

African American Emotional Intelligence: Turning on the lights

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Fine Arts

Watkins College of Art

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Fine Arts with a concentration in Visual Arts

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May, 2019

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Introduction: The Lights Are Out!

The emotional damage in African Americans due to colonialism and white supremacist ideology has been long researched by many writers, psychologists, and academicians including Franz Fanon, W.E.B. Du Bois, (to a lesser extent Edward Said). More recent queries have been performed (and specifically referenced in this text) by scholars such as Heather Williams, Alma Carten, Taasogle Rowe, and Kamilah Woodson. However, this damage can also be addressed by acknowledging the neglect of individual emotional intelligence within the African American community. *Emotional Intelligence* is a contemporary field of study in psychology discussed by educator and author Karla McLaren, and psychologist and science journalist, Daniel Goleman. The subject of individual (or personal) emotions in the African American community is seldom discussed due to an array of harmful social and political conditions affecting them, stemming from the manifestation of discriminatory attitudes originating in colonial times. Inquires into this subject matter by academicians Bell Hooks, Brandon Jones, Jason Silverstein, Aubrey Harrison along with writers such as Torraine Walker, have begun to establish texts grounded in this pressing phenomenon.

For the sake of this paper, terms and phrases such as black people and black Americans may be used interchangeably to refer to African Americans. This paper may also refer to white supremacist ideology through a compiled variety of terms and phrases such as colonial thinking, colonist mindset, and white supremacist thinking. This text uses the terms colonialism and post-colonialism to reference the European colonization of the Americas, coupled with the integration of African slaves and how the reflection of its structure is still experienced today. In

the context of this text, colonized people will be African Americans, specifically concentrating on their struggles with the awareness of their own social, psychological, and cultural inferiority enforced by the colonized state of mind. The term colonizer will be used to reference European settlers, with specific references to the superiority they assumed over the colonized through cultural domination. This is sure to resonate with expansive cultural references from different timeframes and contexts threaded throughout this text.

While many scholars discuss the effects of dehumanization as a result of colonization, the philosopher and revolutionary Franz Fanon along with sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois discuss the significance of the foundation of the colonial mindset within the colonized people and how it has found its way into contemporary times. In his text *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon mentions how colonialism “turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.”¹ This distortion has seeped into post-colonial times as African Americans struggle with their own emotional identity. Forever split between how they view themselves and how they are viewed through the eyes of others, Du Bois in this regard speaks to the “double consciousness”² formulated through the lens of colonialism and more recently, white supremacist ideology.

The emotional condition African Americans find themselves in today has stemmed from the continued cultivation of white supremacist ideology. African Americans are led to believe (and then internalize) that they have no emotional capability beyond the stereotypes instilled in them during the oppression of both the colonial and post-colonial eras. This has led to (among

¹ Fanon, Frantz, and Jean-Paul Sartre. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth, 1977.

² B., Du Bois William E. *The Souls of Black Folks: Revised and Updated Bibliography*. New York: Penguin, 1982. p. 3

other issues) a lack of emotional intelligence and acknowledgment of authentic emotions amongst African Americans due to framework passed down from the widespread mindset of the emotional capabilities of the group from colonialism. Emotional intelligence is a concept developed by the work of scholars John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey; this concept was brought to the public arena by Daniel Goleman in his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*.³ This field of study defines emotional intelligence as “the ability to engage in sophisticated information processing about one’s own and others’ emotions and the ability to use this information as a guide to thinking and behavior.”⁴ This strain of critical thinking, although found lacking overall in western culture, has been a neglectful discussion in African American communities as a result of continuing colonial ideologies. The skills used for emotional intelligence are meant to serve as “adaptive functions that potentially benefit [oneself] and others.”⁵ Karla McLaren resonates with this skill set in her text *The Language of Emotions* when she insists that if we can utilize emotions as “tools of [our] deepest awareness, [we will] be able to move forward as . . . whole and functional [people].”⁶ These skills remain inaccessible to black communities because of the developed stigma of addressing emotional traumas.

After African Americans began to better integrate within the broader social and political structure following the Civil Rights Movement, some aspects of the African American experience began to be remedied at least legally. However, the emotional trauma of the group was not addressed. Brandon Jones, psychologist and scholar, addresses the “trauma we continue to endure” that leaves us “unable to ‘come together’ with the force needed to make a significant

³ Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam Books, 1995.

