



Same Church, Different Pew Axis of Arts & Hub of Humanities with the Sum in Social Sciences

Keith Bernell Stevenson

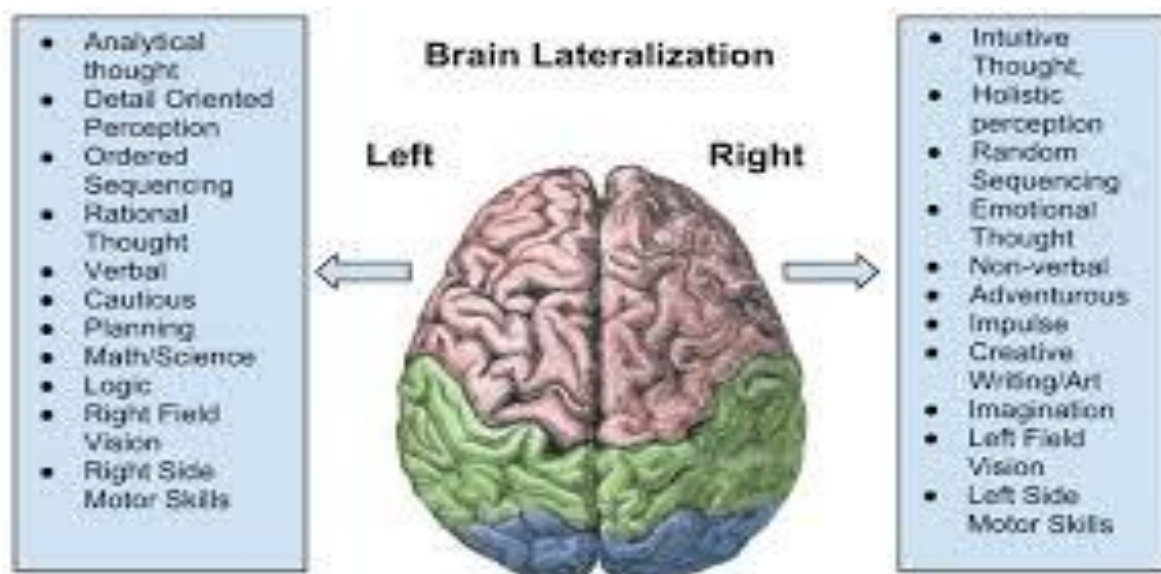
*“Keith brought to his position a collaborative spirit, great creativity, and a desire to continually refine his work to better serve UC Berkeley students”
-- UC Berkeley Chancellor Carol Christ*

By

Joseph Martin Stevenson and Karen Wilson Stevenson

“We must look at each other for sameness and similarity, beyond each of our singularities, for the sum of all beings. We must look further and farther”.

Our metaphorical title, "same church, different pew," is frequently referenced when people want to emphasize or point out something in the same situation but under different circumstances or when something is connected to something else in the same situation or context. Another way of putting this is the example of the arts, the humanities, and social sciences -- they all deal with the humanity in both artistic and scientific ways. Another more personalized example, that has relevance to definitely everyone and seemingly everything, is the worldwide impact, manifestation, and phenomenon of the coronavirus pandemic. It has not only been impactful in the United States, it has impacted every human being in every continent and country on the planet -- same church, different pew. This two-fold metaphorical and metaphysical meaning will be thematically threaded throughout this commentary, and we hope that faculty who read this journal will share this narrative with undergraduate students who are seeking to find cognitive connections systemic synergies during their freshman and sophomore years with undeclared major status and when they many times are enrolled in classes from the liberal arts to find life choices for careers or graduate school. The best college or university classes for this reading would be classes like "introduction to liberal arts", "survey of the humanities", "social science education", "social science seminar" or "African American Futures". This last class listed here is part of the curriculum at our institution, which is an historically Black research university in the Deep South. First, though, we want to begin with introductory comments about the brain as it relates to the narrative. We encourage students *“take charge of navigating your brain’s bureaucracy by untapping its potency, power, and potential”*. The brain is fascinating and facilitates the workings and the wherewithal of neurons, nerves, and networks between the left side and the right side of the brain.



