

TRAUMA: A LOOK AT GENERATIONAL CURSES THAT PLAGUE THE BLACK CHILD

By

VICTORIA ASTON

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Dr. Anthony Wright

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Dr. Anthony Wright

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CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

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By VICTORIA ASTON

Capstone Director:

Dr. Anthony Wright

Trauma. We can all define the year of 2020 as a traumatic year but this statement is especially truthful for black lives. But to truly understand the plight of black people, we must look into what factors are the cause for the effect. We must explore the issues of growing up as a black child amidst structural racism. This requires attention to a variety of factors, including the stigmatizations of black families and households, the trauma that many black children endure and carry into adolescence and adulthood, the school to prison pipeline, and the issues of generational wealth. We also must consider how this trauma has its roots in specific historical period that correspond with specific systems of racial oppression. In this thesis, I divide this history into three periods 1) race-based slavery, 2) Jim Crow and 3) mass incarceration. And work on how healing can truly begin as a community.

Introduction:

As the clock struck midnight on December 31st, 2020, a year that brought to light many of the struggles of black people in America came to a close, we have no choice to but to reflect on what the year showed us about trauma and generational curses that plague the black community. Systematic oppression has been at the forefront of contemporary and debates. When we question and dive deep into disadvantages that black people face in America we are slapped in the face by the repercussions of systematic oppression. Why are so many black people incarcerated? Why are so many black people living in poverty? Why are so many black people targeted by the police? Recent murders such as that of Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd have led to an awakening of epic proportions. The demand for a change, for justice, for peace peaked in 2020. Riots and violence at unprecedented proportions occurred and the world wondered why. The revolutionary Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once noted that “Riots are the voice of the unheard.” And he was right. The movement demanded justices and answers. Cities and building burned to match the flames brewing in our upset and fed up souls. But to truly understand the plight of black people, we must look into what factors are the cause for the effect. We must explore the issues of growing up as a black child amidst structural racism. This requires attention to a variety of factors, including the stigmatizations of black families and households, the trauma that many black children endure and carry into adolescence and adulthood, the school to prison pipeline, and the issues of generational wealth. We also must consider how this trauma has its roots in specific historical period that correspond with specific systems of racial oppression. In this thesis, I divide

this history into three periods 1)race-based slavery, 2) Jim Crow and 3) mass incarceration. This paper will dive into and demonstrate how centuries worth anti-blackness within the United States continues to affect many black children to this day. This paper draws upon the detailed who have chosen to critically analyze and fight these issues. After reviewing the history of anti-black oppression, I consider how can healing truly begin through various therapeutic modalities and community-based practices. My hope is that those reflections can contribute towards the collective work of building a better world for future generation-a world that thrives on collective healing and harmony.

Background:

When did black history begin in the United States? To answer this question, we have to first start with the continent of Africa: the homeland of humankind. For centuries the continent we now call Africa, various tribes and nations laid down their roots, harvesting their own cultures, traditions, dialects and social structures. In the 17th century, European colonization began to discover the profit of the enslavement of Africans. European slave traders began to pit tribes against tribes and villages against villages and many people were sold, tricked, and betrayed. They were ushered onto crowded slave ships and ripped from their lands. Families were torn apart. Once enslaved the voyage over the Atlantic Ocean was treacherous. The enslaved people onboard were chained so tightly together in an enclosed space that disease and despair ran rampant. The book *Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of*

American Capitalism by Edward Baptist introduces many first-person stories and resources to express the true horrors of slavery. In the following section, I review these stories for what they reveal about the traumas of enslavement.

Enslavement (Roughly 1619 to 1863)

“The man remembered how he had lain in vomit and shit and piss. How he had eaten from the bucket they brought. He heard the women on the other deck crying for a dying baby or sister; heard them fight as the sailors took them into the crew’s quarters one by one, to be raped.” (Baptist 2016: Page 194). Those who did not survive the trip were hoisted over the side of the boat fed as bait to the same unforgiving sea. Upon arrival whether the destination was the West Indies or on the main land of America, these slaves were sold at auction. Sold and given to the highest bidder and then were forced into unpaid labor picking crops such as tobacco, rice and cotton, working from sun up to sun down and experiencing unprecedented levels of manipulation and trauma. They were treated like livestock and placed in a type of chain called a *coffle* (an African term derived from the Arabic word *cafila*, a chained slave caravan) that attached to one enslaved person’s neck and then to another one’s wrist, symbolic of the chains that black people would wear for years to come (Baptist 2016: Page 143). Dirt and lice bounced from person to person and the cuffs of the coffered were so tight that scabs and welts formed around them, symbolic of the invisible scars that they would carry for years to come.

“After 1670 or so, the number of enslaved Africans brought to North America surged. By 1775, slave ships had carried 160,000 Africans to the Chesapeake colonies, 140,000 to new slave colonies that opened up in the Carolina and Georgia, and

30,000 to the Northern colonies.” (Baptist 2016: Page 82) Enslaved Africans were tortured, raped, murdered, sold like cattle and dehumanized. Even during the throes of the Revolutionary War, black men laid down their lives for the nation fighting for “freedom” and “liberation” from tyranny were thrust right back into slavery following the war. One of the first casualties of the Revolutionary War was actually a black man, Crispus Attucks. Enslaved individuals weren’t allowed to be counted as full persons, weren’t allowed to read nor write, weren’t allowed to construct their own identities or express their own opinions. Women were raped and forced to give birth to their masters’ children and families were torn apart at auctions, as individual members got parceled out among the highest bidders. (Baptist 2016).