⁴ Green, Rachel. “*The Emotional Intelligence Institute - What Is Emotional Intelligence?*” [See bibliography for full reference]

⁵ Green, “*The Emotional Intelligence Institute*” [See bibliography for full reference]

⁶ McLaren, Karla. *Language of Emotions*. Boulder, Co: Sounds True, 2010. p. 3

impact.”⁷ Black Americans are dealing with unaddressed trauma that has left them unable to utilize emotional intelligence to better their own situations and, more so, their communal efforts. African Americans come together in hopes of changing society’s view of the group but, have not addressed the needed change of how they view themselves. Bell Hooks discusses this too and makes an example of profound civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. when she critiques his method of remedying civil rights issues; although “he admonished black people again and again to recognize the importance of loving our enemies, of not hating white people, he did not give as much attention to the issue of self-love and communal love among black people [. . .] King did not address the issue of how black people would love the enemy if they did not love themselves.”

⁸ This revolving pattern of unacknowledged, emotional neglect in African Americans continues to fester, even during attempts to decolonize the mindset of American society to establish fair treatment of black Americans.

Aubrey Harrison, Clinical Psychology PhD student at The George Washington University, acknowledges the lack of discussion of emotional traumas in African Americans, specifically males, in his article *Black males don’t cry*. Harrison highlights this repression and internalized fear of emotional expression as he describes how most black men “hide their emotions and refrain from expressing them even when you knew something or someone hurt them. It was a coping mechanism. . .”⁹ Learning to cope with these unaddressed feelings has lead to internalized traumas. It is important that internalized trauma is addressed in order for

⁷ Jones, Brandon. "Emotional Intelligence of the Black Male." *Abernathy*. August 06, 2017. Accessed March 17, 2019. [See bibliography for full reference]

⁸ Hooks, Bell. *Salvation: Black People and Love*. Harper Perennial, 2016. p. 7-8

⁹ Harrison, Aubrey. "Black Males Don't Cry." *American Psychological Association*. November 2015. Accessed March 27, 2019.[See bibliography for full reference]

black Americans to begin understanding their own emotions outside the framework of white supremacist ideology to move towards individual and communal healing.

The lack of acknowledgment of emotional traumas are only a fraction of the multiple consequences paid by African Americans who have not been given proper information and opportunity to understand their own emotions regarding themselves let alone others. This continues to stem from the colonist mindset. Though much has been reconciled politically, white supremacist ideology has now transformed into new forms of oppression through the media, school, work, public places, intimate places, etc. One of the most predominant forms of these subliminal oppressions are *Microaggressions*. Derald Wing Sue Ph. D., Professor of Psychology at Columbia University elaborates on the reality of this phenomenon:

*Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment.*¹⁰

These microaggressions are projected into black communities (internalized by the group) and further perpetuate white supremacist ideology within African Americans' interactions in the larger American social structure. These "hidden messages" further the downward slope of unaddressed emotional traumas faced by African Americans.

In order to begin addressing these emotional discrepancies, we must understand its origin by tracing the morbid legacy of colonialism and post-colonialism. Then we will analyze and discuss how it has seeped into the ideologies and thinking within black communities and the

¹⁰ Sue, Derald Wing, Ph.D. "Microaggressions: More than Just Race." Psychology Today. November 17, 2010. Accessed April 25, 2019 [See Bibliography for full reference]

effect this has had on emotional intelligence of individuals in this group. As a male of mixed racial backgrounds (Hispanic and African American), it is my hope that the value of this threaded information will foster a discussion and open further investigation into this inquiry of African American suffrage.