We must have both sides for centralizing function and knowing how they work across the disciplines of the arts, the humanities, and the social science to empower undergraduate student learning and thinking in higher education. Toward this end, the brain becomes as axis, hub, and sum for igniting critical thinking of the mind. The challenge is to navigate the empowerment of the brain's *bureaucracy* creatively and scientifically. This academic empowerment can enhance both cerebral health and cognitive ability and help navigate the artistic soul and scientific mind later in higher education as the genesis for qualitative and quantitative research acumen and fundamental axis. In our age of accelerating analytics, emerging informatics, and much needed creative thought leadership, this type of mindful axis and liberal arts-thinking acumen will have utility later for undergraduate students once they land either for career-starting in the workplace or graduate or professional school-starting after they graduate from the undergraduate experience with its synergies of wonderment. That said, the two authors will first survey with a narrative about the disciplines mentioned, then culminate with observations about research acumen that is paramount to build on, ameliorate, garner, and marshal the critical thinking skills gained from higher education and sustaining that skill set for a lifetime. Throughout the lifetime to memorialize and remember this acumen, one of these co-authors has college students do something as an interactive exercise for reflective demonstration. He asks students to place their left hand on the right side of the head and place the right hand on the left side of the brain. The left side navigates the right side of the body and the right side navigates the left side. When students drop their hands toward the waist, he asks them to crisscross the arms and hands between the head and the waist with the hands ending up with open palms and extended fingers at the completion of this slow arm-hand-fingers motion. He suggests that this very simple physical movement explains the empowerment of the brain, the essence of liberal arts critical thinking, and the crisscrossing of thought leadership for a lifetime. Mind setting for critical thinking begins in the brain but is so often manifested from the fingers of the hands when we write, text, tap, or type. In today's society, all of which we must write, text, tap, or type should be result of critical thinking. Particularly in this age of accelerating and speedy social media, students must learn how to be enlightened with or informed by what they absorb from social media but not necessarily engaged in or influenced by social media. This requires a mind set for creatively and critically thinking-things-through--thoroughly--throughout (See Stevenson and Stevenson, 2014) about verifying information, validating information, and vetting information before valuing information or data. A great deal of this thinking can be manifested and realized early on in the undergraduate experience by: (a) considering the general education and liberal arts core curriculum as "same church, different pew"; and (b) making the crisscrossing connections -- cognitively, -- within the classes or courses that appear to be not the same but are similar for framing things in a wider, deeper, and bigger context. Hence, the blessing of the brain and the way as well as wherewithal to look at each other for sameness and similarity, beyond each of our singularities, for the sum of all beings. We must look further and farther through the lens of liberal arts, humanities, and social sciences.



The Arts

With regard to the arts, we dedicate this part of the commentary to the lead author's late Keith Bernell Stevenson, an exceptionally talented visual artist at University of California, Berkeley – arguably among the best universities in the world. Keith had the unique acumen and special ability to see connections in art, literature, music, social science, and life. Keith was philosophical, profound, and penetrating with his constantly “balanced” thought leadership. We (co-authors) had the pleasure, yet uncomfortable opportunity, to spend a few days in his apartment after his untimely passing. The place was the mixed manifestations of a museum, a library, a chef's kitchen and wine bar, and a multifaceted entertainment center.

The essentials to ferment, fuel, and feed good conversations was everywhere in his warm and comforting space. Keith was a modern-day Argonaut of sorts. His diversity of books, music, art, and artifacts was overwhelming with intellectual breadth, depth of dexterity and connections to social context. On many personal levels, Keith worked at being non-judgmental and exhibiting empathy. He knew how to personalize perceptions and think-through paradigms. And, he knew how, when, where and why to communicate respect – always trying to understand others from their point of view and their “lived experiences”, especially with regard to race, art, justice, and gender. Keith was the epitome of a social-conscience artist and authentic humanitarian. We recently visited the African American Museum of History and Culture in Washington, D.C. and read that “visual artists of the African American Renaissance asserted themselves through sculpting, painting, other vibrant media, and often developed common themes of racial identity, migration, war, African influence, and social class. Sometimes, artistic talents merged with like-minded literary figures Langston Hughes and Alain Locke. We can visualize Keith merging his talents and holding heavy conversations with many known and celebrated like-minded socially conscious artists at, with, and from Berkeley – many of whom were sculptors, painters as well as asserters of literary, visual, and cultural arts.



