabis, and now, Psilocybin, Ayahuasca, Iboga, and so many other Sacred Earth Medicine allies and practices.

4. Capitalization

Lineages that previously contributed to the demonization and suppression of these traditions are now benefiting financially from their resurgence. These Sacred Earth Medicines are subject to the same cycles of abuse that have been carried out for centuries. The question is: Why does any of this matter to you and your relationship with yourself, with the medicine, and with the collective?

We all have been forced to internalize and participate in perpetuating the process of colonization. We carry this out every day through socialization. This complex and persistent practice of socialization transforms us into agents of our own and our shared oppression. Through media, peers, family, religion, school, and other institutions, we are taught time and time again that who we are, and who others are, is not acceptable. We are pushed to cast judgment on ourselves and others for anything that falls outside of a White-heteronormative viewpoint. We hold shame for our mental health struggles in a world of suffering, and feel guilty for the exploration of “alternative” modes of healing. We are constantly policing the world within us and around us, guided by what is deemed to be “socially acceptable,” yet what is seen as acceptable is informed by the colonized perspective.

Now that we have some shared language and baseline understanding of how we are all subject to these patterns, the question remains: **What steps can we each take to support our decolonization and move boldly towards collective liberation?**

Understand intersectional theory

Individuals are often disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression: their race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, ableism, and other identity markers (Kimberlé Crenshaw)

Connect with your ancestry

One of the greatest ways to resist colonization is by reconnecting with your ancestral traditions. We all come from Indigenous and animist traditions - find yours and begin incorporating those rituals into your spiritual practice.

Participate in social justice movements

Support the fight to dissolve these systems of oppression for individual and collective liberation. Do not assume how to help, always ask how you can be of service to the movement.

Take time for self-reflection

It is key to reflect on your identities and your role in maintaining or eradicating systems of oppression. This process may be challenging and uncomfortable but will ultimately support your personal and our collective liberation.

Take continued action

Once you have a deeper understanding of your role within these systems of oppression, it is time to make commitments to dismantle the structures that ultimately oppress us all. Being an agent of change is a daily, embodied practice. Be patient with yourself as you begin to dismantle the internalized and external conditioning that perpetuates suffering.

Which step can you commit to working through first?

I'd like to leave you with the concept of 'Ubuntu'. Ubuntu is a word from Nguni and Bantu languages in Southern Africa that reminds us that: I am who I am because of who we all are. There can be no collective liberation without a deep dedication to liberating yourself.