These practices were facilitated by creation of legal and cultural structures that enforced the association of blackness with slavery. “Customs and laws insisted that children were slaves if their mothers were slaves, that enslaved Africans were to be treated as rights-less, perpetual outsiders.” (Baptist 2016: Page 82)

Over time, the overall demand for the enslaved people and their labor only continued to rise. In order to coerce maximum productivity, enslaved people were subjected to quotas, and if those quotas were not met, they knew what to expect next. “The threat of torture drove enslaved people to inflict this creation and destruction on themselves. Torture walked right behind them. But neither their contemporaries then nor historians since have used “torture” to describe the violence applied by enslavers. Some historians have called lashings “discipline,” the term offered by slavery’s law-givers and the laws they wrote, which pretended that masters who whipped were calmly administering “punishment” to “correct” lazy subordinates’ reluctance to

work.” (Baptist 2016: Page 492) This euphemization of torture as “discipline” truly sugar coats many of the horrors of the time. Enslaved people were looked at more as disobedient livestock subject to their owner’s discipline, as opposed to the grown men and women they actually were who were able to distinguish right from wrong and who actively worked to meet the quotas to avoid such punishments.

Slavery would continue on in the United States until the pressure to abolish it practically tore the country apart. Rising out of their adamant “need” for slavery was the Confederacy consisting of South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee and North Carolina. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 as the nation entered its third year in a bloody war that we all know as the Civil War. The Emancipation Proclamation did not outright end slavery within the United States but it inspired millions and in part changed the course of the war. Although the Confederate Army stood no real chance of defeating the Union, blood was shed and lives were lost. Countless bloody battles after bloody battles ensued. “By 1864, once enslaved people were marching through almost every southern state, not in tatters and chains, but bearing arms and wearing blue uniforms with the confidence of people who believed that the federal government would back their claim to rights. Their presence encouraged still-enslaved people to refuse to work for their owners, or to run to the woods.” (Baptist 2016: Page 1,322) Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment in March 1865 that stated “ Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” This was the final nail in the

coffin that was slavery. It ended race-based slavery throughout the United States permanently and freed people who were not covered by the earlier Emancipation Proclamation. Many black people believed that this fight would finally lead to their freedom. But would it truly? With the ratification of the 13th Amendment and the And the Emancipation Proclamation, freedom was declared. But although enslaved people were released from their shackles and given citizenship, hateful measures to further divide and traumatize were already brewing.

Reconstruction Era/Jim Crow (1865 to 1964)

The Reconstruction era in America lasted from 1865 to 1877, nowhere as long as slavery lasted and arguably not enough time to heal the trauma and wounds of those who were previously enslaved. The period was focused on giving the newly freed people the citizenship and basic civil rights that were stolen from them. But this was easier said than done, as some much damage had been inflicted, and many white members of the Confederacy would continue to resent the outcome of the war for years to come. The assassination of Abraham Lincoln also inhibited the Reconstruction process, as the next president, Andrew Jackson, ultimately decided that it would be best to allow the Southern states to determine the rights of former slaves. This proved to be a major mistake. Following the “abolition” of slavery, the American South specifically the white people who held strong to the Confederacy and perpetuated the vilest forms of racism, still needed ways to belittle, hinder and humiliate black people. And with this was the creation of Jim Crow laws and racial segregation. The theory was created “we have to free them, but that does not mean we have to treat them fairly or make them feel as though they are our equals.”

“Jim Crow was not merely about the physical separation of blacks and whites. Nor was segregation strictly about laws, despite historian’s tendency to fix upon such legal landmark as *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In order to maintain dominance, whites needed more than the statutes and signs that specified “whites” and “blacks” only; they had to assert and reiterate black inferiority with every word and gesture, in every aspect of both public and private life.” (Chafe 2014: Page 79) Jim Crow came down to be being about maintaining that control that the South lavished in during slavery. It created separate establishments such as schools, churches, graveyards, prisons and the “black- only” establishments were allotted the least resources and zoned in the least desirable locations. The issue of separate schools led to a major difference in education between the races. Black children were given the older books or supplies and often times no books or supplies at all. The need to keep blacks feeling so inferior and to make them be seen as less than deserving citizens was so extreme that many states and counties tried to created restrictions to limit black voters, a cycle that we are seeing again following the 2020 Election in Georgia. The knowledge that a large black voter turnout had the ability to shift an election was evident even in the past and counties/states would go above and beyond by creating literacy tests or clauses to stop those voters. Some who were so bold to even register to vote were faced with threats and adversity. But even restricting voting and separating establishments were not enough, and at this time lynchings were at an all time high. The lynchings were a way for the white men and women of the South to continue to instill fear within the black community. Gone were the threats of the coffle, but what followed was no less

sinister. Billie Holiday's famous song "Strange Fruit" conveys the horrors of the situation: "Southern trees bear a strange fruit. Blood on the leaves and blood at the rot. Black bodies swingin' in the Southern breeze. Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees." Black people were lynched to instill fear in them, to put them into their place and to keep them from feeling superior. The egos of white people were too fragile to bear the loss of their own sense of superiority. "There was a Mr. Fields that was killed by a Lynch mob. You will never guess why he was killed. One of his dogs jumped on this white man's dog and beat him up. They killed him because he should have been able to control his dogs. They killed him because 'my dog beat your dog.'" (Chafe 2014: Page 128)

In the Jim Crow South, it was dangerous to challenge white people. Even simply walking on the sidewalk with them was a challenge and young age black children were taught to always yield the right of way to whites. "To challenge white people just was the wrong thing to do. You just automatically grow up inferior. And you had the feeling that white people were better than you. It just really wasn't any question asked then about why." (Chafe 2014: Page 98) The writer explains how many black people in the South just immediately thought that way and believed in their own inferiority until the late fifties and sixties when Dr. Martin Luther King came along. So, even by the 1950s black people, who were at this point a generation or two away from slavery, still felt like second-class citizens in their own country.

