

Post Slavery Persistent Traumatic Stress Disorder (PSPTSD)

by

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The root cause of psychospiritual illness/disease/disorder/trauma derives from our Ancestors beginning with their enslavement. And as a direct result of this heinous historical trauma their unresolved psychic trauma has become part of the genetic cellular memory (DNA) inherited by their descendents of today, and until this profound psychic trauma has been healed successfully, it will continue to trigger psychospiritual illness/disease/disorder and trauma in the generations that follow.

When an Afrikan is experiencing illness, disease, disorder or trauma it's because s/he has in some way become unconsciously disconnected from Muntu (God/dess) and the Ancestors. A process of consciously rejoining Muntu and the Ancestors accomplishes psychospiritual healing; what we call Muntu realization. It has nothing to do with the names of diseases, the swallowing of medicines, or the work of a skilled surgeon, psychiatrist or clinical psychologist. Healing is a rejoining of the person to the whole. In other words, the solution to the profound sickness of racism/white supremacy is the awakening of the consciousness of Afrikan people to the divinity within.

Post Slavery Persistent Traumatic Stress Disorder (PSPTSD) is the term I've coined to help explain the consequences of multigenerational oppression for centuries of chattel slavery and institutional racism/white supremacy and to identify the resulting adaptive survival behaviors. Researchers have long investigated how historical trauma is passed down through generations, and findings suggest actual memories are transmitted through DNA.

PSPTSD differs from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD, which results from a single trauma experienced directly or indirectly. When we look at Amerikan chattel slavery, we are not talking about a single trauma; we're talking about multiple traumas over lifetimes and over generations. Living in Black skin is a whole level of stress.

In formulating my theory, I wondered: what happens when stressed people lack treatment for generations? How have Black people coped? What adaptive behaviors have we invented-now misinterpreted as "cultural"- to survive in a toxic environment? How do we tease out, as a people that which is harmful and adaptive, that which builds resilience and that which is absolutely pathological? Because figuring that out is essential if we are to break the cycle. We have to learn to pass along the broken material. We have to learn how to keep ourselves safe.

In other words, there's nothing "post" about where I grew up in East Oakland, California. Something stressful was always happening all of the time. The term post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is inadequate to capture the depth, scope and frequency of trauma in my previous environment. For me, and many young and older people of color, stress is persistent, not post.

Trauma and crisis was commonplace in my neighborhood growing up and as a result, I and many of my former peers had learned to work and live in persistent traumatic stress environments. There is an important distinction here. PSPTSD highlights the root causes of trauma, like food insecurity (hunger) and lack of housing and access to good medical care, violent police, racism/white supremacy, while PTSD diagnoses only a "disorder" resulting from a past experience that is presumed to have concluded. African so-called "Americans" often experience greater stress, anxiety, and depression because of the lack of safety, economic opportunities, and basic housing that are fundamental to well-being. Researchers, practitioners, and policy stakeholders all confirm that persistent stress has a negative impact on learning, healthy behavior, and mental health. In addition, the resulting stress of living in a high stress environment can lead to a variety of psychological and physical illness. These events trigger major depression, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, digestive problems, cerebral and vascular strokes, seizures and a cascade of neuroinflammatory disorders. This results in neurodegeneration, laying the groundwork for various dementias, including Alzheimer's disease. Many suffer chronic, unaddressed systemic inflammation and a depression of their immune systems leading to a myriad of deleterious effects, including Bell's Palsy.

In sum, PSPTSD is the persistent presence of racism/white supremacy, despite the significant legal, social, and political progress made during the last half of the twentieth century, has created a physiological risk for Africans in Amerikkka that is virtually unknown to white Amerikkans.