

Color based on Ashanti values woven into symbolic kente cloth

Art form expresses tradition, pride



Robin Trimarchi/DN

Sherman Robertson explains the meaning of the kente cloth.

The kente cloth has been woven and worn by the Ashanti people since antiquity. However, the only history reading available is that taken from accounts of early European travelers, and reflects their Eurocentric biases.

The use of color ritualistically in Ghana is based upon a philosophy with deep abstract and spiritual values. A rule of Ghanaian culture has been that chiefs wear gold ornamentation.

The kente cloth picks up this tradition and uses yellow to represent the gold when the kente cloth is woven for royalty. A kente cloth, which is predominantly yellow in color, is also worn by young girls during a part of their rites of puberty.

The color white symbolizes virtue, victory and spiritual entities including the deified spirits of ancestors and Gods. A kente cloth in which the color white dominates, is worn by mothers during child naming ceremonies, and by young brides upon their first entry into their husband's bedroom.

The use of the color green is worn in connection with fertility, vitality and primeness in growth. During the second stage of puberty

initiation, a green kente cloth is worn by young girls.

Symbolic of soot, charcoal, ebony, and relating to emotional feelings of melancholy, is the color black. Black also signifies old age and history. During the first stage of funeral ceremonies a black-toned kente is donned.

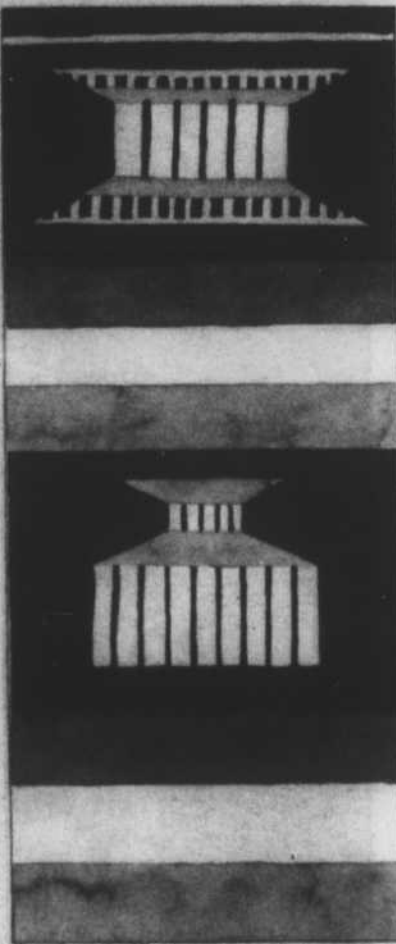
The symbolism attributed to the color red is broad and emotional, from the death of a close relative to the signals by young girls that they have reached puberty.

The red kente cloth is worn by warriors and participants in political rallies.

Blue is the color of love, female tenderness and serenity. It also is used to make known to the public of the death of one's spouse.

When colors are grouped together in the kente cloth, they take in different meanings. A kente cloth with white interweaved with blue is worn by young girls during puberty, red and yellow kente cloths are symbolic of the power of life and its power over the sick, and green and white kente cloths represent a bountiful harvest.

Africa has a rich history of textiles. Focusing on the Ashanti of West Africa, the kente cloth sym-



David Badders/DN

Ashanti kente cloth

bolizes the pride, history and tradition of the Ashanti people. More than just a cloth, the kente conveys information, social status, emotional state and mood of the wearer.

The weaving of the kente cloth is an art form. Formation of the patterns demonstrate the artistry of the weaver.

A predominance of one color over others in the kente cloth conveys the meaning of and purpose of the cloth. Just as each pattern has a name which symbolizes a particular saying or historical fact, so does each color and color combination.

The kente cloth has emerged today as the symbol of the majestic nature of the Ashanti culture.

Sherman Robertson is a non-traditional student, anthropology major, and a Diversions contributor

Ethnic items need to be supplied

As an African-American female living in the Midwest, it has been difficult for me to purchase ethnic items for women of color, skin and hair care products, as well as cosmetics.

I have lived in Lincoln for 10 years; the African-American population is small compared to its population in Omaha, but the fact remains that there is an African-American community in Lincoln with a need.

I decided to go into the community surrounding the university's city campus and east campus, to find out which merchants sold skin, hair and cosmetic products for its African-American customers. My main objective was to ask if the

local merchants had any cosmetics for women of color; my intent was to see if merchants were even aware of the many differences between the two, and if they were knowledgeable of the products used by African-Americans.

I was a former employee at one of the stores that I used in my researching. While working there, I made sure this store was aware of my, as well as the needs of other African-Americans, who would come to me requesting certain products.

One thing I noticed through my research was that the stores that had cosmetic items designed for people of color in Lincoln, had them placed away from the other

products of its kind. One of the store clerks said this reason was so that customers could see the special item. As a customer, by having products that I needed placed somewhere separate from products of its kind would make me think that those products wouldn't be around for long — like it was a sale item going out of stock.

I spent two hours discussing with the owner and his assistant about whether or not it was possible for them to stock cosmetic items for women of color, besides the one product they already had. The owner said he wasn't aware of these products because the sales

See ETHNIC on top

Ethnic

Continued from bottom

representatives who sold him these products told him there were no others. He said he would be happy to stock his shelves with these products.

After completing my research, my overall response was that many African-Americans have decided that they cannot get the products they need in Lincoln. Also, the

merchants did not feel the demand to supply products that would not sell as quickly as others.

I can understand that reasoning. I am only one of probably other African-American customers who makes our needs known. I feel that if the need is shown, the demand will be met.

Yolanda Avidano is a sophomore consumer science major and a Diversions contributor, who was recently interviewed in the Lincoln Journal about her findings in her research.

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