We can hear these kindred spirited artists suggesting that “art is everywhere all the time and within all of us every day ...this, that, and other”. We can imagine Keith having dialogue with architect Kofi Bonner of Berkeley known for city redevelopment of Emeryville and city manager for Oakland; or Hans Hollein, – architect, awarded the Pritzker Architecture Prize; or Julia Morgan, – an architect who designed the Hearst Castle or Vladimir Ossipoff, – Russia-born "master of modern Hawaiian architecture" or Sigrid Lorenzen Rupp, - German born architect in Silicon Valley. We can easily imagine Keith in shared deep thoughts with Berkeley Comic Strip Artists like: Scott Adams, – creator of Dilbert; Rube Goldberg, winner of the Pulitzer Prize; Ethan Lee, - author of webcomic Single Asian Female; Stephan Pastis, – creator of Pearls Before Swine or Adrian Tomine, – comic artist for Optic Nerve and illustrator for The New Yorker. In Fine Art, we can hear Keith in conversations with Natalia Anciso, – visual and installation artist and educator; Melanie Cervantes, – artist, printmaker, and activist; Enrique Chagoya - artist, printmaker, and professor at Stanford University; Robert Colescott, – artist, educator, and first African American painter to have a solo exhibit at the Venice Biennale; Claire Falkenstein, – sculptor, painter, print-maker and jewelry designer known for her large-scale abstract metal and glass sculptures; Ester Hernandez, – visual artist; Gilah Yelin Hirsch – multi-disciplinary artist; or Malaquías Montoya, – artist and professor emeritus at UC Davis; or Nancy Selvin, sculptor. In Music, in the context of liberal arts and humanities, we can hear Keith discussing different genres with Gregory Abbott – composer and musician; Mary Elizabeth Caldwell, — composer; Les Claypool – singer of Primus; Henry Cowell – composer; Defari – hip-hop artist; Adam Duritz – lead singer of Counting Crows; Rob Hotchkiss, – Grammy winner and guitarist; Ivan Ilić, – American pianist of Serbian descent based in Paris; Matt Wallace, - producer, composer; Shing02 – underground Japanese hip hop artist; and LaMonte Young, – composer. We can hear Keith’s voice in dialogue about Film, Television, Video Games and Theatre with Berkeley artists like George Azar, – press photographer and documentary filmmaker, specializing in Middle East coverage; Amir Blumenfeld, – writer, comedian, actor and TV host; John Cho, – actor (American Pie, Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle, Star Trek, Better Luck Tomorrow); Camille de Casabianca, – screenwriter, director and novelist; Quentin Lee, – Asian-American film director; Shirin Neshat, – Iranian-American filmmaker, video artist, and photographer.

All of these artists attended, graduated, worked, or taught at Berkeley. Keith could have hold in-heavy and high-level conversations about “discovery” with all of these past and present Berkeley artists and he had the ability to contemporarize them with today’s younger generations with his profound metaphors, penetrating allegories, provocativedialogue, and philosophical inspirations.



We can hear Keith contemporizing art with the next generations for these artistic talent fields, career venues, and domains of artistry. Like the relationships between the earlier mentioned artists and Langston Hughes during the Renaissance, Keith would have facilitated of colloquy of broad and deep inquiry that would be confluent, complimentary, circular, cross disciplinary as well as rounded, rudimentary, and robust among and between the Academic Arena at Berkeley, including Art Curators, Art Professors, Visual Artists (like Keith’s talented brothers Scott and Michael), Art Historians, Art Librarians, Art Museum Directors, Art Restorers, Art Critics, Art Publishers, and Art Therapists. Again, Keith could hold court with all of these diverse, defining, and different artists. We would often hear Keith utter his famous metaphoric words of “**this, that and the other**” when referring to the common denominators of art forms and social settings.