Colonialism to Post-Colonialism Theory: Finding the Fuse Box

Colonialism is a worldly historical phenomenon of domination and subjugation where a society gradually expands by conquering the territory of an established society of people, and settling on their territory.¹¹ The colonizers not only seize the physical land, they also alter, appropriate, and possibly erase the established culture to replace it with their own. This is not a modern concept, as many empires during centuries of world expansion have utilized this method of spreading its influence of power. “The ancient Greeks set up colonies as did the Romans, the Moors, and the Ottomans. . . Colonialism, then, is not restricted to a specific time or place.” (ibid.) The difficulty and justification of Colonialism has been a long-lived and continued discussion filled with philosophical ideologies, political theory, and debate. In reconciling this difficulty, the principal argument of the colonizers to justify the terror of Colonialism was the “ ‘civilizing mission,’ which suggested that a temporary period of political dependence or tutelage was necessary in order for ‘uncivilized’ societies to advance to the point where they were capable of sustaining liberal institutions and self-government.”¹² This historical rationalization implied the inferiority of colonized peoples and has led to oppressive ideologies and attitudes of superiority in the colonizers to the colonized. When Africans were savagely abducted from their homeland, they were brought across the Atlantic Ocean by European colonizers to cultivate the new world as slaves. For over 200 years, they were treated as property until 1865 with the passing of the 13th amendment to the United States Constitution which made slavery illegal. This change in

¹¹ Kohn, Margaret and Reddy, Kavita, "*Colonialism*", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Accessed March 20, 2019.

¹² Kohn and Reddy, "*Colonialism*", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [See bibliography for full reference]

law did not change the way newly freed African American citizens were treated nor were any attempts made to address the past centuries of savagery and trauma they endured. As a result, this has added mental strain to African Americans as white supremacist ideology continued to be internalized through what Du Bois refers to as double-consciousness. African Americans are faced with a world “which yields [them] no true self-consciousness, but only lets [them] see [themselves] through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”¹³ What Du Bois describes here is the internalized oppression of African Americans through the circulation of white supremacist ideology. More importantly, he identifies that this is not only circulated in the larger societal structures around African Americans, but it is also internalized within the group’s thinking. This sense of viewing and contemplating of oneself through the eyes of the opposing group—a group that holds social and political power, has morphed from the nefarious projection of white supremacist ideology of “civilizing” African Americans following the dismantlement of slavery.

Attempts at a single definition for post-colonialism has proven to be difficult and controversial. However, it can be said that post-colonialism is a theory that places concern on the ramifications of colonial structures and study the impact of colonialism on a wide variety of topical issues.¹⁴ These issues are included but not limited to “hybridity, diaspora, representation, narrative, and knowledge/power.” (ibid.) This is different from the discussion of decolonization theories that are more closely associated with “revolution, economic inequality, violence, and

¹³ B., Du Bois William E. *The Souls of Black Folks: Revised and Updated Bibliography*. New York: Penguin, 1982. p. 3

¹⁴ Kohn and Reddy, “Colonialism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 5. Post-colonial Theory[See bibliography for full reference]

political identity.” (ibid.) In this text the theory of post-colonialism will be utilized to examine the effects colonialism has had on colonized people (specifically African Americans) today.

The literature and media produced in the post-colonial era are important areas of focus that assist in further understanding the array of contemporary forms of oppression African Americans face. This strain of theory allows for consideration of how internalized white supremacist ideologies are fed to society daily through the lens of “realistic” images and representation. A communication study done by Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter in 2008 discusses the effects of mass media on African American stereotypes:

*Communication research and theory suggest that the mass media are an important source of information about African Americans and media portrayals contribute to public perceptions of African Americans (Davis & Gandy, 1999; Gray, 1989; Matabane, 1988; Wilson, Gutierrez, & Chao, 2003). Dates (1990), for example, has argued that Black images on television may cause viewers to conceive, alter, or even reinforce their beliefs and opinions about Blacks.*¹⁵

Bell Hooks references this internalization when she elaborates on the why the image of a drug addicted African American woman is more “real” than the image of a pious, single mother of color, who attends college to better her situation. “The fact is that racism, sexism, and class elitism together encourage individuals to assume that the negative image is ‘real’; individuals approaching blackness from this biased perspective have an investment in presenting the negative image as the norm. To do so promotes, perpetuates, and sustains systems of dominance. . .”¹⁶ Although the argument could be made that African Americans now have access to major acting roles and are represented, the negative images of African Americans projected across media is still a form of aggression that is internalized by its audience and believed to be a reality.

¹⁵ Punyanunt-Carter, Narissra M. "The Perceived Realism of African American Portrayals on Television." *Howard Journal of Communications* 19, no. 3 (2008): 241-57. doi:10.1080/10646170802218263.

¹⁶ Hooks, Bell. *Salvation: Black People and Love*. Harper Perennial, 2016. p. 48-49

In this regard, the social constructs of racism, sexism, and class elitism alike have been established in the cloaked form of “reality” to further perpetuate oppression of black Americans. More so, the white supremacist thinking in black Americans has distorted their view of themselves and the reality faced by individuals in this group.