Civil Rights Era (Roughly 1947 to 1968)

The 1960s and early 1970s brought more strife into the black community with Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Panther Movement. The Vietnam War was the first war where black and white troops were fully integrated. Black men were drafted into the war. Sacrificing their bodies, dealing with trauma and murder, losing limbs or lives and returning back to the war to deal with severe PTSD and a life in shambles. Black communities throughout the country were suffering from so many men being away from home. They were suffering from the fathers and husbands being thousands of miles across the ocean and not at the head of their home as necessary. The Civil Rights Movement brought important names such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Jesse Jackson, Rosa Parks, Ralph Abernathy, Coretta Scott King, The Freedom Riders, Medger Evans, Malcolm X, and John Lewis into our lives. The movement was centered around creating “the need to end institutionalized racial discrimination, disenfranchisement and racial segregation .”

One of the first major issues the Civil Rights Movement aimed to tackle was that of voter discrimination. Various activists descended upon the South to tackle this prominent issue. They endured mistreatment and violence at the hands of police and white people for their non violent attempts to register blacks to vote. The event that sparked the most outrage was the march from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery, Alabama for voter rights. The peaceful marchers were met by Alabama state troopers with bats, hoses, dogs, fist, tear gas, and smoke. The televised event horrified thousands of Americans. The second attempt to march from Selma to Montgomery led to a new recruitment of marchers who flew, drove or took trains to Selma to be apart of

the movement. Now not only black men and women were marching but many northern whites joined in on the march. This peaceful march spurred the conversations and the debates that led to the Voting Rights Act being signed into law on August 6, 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson. This was a small victory on a long road towards equality. Following the Voting Rights Act, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr would fight to tackle many other issues plaguing the black community such as the Vietnam War, poverty, unfair wage, and various others. Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4th, 1968, many of his ideas did not die with him and the Black Panther Party would continue to struggle for black liberation.

The Black Panther Movement (Roughly 1966 to 1980)

The Black Panther Party was a political organization founded by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton centered around improving the lives of black citizens in their communities and challenging police brutality/corruption. The Party organized a variety of community social programs to improve the community by giving free food to children, free daycares/education centers and free health clinics. The Panther's radical politics and unapologetically pro-black stance led the party to be perceived as a grave threat to white power. In response, the Black Panther Party members were subject to abuse by the police departments and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Party terrified the police departments of the cities they occupied because they aimed to directly stop the hyper policing of black areas. The Black Panther Party was successful in rallying more than just those in the black community over the issues of the police departments and quickly gained support from more progressive whites and Latinos as well. The threats that the Black Panther Party posed to the mainstream, white political

order ultimately led to the imprisonment or assassination of many of the party leaders, and this consequently helped speed up the collapse of the organization. (Bloom and Waldo 2016)

Mass Incarceration: Racial Disparities in Policing and Sentencing (1969-Ongoing)

In the 1980s, cocaine and heroin flooded the United States and the federal government responded with the “War on Drugs,” which laid the groundwork for what we now know as the system of mass incarceration. It seems that poverty, combined with a desire for wealth and high status were primary drivers of the drug trade. The normative expectation at the time was for men to lead the household, to be the breadwinner. But men’s ability to fulfill this role was complicated by the economic fall out of deindustrialization, which has disproportionate, negative consequences on black families. The Great Migration was the movement of roughly 6 million black Americans out of the South into the urbanized Northeast, Midwest, and West between the years if 1916 up until around 1970. These families left their homes in the South for the opportunity to secure better work opportunities, to ave more fairness in buying homes and property, and to help with the sudden boom of warehouse and factory jobs. The 1970s begin the age of the collapse of many of these factory/warehouse positions, and the neighborhoods that once thrived saw a change in their fortunes. Many white families had the resources and help to relocate and find new opportunities once the factory shut down. They were able to quickly secure new positions and to take advantage of the new suburban areas popping up all over the country. (Blackmon 2012)

In addition to the fallout of deindustrialization, housing discrimination was rampant with many black families being unable to secure mortgages or loans due to the prominent issue of redlining in many cities. Redlining was a practice in which mortgage lenders denied loans to individuals who were denied or restricted from buying in certain areas of the communities. It was a way of enforcing racial segregation. The redlining practices had a way of keeping some communities “white only.” The book, *Remembering Jim Crow* mentions how very few blacks owned land or homes. This is a fact that still has negative consequences and repercussions today showing up from the Jim Crow era. No better than in the 1960s are the issues of levels of homeownership rates seen today than those that existed when private race-based discrimination was legal. (Alexander 2010)

In the midst of rampant racial discrimination and poverty, many black men and women turned to the drug trade as a way to make ends meet. Black families faced the issue that many male breadwinners had potentially lost their only means of paying bills, and with no ways to find potential new career opportunities, a life of crime became the means survival. In response, the federal government declared the War on Drugs, which has disproportionately affected black communities. Disparities in sentencing during this era have had negative repercussions on black communities for many years to come. In many ways, the War on Drugs can be seen not only as a strategy for containing poverty, but also as a way for those in power to contain the effects of the Civil Rights and Black Panther Movements. It was a way to maintain control and to keep black communities separated and at war with one another, which stood in stark contrast to the goals of the Civil Rights and Black Panther Movements, which

were centered around black unity and empowerment. The goal of the War on Drugs, on the other hand, has been to keep the black community from being unified, from feeling strong, from having the tools to succeed—in other words, to keep the black community feeling inferior.

