Chapter 8
Digital Equity and Black Brazilians:
Honoring History and Culture

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author examines the history of the colonization of Brazil through the transatlantic Black slave trade and the effects this history had upon digital equity experienced by Black Brazilians in the information age. This examination is conducted using the philosophical lenses of critical theory and critical race theory (CRT). Coming from these perspectives, the author joins other scholars in the belief that racism does, in fact, exist in Brazilian societies and joins with those who aim to dispel ‘the myth of racial democracy’ and the myth of racial harmony in a country with roots in a race-based system of slavery and peonage. The author contends that issues of digital equity and equality of opportunity can only be effectively addressed if one has a deep understanding of the factors that led to inequities that preceded the information age. With this in mind, the author shares various culturally-based grass-roots efforts along with government initiatives she observed during a preliminary investigation of digital equity in this segment of the African Diaspora.

CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL EQUITY

In examining the issue of digital equity today, many researchers have gone beyond exploring mere access to computer-related technologies by individuals or groups in society (e.g. Mack, 2001; van Dijk, 2005). Consequently, in this age of rapid change, technological development, and the widespread availability of information communication technologies (ICTs), the broader definition of technology and digital equity has evolved which includes differential access to and use of computer-related resources by various groups in society. Employing social justice perspectives to examine these issues, the author focuses upon the effects that the information and digital age has upon 

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specific social identity groups who have historically been oppressed and discriminated against. The use of historical methodologies and critical social theories aid in this analysis as attention is centered upon those within the African Diaspora.

**Critical Social Theories**

A critical social theory is one that examines power relationships and addresses issues of oppression and domination. Typically, such a theory addresses issues of racism, classism, sexism, and/or other forms of discriminatory practices, behaviors, and policies aimed at specific social identity groups that have been historically underserved. Social identity grouping involves how individuals align themselves or are assigned by others according to race/ethnicity, religion, gender, language, and other aspects of culture. The shared and most salient characteristics of those within the African Diaspora include those subjugated as a result of colonization due to their Black African lineage and heritage and associated racial and ethnic identities. The colonization of North and South America, particularly the United States and Brazil, was facilitated through the racist transatlantic Black slave trade. As a result, the overwhelming majority of Blacks living in these countries today align themselves within or are assigned to this social identity grouping, despite differences among them concerning other cultural traditions and cultural features (i.e. language).

**Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy**

The author believes that an appropriate critical social theory to use in examining digital equity within and among marginalized social identity groups is critical theory along with critical pedagogy, which attempts to implement the tenets of critical theory within educational settings. The tenets of critical theory deal with power and dominance and the oppressed and the oppressors within a society. It is heavily influenced by Marxist philosophy, which historically has focused upon society’s economic base and means of production. As such, Marxists believe that institutions and systems support the economic base and the hierarchies of workers and owners in production (Block, 1994). They are concerned with justice in the general society as well as in schools. Critical theorists and scholars aim to expose power relationships, dominance, oppression, and injustices.

**Reproduction Theory, Hegemony, and Resistance Theory**

Many critical theorists also believe in reproduction theory. Reproduction theorists contend that many institutions, including educational institutions, serve to maintain or reproduce the system of government, economy, and the power hierarchies that exist in a society. For example, the U.S. and Brazilian educational systems and pedagogical practices carried out within them will reproduce existing unjust systems, inequities, and power relationships. They also believe that, in many cases, the dominated or oppressed become complicit or contribute to their domination or oppression by internalizing the perspectives of those in power. The term referred to as hegemony speaks to the widespread adoption of dominant views within a society even when the adoption of such views contributes to the demise of the individual or group who adopts such views or perspectives. In addition, acceptance of dominant views and narratives often defies common sense, as explained in the following:

*Hegemony supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural...but which is lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent, and which...even constitutes the substance and limit of common sense for most people under its sway, that it corresponds to the reality of social...*