Jason Silverstein, lecturer, instructor, and the writer-in-Residence at Harvard, elaborates on the effects of perpetuated stereotypes of African Americans in his article *I Don't Feel your Pain: A failure of empathy perpetuates racial disparities*.¹⁷ In this text, Silverstein discusses the racial empathy gap, which he uses the example of watching a needle pierce white skin vs. dark skin to help shape the image of this concept. “For many people, race does matter, even if they don’t know it. They feel more empathy when they see white skin pierced than black. This is known as the racial empathy gap.” (ibid.) This further supports the internalized white supremacist ideologies that view African Americans as less than white Americans in American society and more importantly, perpetuating these ideologies in black American communities. Research performed by Sophie Trawalter, Kelly M. Hoffman, and Adam Waytz, also referenced in Silverstein’s article, concludes that “people, including medical personnel, assume black people feel less pain than white people.”¹⁸ This conclusion, based on peer reviewed research, further clarifies that racial prejudice is not entirely to blame for this empathy gap because “black participants also displayed an empathy gap toward other blacks.”¹⁹ According to Silverstein, “assumptions about what it means to be black—in terms of social status and hardship—may be behind the bias” (ibid.) This further references the unacknowledged emotional traumas of African Americans being neglected by assuming that since having faced hardships (such as slavery,

¹⁷ Silverstein, Jason. "Why White People Don't Feel Black People's Pain." Slate Magazine. June 27, 2013. [See bibliography for full reference]

¹⁸ Trawalter, Sophie, Kelly M. Hoffman, and Adam Waytz. "Racial Bias in Perceptions of Others' Pain." [See bibliography for full reference]

¹⁹ Silverstein, Jason. "Why White People Don't Feel Black People's Pain." Slate Magazine. June 27, 2013. [See bibliography for full reference]

racism, and the struggle for civil rights) then, other kinds of pain that are less of its equivalent are not as harmful to them versus white Americans. “This gives us some insight into how racial disparities are created—and how they are sustained. First, there is an underlying belief that there is a single black experience of the world. Because this belief assumes blacks are already hardened by racism, people believe black people are less sensitive to pain. Due to this false belief, black people are forced to endure more pain.” (ibid.) The neglect of African Americans’ trauma has been internalized as a standard for this group and has led to devastating stereotypes of their emotional capacities. This internalized white supremacist ideology further breaks down black Americans’ internal access to Emotional Intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence: Learning How to Rewire

As internalized white supremacist ideology promoting inferiority of African Americans perpetuates throughout the larger American political structure, the emotional intelligence of this group also becomes increasingly neglected and seldom discussed. Emotional intelligence is a newly developed field of study, brought to light under two decades ago by scholars John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey.²⁰ Psychologist Daniel Goleman successfully brought the concept of Emotional Intelligence, (also recognized as “EQ”) into the public arena in the early 2000’s. Goleman refers to “*EI* as the English abbreviation for emotion intelligence”²¹ throughout his text. An elaborated definition of EI, according to Goleman’s compiled research on Salovey and Mayer, can be conferred by expanding it into five centered domains that build on one another to form a solid foundation of EI.

The first would be “*Knowing one’s emotions.*”²² This domain focuses on a person’s self-awareness by recognizing, acknowledging, and monitoring their own emotions as they happen. This is imperative to EI because it allows people to gain insight and self-understanding to their own emotions which is crucial. Individuals with “[a]n inability to notice [their] true feelings leaves [them] at their mercy.” (ibid.) Allowing emotions to overrun life without any self-reflection, leads to irrational decisions that can cause harm to self and others. People who are aware of their own feelings are able to make rational judgments to better pilot their lives and the personal decisions they make for themselves. This self-acknowledgement allows for an

²⁰ Green, “*The Emotional Intelligence Institute* [See bibliography for full reference]

²¹ Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam Books, 1995. p. x

²² Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam Books, 1995. p. 46

individual to feel in control of their own situations, “having a surer sense of how they really feel about personal decisions. . .” (ibid.) leading to a more stable existence.