Police who continued to hyper police black neighborhoods and politicians who were determined to rid the streets of drugs and crime led to a higher number of black men being incarcerated for petty crime or for minor drug offenses. A black man who was arrested for a small possession of marijuana or cocaine was possibly facing 10-plus years imprisonment, while a white man who was arrested for the same crime possibly faced a misdemeanor or a “slap on the wrist.” In pointing this out, I follow (Alexander 2010: Page 3) in arguing that “mass incarceration is, metaphorically, the New Jim Crow.” “Nothing has contributed more to the systematic mass incarceration of people of color in the United States than the War on Drugs.” (Alexander 2010: Page 5) The War on Drugs defines the period during President Ronald Reagan’s administration as a response to crack cocaine. It was officially announced as the War on Drugs in 1982. Following the announcement of the “war”, crack cocaine began to spread rapidly in major cities. The black “crack whore”, “crack baby”, “crack dealer” stereotype was all over. Following the drug war, the prison numbers catapulted. “From the mid-1970s to the mid-’80s, America’s incarceration rate doubled, from about 150 people per 100,000 to about 300 per 100,000. From the mid-’80s to the mid-’90s, it doubled again. By 2007, it had reached a historic high of 767 people per 100,000, before registering a modest decline to 707 people per 100,000 in 2012. In

absolute terms, America's prison and jail population from 1970 until today has increased sevenfold, from some 300,000 people to 2.2 million. The United States now accounts for less than 5 percent of the world's inhabitants—and about 25 percent of its incarcerated inhabitants. In 2000, one in 10 black males between the ages of 20 and 40 was incarcerated—10 times the rate of their white peers. In 2010, a third of all black male high-school dropouts between the ages of 20 and 39 were imprisoned, compared with only 13 percent of their white peers.” (Coates 2020)

“By the late 1990s, the overwhelming majority of state and local police forces in the country had availed themselves of the newly available resources and added a significant military component to buttress their drug war operations.” (Alexander 2010: Page 50) The War on Drugs essentially went from a hip political slogan coined by President Nixon, to one that the Reagan administration took and ran away with, leading to the development of a full-blown war. Police forces were equipped with special weapons and units to get “drugs off the streets.” Raids were becoming increasingly common with the change to the Special Weapons and Tactics, ‘SWAT’ teams who were almost promoted in their role by the drug war. The responsibility of the SWAT team was changed to serving narcotic warrants and they were allowed and encouraged to do so with force. SWAT raided homes, apartment buildings, public housing, or even public high schools on the hunt for crack cocaine. And the individuals who were usually searched, raided or arrested were almost always people of color. The disparities were compelling. And once arrested many people of color struggled obtaining counsel, or they were equipped with inadequate counsel. Oftentimes, they were given a public defender who was so overwhelmed and overworked

that they pushed plea bargains on their defendants. “Even people are charged with extremely serious crimes, such as murder, they may find themselves languishing in jail for years without meeting with an attorney, much less getting a trial.” (Alexander 2010: Page 65) This directly breached their Sixth Amendment right to enjoy a speedy trial. Alexander (The New Jim Crow 2010) also notes how children who were unfortunate enough to be caught up in the system often experienced some of the worst conditions. One popular example is that of the "Central Park Five" now called “The Exonerated Five," a group of five young boys ages ranging from 14 to 16 years of age. This case occurred in 1989, in New York City. A white female Central Park jogger was raped and assaulted, and the crime horrified the city. Six young boys, later five following the release of one young man, were indicted for the crime. The young men were harassed and assaulted by the New York Police Department without lawyers or parents present despite each boy being underaged. Former President Donald Trump but who was a New York businessman at the time, would go so far to publish a full page advertisement calling for the death penalty for the youth. They were forced and tricked into giving false guilty pleas and ultimately sentenced to 5-10 year in juvenile prison. The oldest of the group, 16-year-old Korey Wise, received the worst treatment of them all and was tried as an adult, sentenced as an adult, and was sent to an adult’s prison where he would serve 15 years. The boys were later exonerated when the real assailant was caught and confessed. The young men would file wrongful conviction suits against the state of New York, push for justice reform, and inspire a docu-series that resulted in an Oscar win. The issue surrounding these plea bargains and the lack of defending in part from the public defenders is so common that stories like that of

the “Exonerated Five” are far too common. “The practice of encouraging defendants to plead guilty to crimes, rather than affording them the full benefit of a full trial, has always carried its risks and downsides. Never before in our history, though, have such an extraordinary number of people felt compelled to plead guilty, even if they are innocent, simply because the punishment for the minor, nonviolent offense with which they have been charged is so unbelievably severe. When prosecutors offer “only” three years in prison when the penalties defendants could receive if they took their case to trial would be five, ten or twenty years—or life imprisonment—only extremely courageous (or foolish) defendants turn the offer down.” (Alexander 2010: Page 66)