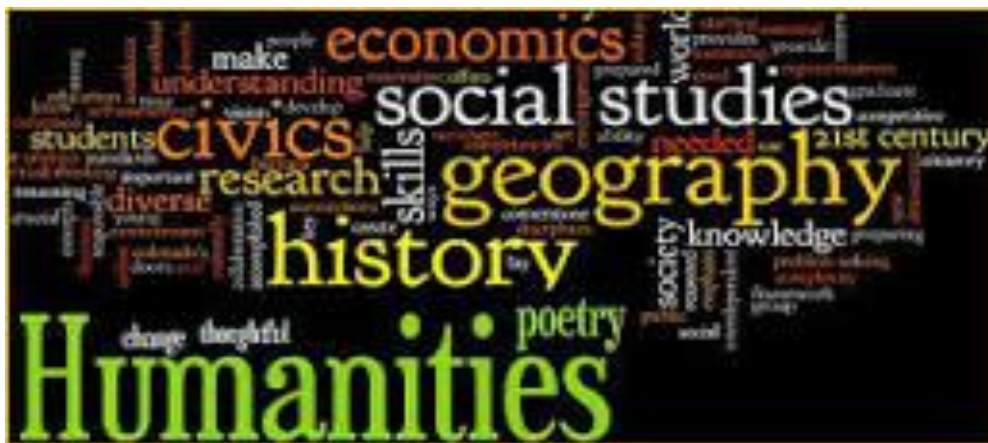
Keith’s dialogue, discussions, and discourse with these artists -- from one spectrum and scope to another -- would be often political, frequently pragmatic but always purposeful and profoundly humanitarian. That’s just how Keith was as a gifted human being. Only Keith could artfully navigate discourse between Automobile Designers and Aerial Photographers; or Illustrators and Landscape Architects; or Landscape Architects and Camera Operators; Web Designers and Quilt Makers. He had that kind of gifted transdisciplinary mind. Let me conclude comments about Keith Bernell Stevenson in this section by quoting Cornel West, who said “*You can’t lead the people if you don’t love the people. You can’t save the people if you don’t serve the people.*” Indeed, Keith definitely led and loved many people; and Keith served and probably saved many people by his wise words, his artful works, his introspective actions and reflective reactions, and his shared outlooks on life with so many, many people. Keith possessed the acumen of an artist, the heart of a humanitarian, and the soul of a socially consciousbeing. This is an excerpt from the Prayer we wrote for Keith at his memorial service:

“Poet Robert Bly tells us that the door to the soul is unlocked. God, we know that you have unlocked Keith’s soul to us, and we deeply thank you for blessing us with Keith’s deep soul, artful mind, remarkable creativity, and caring heart...”

The experience and expression of the arts joins creativity and beauty to apply human creativity for painting to sculpture, to dance to music, or language to literature as well as other forms. This could including applied art such as floral, quilt, tattoo, costume and others; 2D art like illustrations, commercial, cartoon or painting; 3D like architecture, ceramic, or sculpture; digital like animation, graphic, web, software, or video; or photographic for film, cinema, camera or photographic documentation used for fashion, by police, with aerial application, for commercial work or other documentation. See below for website for full spectrum and scope of the arts:

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.digication.com/M1fd3533e1d137adbcb4884efecdf431.jpg>

In all of these examples of the arts, the brain generates the imagination, ingenuity, and critical as well as creative thought process. This is the case of the sculptor, the painter, the visual artist, the software engineer, the documentarian of photographer, the florist, the dancer, the fashion designer, and the aerial photographer. And, in all of these roles the artist must see his or her art in a social scientific context that is grounded in humanity. This especially important now as our society is experiencing widespread social divide and human division. For these reasons, readers of this journal should encourage students, and faculty, to see the axis of the arts and the hub of the humanities as apparatus to stimulate the right side and left side of the brain from crisscrossing relations, synergies, confluence, and intersectionality. It should be noted, too, to amplify and pronounce this point, that artistic and scientific bridges are frequently crisscrossed from art educators to art therapists; from museum directors to art curators; from art historians to art librarians; art dealers to art directors; or art critics to restores. It is all same church different pew. We give the examples exemplified by Keith Bernell Stevenson. Keith had broad based ability because he saw art through and all from connection to the social sciences and the synergies in the humanities.



The Humanities

Concerning the humanities, an area where we need more humans to be courageous leaders and positive catalysts for change in today's world. This branch of the brain's axis and Modus operandi includes literature, literary works, history, philosophy, and other subjects concerning human culture, benevolence, humanness, nature, compassion and other forms of fostering human diversity, human decency, and human dignity. Like its companion arts, it must convey these understandings from a thought process generated from an axis and intersections of the mind. Thus, again, is the manifestation of same church different pew. We experienced this recently with the coronavirus pandemic. All of us had to think about the bigger picture, the greater good, and the larger context, and we all interacted and not interacted as the result of social distancing, gave the entire world evidence and examples of what we are all humanly capable of doing when we are challenged by despair, devastation, dreadfulness, and dire circumstances. We must now bring our students and faculty back to the campuses, or virtually, to continue this human momentum. Doing so in the freshman and sophomore years at the lower division and the general education level, then again in the junior and senior years at the upper division and the discipline based level, can round out the undergraduate experience from acumen generated from the arts, the humanities, (which all students should take) and the myriad of connecting social sciences. It is all same church different pew.

The Social Sciences