Ta-Nehisi Coates also analyzes the era of mass incarceration, looking particularly at the studies of Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Coates 2020). Coates breaks down Moynihan’s report from March of 1965 called “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.” “Running against the tide of optimism around civil rights, ‘The Negro Family’ argued that the federal government was underestimating the damage done to black families by “three centuries of sometimes unimaginable mistreatment” as well as a “racist virus in the American blood stream” which would continue to plague blacks in the future.” (Coates 2020) The report demonstrated how shocking it was that African Americans had survived their ordeals of trauma and that it could have broken or killed out a weaker man. Black people were so battered and tormented by constant discrimination, injustice, and uprooting that one questions how they were able to show resilience. The report details how although a small percentage of young black men and women were able to move ahead and reach level of achievement,

many others fall behind. It also explores the issue of how difficult some of these achievements are to reach for the young African Americans versus other races. Moynihan argued that the African American community was forced into a matriarchal structure because the Negro male was being incarcerated or murdered at alarming rates, and it suggested that ultimately the matriarchal households failed to enable young black men to reach the full potential of their “birthrights”. The crux of Moynihan’s argument was that a household of all black women forced to work hard to put food on the stove could not show a young black man how to be a man, and because of this a cycle of poverty ultimately continued. Moynihan’s report originally aimed to “muster support for an all-out government assault on the structural social problems that held black families down” (Coates 2020) but instead had the opposite affect, more conservative readers took it as a strong argument as to why the black family needs to fend for itself. Moynihan’s report was ultimately referred to as “victim blaming” and faulty in its assumptions. But there was some truthfulness behind the report and the study including what it brought to the forefront in regards to incarceration rates of black males.

Black Lives Matter Movement (2012 to Ongoing)

The early and later 2000s would bring to a head many of the issues that have surrounded the black community. One major turning point would be the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012. This event is notorious for sparking the creation of the Black Lives Matter Movement. Trayvon Martin was a 17 year old who was shot by a neighborhood watchman who felt threatened by the young man who was walking home and wearing a hoodie. Martin was stalked and deemed suspicious when the only thing

he had in his possession was a can of ice tea and a bag of Skittles. Trayvon Martin's killer was acquitted on the grounds of the Stand Your Ground law that has notoriety in the states of Florida and the overall defense of self-defense. The response to the verdict was the spur of riots and civil unrest. Many people throughout the nation collectively gasped when the killer was free to walk while the young Trayvon Martin lost his life. Black Lives Matter was created in response to the acquittal and advocated that black lives must be made to matter in the eyes of the law. Following Trayvon Martin's death the list of names continued to grow and grow with the murders of Oscar Grant, Jordan Baker, Eric Garner, John Crawford, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Walter Scott, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, and too many more names to list. A list that is continuously growing with a name constantly being added. "The list is far from complete. In fact, it's short by hundreds of names that are the damning evidence of the level of violence against black bodies in America." (Lebron 2017: Page 14) The movement isn't without its fair share of misunderstanding with some individuals identifying the movement as a terroristic organization, as divisive, or as a pro-black and anti-other-races group. But these are misunderstandings of the true principles of the movement. "Black Lives Matter' represents a civic desire for equality and a human desire for respect. The intellectual roots of the movement lie deep in the history of black America and precisely because the history is rich and established, I perceived an opportunity to contribute to our moment by bringing to bear the forefathers and foremothers of black American social and political thought on an urgent claim: that black Americans are humans, too. Precisely because blacks' struggle for human acknowledgement is centuries old, what can those who have been on

the front lines in the past teach us about our present ideas about the struggle?.” (Lebron 2017: Page 24)

2020 brought the name George Floyd into the Black Lives Matter movement. George Floyd was a Minnesota man who was arrested for allegedly using a counterfeit \$20 bill at a grocery store. He was arrested and murdered by a police officer who pressed a forceful knee into Floyd’s neck for over eight minutes. The only crime that Floyd committed was allegedly using a counterfeit \$20 that later proved to not be true. His death was ruled as a homicide and the entire world quickly watched the over eight-minute ordeal that took a man’s life. Various people of different political, societal, and racial backgrounds rallied together over how traumatic and unnecessary the murder was. George Floyd’s death is arguably the one that caused the most outrage in the nation that was already up in arms due to the pandemic COVID-19, high records of unemployment, and civil unrest. For years people differed over their opinions on the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Philando Castile, Oscar Grant and others. With some deeming that “they deserved it,” “they had criminal pasts,” “they should have complied,” etc. The entire nation watched a video where a man sobbed, choked and complied. A man who didn’t fight back and was respectful to the officers. And he still was murdered. It was sickening. What would follow was the largest amount of protests to ever occur within our nation in every major city. Even foreign countries hosted protests over the issue. The Black Lives Matter movement was at the forefront of everyone’s minds. People were also protesting the murder of Breonna Taylor at the same time as George Floyd. Breonna Taylor was a young woman who was murdered in March 2020 while asleep in her bed. The Louisville Police forced entry into the

apartment as part of an investigation into alleged drug dealing operations that were occurring at the home. The drug dealing operation allegations stemmed from Taylor's ex boyfriend who did not live at the apartment and no longer was dating Taylor. Taylor's new boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, was with her instead and he was licensed to carry. The couple was awakened by a loud bang of the door being forced open and Walker fired a single legal warning shot at who he believed was a possible intruder. Walker and Taylor did not know that it was the Louisville Police who claimed that they knocked and announced themselves prior, and they were met back with an explosion of gunfire. Taylor was hit six times and died from her wounds.

The killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor gutted this country. People took to the streets to march, to chant, and to demand a change. In some cities we saw peaceful officers join the protesters in solidarity but in some cities we saw the protesters treated horribly. These peaceful protestors were met with pepper spray, smoke bombs, and rubber bullets. A few peaceful protests turned violent after-hours with looting occurring and many properties being damaged but many can argue that the peaceful protestors from the morning greatly differed from the destructive individuals who came out at night to take advantage over the unrest. The summer of 2020 was filled with a demand for change. People were exhausted and cried for liberation from systematic oppression, police killings, and violence. The holiday Juneteenth was celebrated by companies in solidarity with the movement. Prominent figures demanded to help in the fight and to bring in a change. The year 2020 was a year of immense change. It was the year that put to the forefront of the issues that no longer could be ignored.

Racism and Oppression as a Cause and Effect:

The centuries of systematic racism and oppression from slavery to Jim Crow to the 1970s then the 1980s and in present day act as a cause and an effect. The cause is a series of traumatic experience, hatred, and harm. The effect is our current landscape now in the black community. Black trauma has roots long before the year of 2020, but the year of change and unrest brought greater attention to the true trauma that many in the black community have been forced to endure. Trauma is defined medically as a wound or injury. The trauma we speak of when we discuss the experiences of black Americans within the United States is beyond that of a physical wound or a literal injury. The trauma is an emotional or psychological wound of sorts. To better explain that sense of trauma versus the literal definition, one has to dive into the definition of psychological trauma. “Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless in a dangerous world. Psychological trauma can leave you struggling with upsetting emotions, memories, and anxiety that won’t go away.” (HelpGuide: 2021) Detailing the history and background of the black experience in America from slavery to the Black Lives Movement, we can be so bold as to argue that these can be characterized as “stressful events.” These can be argued to be the stressful events that might have shattered the sense of security or created the tools that would lead to consequences of feeling helpless affecting not only the individual, but the entire community.

Kikinis et al. (2018) studied the relation between racism and trauma through a method of reviewing existing social science literature. The authors sought to identify

and assess a relationship between racial discrimination and trauma and conducted the study empirically, researching peer reviewed journals and conducting a physical study. The data obtained through the screening and review of literature with common search terms which included race-based trauma, racial trauma, racism, racial stress, etc. proved that the topic lacked a select measure of trauma and/or racism. We can argue this in part because it is difficult to place a numerical number on trauma and/or racism. Not all experiences are the same and there are still plenty of traumatic experiences that occurred within some individuals in the black community who have not accepted their trauma. Trauma is an experience that you can arguably only acknowledge once you understand that a traumatic or stressful event occurred. Some issues that hindered the study of literature relating to trauma and racism is the fact that more research is ultimately still needed in the arena of racism, discrimination, and trauma. Another literature limitation is how we currently assess racism and racial discrimination and how it is viewed primarily on individuals level experiences and not within a realm of a collective experiences. This is an important argument because the black experience within the United States is arguably not a collective one. This dates back to as far as the era of slavery. Some enslaved people note generally more positive experiences than others and this can be arguably due to disparities in complexion or racial mixing. Black Americans in the North might have had generally more positive experiences than those in the South during the Jim Crow and Civil Rights era.

Healing the Hidden Wounds of Racial Trauma by Kenneth V. Hardy looks into some of the issues that children and youth of color face and how trauma shaped

their lives at such an early age. The repercussions of the trauma endured are depression/hopelessness or disruptive and destructive behaviors. Often by the time that the destructive behaviors begin is when individuals finally express interest in the cause to the effect versus identifying the trauma from the beginning. Hardy notes the hidden wounds of oppression as “internalized devaluation, assaulted sense of self, and internalized voicelessness.” (Hardy 2013: Page 25) “Internalized devaluation is a direct by-product of racism, inextricably linked to deification of whiteness and the demonization of non-white hues.” (Hardy 2013: Page 26) Many young black children will experience their first encounters with racism or systematic oppression at an early age. We can argue that this also comes from American society’s normalization of forcing black Americans to feel inferior, a practice most common during slavery and the Jim Crow era. The feeling of inferiority has not disappeared with time and new approaches have reinforced feelings of black inferiority in different ways. “The assaulted sense of self is the culmination of recurring experiences with internalized devaluation” (Hardy 2013: Page 25) So arguably when a child feels devalued and inferior and worthless, their sense of self or identity suffers. Feelings of not being “enough” cloud the mind and this feeling is incredibly detrimental because it segues into adolescence which is in part an already rough time with the complexities of puberty and high school. “Internalized voicelessness erodes the ability to defend against a barrage of unwelcome and unjustified negative, debilitating messages.” (Hardy 2013: Page 26) So imagine that a person is so broken down by feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness, and inferiority that eventually even their inner thoughts reflect the same or become voiceless and numb to the positive thoughts necessary to pull an

individual out of depression. Anger and rage are common repercussions to the issues of hopelessness and devaluation. With these feelings comes the argument about how many of the issues have come from systematic oppression and racism, and it has created endemic unfairness for black children. The black child is met with strife in school, in the community, and even at home. The trauma beginning at childhood is often reproduced by parents who in part have their own collective trauma trickle down to their children.

Trauma Beginning at Childhood:

The argument that many traumatic experiences begin in childhood is one that is easily understandable. This is in part because of the lack of protection towards children, the household issues, and the potential for victimization within communities and neighborhoods. It is easy to show how the traumatic historical events of the past have in part created trauma to the black people. The trauma endured by many black people has been institutionally produced and intergenerationally distributed. The trauma that affected enslaved blacks was severe enough that it transferred generationally to also affect their non-enslaved children, who themselves experienced the traumas of racism. The trauma of the children who endured segregation affects their children who were victims of trauma of de-industrialization and mass incarceration. The notion that trauma endures and passes from generation to generation can be used to make sense of many issues that currently affect the black community.

Children today are often met with the notion that “racism isn’t as bad today as it was in the past.” They are taught a watered-down version of black history by their

school districts, celebrate a relatively short black history month and are taught “inclusion matters” or “diversity matters.” In a sense, it’s a quick way to appease white people or the white parents of the school districts. To make the black children feel safe although many of them know well enough that this isn’t particularly truthful. Black children see the first black President, former President Barack Obama or the new black Vice President Kamala Harris and are taught to think “Wow! Things have surely changed.” And although we are living in very different times than those where black children were segregated from white peers or were forced to see firsthand how they are considered second class citizens with the separate establishments, and although segregation was ultimately ruled unconstitutional the remnants of previous eras have led to a legacy of “de facto” segregation. In addition to this, today’s black child has to witness firsthand the Black Lives Matter movement. Today’s black child has to march with their parents holding up signs that say “Am I Next?.” Today’s black child has to wonder when they go from being deemed as adorable or cute to becoming threatening in the eyes of the law. We all must remember, Tamir Rice, who was gunned down by police for playing with a toy gun was only twelve years old, but he was nevertheless portrayed as a dangerous adult and not a child who was simply just playing outside. “Racial stress can emerge when systems are oblivious or unwilling to acknowledge the presence of racism and its negative implications on the development of Black children and adolescents who are forced to find ways to cope with the ongoing psychological stress.” (Jernigan et al 2011: Page 126) Racial trauma arguably creates stress for black youth which follows them into adulthood. Racial awareness is also an important factor, since, as Jernigan and Daniel argue, children may not have

yet developed a sophisticated cognitive understanding or the affective language with which to process the ongoing effects of racism. (Jernigan et al 2011: Page 128) In simpler terms, one might not be able to truly decipher whether or not racially traumatic incident occurred until much later. This same sort of cognitive issues are seen in other forms of trauma such as that of sexual trauma. An individual might not acknowledge that they were abused until much later when the mind decides to remember the trauma again. A child might not decipher an experience as a racist encounter until later on when they are more aware of what can truly be deemed as racist. In a personal example, I can recall various times in my youth where my mother was questioned about whether or not she was indeed my parent due to my much lighter complexion and longer silkier hair. As a child, I had no idea why people thought I was “adopted” but growing up I see it as a racial experience whereas those in society thought a child who was too fair and pretty couldn’t possibly belong to a black woman.

Many analysts have employed the concept of “micro-aggressions” to make sense of everyday experiences of racism. (Jernigan et al 2011: Page 129) It is the reason why some believe that “racism isn’t as bad today as it once was in the past. “Racial micro aggressions are used to describe the subtle ways in which racism is communicated in everyday settings (e.g., classrooms)” (Jernigan et al 2011: Page 129). So, in the example of my parents being asked if I was adopted, they were the victims of micro-aggression. The behavior was clearly racially motivated, but no one would come right out to be directly racist towards them. Micro-aggressions are further broken down into “micro-asualts, micro-insults, and micro-invaldations.” (Jernigan et al

2011: Page 130) Micro-assaults include attacks on black youths in an often-anonymous way: the writing of derogatory words on a locker or on a bathroom stall, the bullying from the bully who won't admit the target of the assault is due to skin color. Micro-insults emerge in often heard phrases, such as "you are pretty for a black girl" or "you sound too 'white,'" where the youth is teased for being different or being outside the norm for how many people in society think a black girl or boy should be. Too pretty, too smart, hair is too nice, skin is too light, grammar is too well, etc. Micro- invalidation lines up to micro insult whereas a black student is ignored by her teachers for being "too smart." Or the "reverse privilege" talk of how one only got the opportunity because "they are black". These issues of race and racism are what many black youth have to endure at school and in society and it doesn't even begin to tackle many of the traumas that begin at home.

We can blame a great deal of black trauma on the over-policing of black communities, corruption, racism and various other factors that have been prevalent throughout American history. "By 2000, more than 1 million black children had a father in jail or prison-roughly half of those fathers were living in the same household as their kids when they were locked up. Paternal incarceration is associated with behavioral problems and delinquency, especially among boys." (Coates 2020) These were the breadwinners of the homes, the disciplinarians and with their incarceration the burden fell on the mothers who were so overwhelmed and busy from having to do it all themselves that the children suffer. Even when the fathers are eventually freed, the cycle often continues or it's far too late for the children to heal from the initial

trauma. The American prison system does not focus enough on equipping prisoners for success upon their release and many find themselves right back into prison.

Healing Combats Trauma. A Way Forward:

So how do we heal from this trauma? We can go take a professionally established route by visiting a therapist or psychiatrist. Or we can go for a more politically focused solution, by becoming involved in social movements, getting more in touch with history so that we do not repeat our past, helping future generations become more proud/inspired by their black history and culture, visiting museums, and even getting DNA research done by predominantly black companies who focus their research on African Ancestry such as the African Ancestry kit, AfroRoots DNA, and MyHeritage DNA. It's important to note how one issues that children who experience trauma in social settings such as school notice it begins as an issue of what is truly taught in the schools with a watered-down version of black history by their school districts, celebrating a relatively short black history month and being taught "inclusion matters" or "diversity matters" although the words do not often match the actions. It's extremely important to teach our youth about the past and the present so that we do not repeat history. Having a fuller enriching learning lessons on the Civil Rights Movements and the Black Lives Matter movement is important and braiding together the way of transforming oppression and working towards collective change.

A popular approach to dealing with trauma is to literally seek out professional help via a therapist or psychiatrist. This practice might be more beneficial for adults who have deeper rooted issues and need further healing to fix deep seated problems.

There are plenty of black therapists and psychiatrist who focus their practices on racial trauma. A more personal solution is involvement in social movements such as the Black Lives Matter Movement, whether that means doing research, participating in marches, or even donating money to the cause. Taking our youth's education into our own hands is important as well. This goes beyond the curriculum at school and involves parents actively teaching their children about their rich black history, celebrating Black History beyond just the month of February, and inspiring the youth to look up to successful black men and women both in their communities, but also beyond such as athletes or celebrities who are using their star power for the collective good. The National Museum of African American History and Culture is one institution where a tour with your child would leave them feeling enriched and inspired, and although it might not be feasible to all families due to expenses and locations many major cities have their own African Americans history museums, historical monuments or plaques, libraries filled with information or places to visit with some minor research necessary on the parent's part.

Some challenges to healing that have arose are the lack of black organization, the lack of infrastructure such a community organization establishments, fragmentation/isolation, and lack of meaning and hope as noted in *Radically Healing Black Lives: A Love Note to Justice* by Shawn A. Ginwright. The lack of black organization/infrastructure is related to the faltering support of nonprofit social support services in black communities. Also, the stigma of activism and the fear that comes from it are another cause, as many activists have been victims of harassment by the FBI or

victims of assassinations/smear campaigns. There's also a lack of resources for buildings where those in the black community can convene to organize and create. Long gone are the days of the Black Panther Party where the revolution had the resources and organization to fight. Fragmentation/isolation comes from how the tension in the black community is high. "First are the growing class tensions between educated professional and working poor communities. These tensions, while rarely discussed publicly, have fostered different and sometime conflicting views on how to address pressing issues." (Ginwright: Page 35) It explains how the experiences of one black man might seriously differ from that of another. An educated professional might feel as though their community has no issues of racism or discrimination, whereas someone from the working class seriously differs. Even the simplicity of the Black Lives Matter movement, that aims to bring awareness to injustice and simply state that black lives are important is often the butt of criticism and differing opinions with the too often heard rebuttal that 'All Lives Matter.' Lack of meaning/hope details how the black communities struggle with violence, substance abuse, joblessness, and lack of trust of the people in charge that is incredibly difficult to garner hope and activism. "These challenges to African American youth leadership organizing are even more difficult with policies that restrict, control and contain young people."(Ginwright : Page 36)

Healing is possible and there's ways that the black community can move forward despite the lack of trust, hope, leadership, etc. One important step is prioritizing our youth by helping them become more connected to their roots that goes beyond the

need for school reform or community centers and can start at home by parents teaching their children about history and creating pride in their cultures. “#Blacklivesmatter is one example of healing justice because it highlights three important features of the healing justice framework, which are restoration, resistance, and reclamation.” (Ginwright: Page 39) “Restoration involves actions and activities that restore collective well-being, meaning and purpose.” (Ginwright 2011: Page 39) The purpose of the restoration step is to actively combat the issue of communities not having hope/trust in themselves and their leadership. It aims to heal those wounds created and to move away from “individualistic notions of health” (Ginwright: Page 39). It views the total restoration of the community as the greatest good, creating a more cohesive and better community/group dynamic. The resistance aspect is just that, resisting norms. It “involves disrupting and rejecting the hegemonic notions of justice, particularly in regards to race.” (Ginwright 2011: Page 40) One of the best notions of healing is that a change needs to occur, that justice needs to occur in the realm of law and beyond to create fairness and true equality. It’s demanding accountability for actions and arguing that the current society that we live in is flawed. Reclamation comes next and ties into resistance. It’s “the capacity to reclaim, redefine, and reimagine a possible future.” (Ginwright 2011: Page 41) The biggest part of healing comes from wanting to create a dynamic whereas no one else will ever need to be healed again from the same pains. Reclaiming history and the collective narrative is a great tool on how we don’t allow the past to repeat itself.

Conclusion:

With all trauma, it is imperative to create spaces for healing and growth. 2020 has been a tumultuous year but it has been eye-opening in regards to showing the underlying issues unjustly plaguing the black community such as systematic oppression, generational curses, trauma but how important it is to recognize these issues and know they exist to start the healing. Healing is possible, but it takes work. It takes an individual who is sick of the pressures and repercussions of their trauma, an individual who chooses healing, who chooses to do better. One cannot be forced to face their trauma, because facing trauma is an active decision one must make to move forward. I believe that 2020 was a year that made the black community awaken from the deep slumber of trauma. It was a year where many individuals decided that they will no longer allow their trauma to control them or will not longer allow their trauma to be an excuse any longer. To combat trauma and heal fully from the generational curses that plague black people means acknowledging those curses. It means looking into the past as a period that cannot be repeated. It involves collective responsibility to take the reins of our futures into our own hands. The anti-black agenda within the United States has affected black children for long enough and eventually one must rally together and declare that ‘enough is enough.’ The issues of mass incarceration, racism, discrimination, injustice, and systematic oppression are too big to defeat in one year’s time, but the most important step of acknowledging that there is a problem is in the fact the acknowledgment factor, we have to acknowledge the trauma so that we can collectively work towards a better generation that thrives from collective healing and harmony.

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