The second domain is “*Managing emotions.*” (ibid.) This domain builds on self-awareness by furthering one’s capacity to govern their emotions in appropriate ways that avoid emotionally traumatic setbacks. “People who are poor in this ability are constantly battling feelings of distress, while those who excel in it can bounce back far more quickly from life’s setbacks and upsets.” (ibid.) Acknowledging your emotions is only the first step to stabilizing EI. Individual management of how emotions affect daily life and its setbacks allows one to further excel themselves in stressful situations and circumstances.

The third domain is “*Motivating oneself.*” (ibid.) Building on a person’s management of their emotions, one uses them to better focus on goals for “self-motivation and mastery, and creativity. Emotional self-control—delaying gratification and stifling impulsiveness—underlies accomplishment of every sort.” (ibid.) Although Goleman’s statement on emotional self-control can seem stifling to an individual’s emotional expression, it is important to note the first and second domains are the foundation of this self-motivation. Therefore, this is not necessarily stress inducing because the individual is in control of their own emotions in relation to any given situation. “People who have this skill tend to be more highly productive and effective in whatever they undertake.” (ibid.) EI is not only used to acknowledge a person’s feelings but, it also can be utilized as a tool for success of the individual in a multitude of aspects in life.

The fourth domain is “*Recognizing emotions in others.*” (ibid.) The ability to utilize empathy is necessary for successful social interactions. “People who are empathic are more attuned to the subtle social signals that indicate what others need or want.” (ibid.) Utilizing this

domain allows people to better interact with others and thus communicate more effectively. This also grants insight to emotional awareness of others in multiple settings that may have gone previously unacknowledged.

The final domain is “*Handling relationships*” (ibid.) This domain largely utilizes the skill to manage the emotions of others. This is not to be confused with intended emotional manipulation. “People who excel in these skills do well at anything that relies on interacting smoothly with others” (ibid.) and are usually more adaptive to the flurry of emotions exuded around them. As a result, they’re better suited for emotionally disparaging situations that require emotional tact that is not commonly practiced in American culture.

These domains are not intended to make conclusions or assumptions of the correct way to emotionally exist within society; they are simply the basis in which people can begin to hone EI to better themselves and the people they interact with. “Of course, people differ in their abilities in each of these domains. [...] Lapses in emotional skills can be remedied: to a great extent each of these domains represents a body of habit and response that, with the right effort can be improved on.”²³ What should be noted from Goleman here is EI that is lacking or even missing entirely can be improved upon just like other intellectual skills. “Our emotional awareness goes underground in childhood, and we turn toward every other kind of development—physical, scholastic, artistic, financial, intellectual, religious, or athletic.”²⁴ What can be said here is that emotional traumas of any variation can be addressed if one can repair their lapse in EI by considering emotions as a serious domain of intellect. However, as McLaren, notes most youth undergo a process of retroactive learning “as our intellectual skills move forward, our emotions

²³ Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam Books, 1995. p. 46

²⁴ McLaren, Karla. *Language of Emotions*. Boulder, Co: Sounds True, 2010. p. 29

move backward.” (ibid.) The internalized inferiority of emotions as an intellectual skill has impaired American society’s ability to harness them for the sake of their own well being. African Americans can exceedingly benefit from these skills to better address emotional traumas individually and communally but, this consideration is seldom discussed due to internalized white supremacist thinking that is revolving wildly in their minds and communities.

The Spark of Discussion: Seeking Further Consultation

This lack of discussion is the result of a multitude of varying influences; Aubrey Harrison ponders one of the larger influences of cultural fear in black men in his article when he considers “how much culture around you influences your perceptions of what you can and cannot do.”²⁵ The culture Harrison refers to is the persona “that portray[s] a tough, non[]emotional black male. [He] couldn’t show any type of vulnerable emotion..” (ibid.) This repression of vulnerability has led to unacknowledged emotions, further perpetuating the neglect of EI in African Americans. The internalized assumption of the strong African American echoes Silverstein but also writer and speaker, Torriane Walker aligns with this critical thought in his article *The Trouble With Being a Strong Black Man*. He states “for so many African American men, being cool, saving face, appearing to be in control of [their] emotions no matter the circumstances, is a persona [they] gravitate to almost instinctively.”²⁶ This persona that black men undertake is a result of centuries of perpetuated white supremacist ideologies that are internalized by American society. “To be a Black man in American society is to be forced to deal with psychological stress every day. Institutionalized racism, economic instability, and the constant threat of physical danger can do a number on a man’s mental state. When we feel the weight of that bearing down on us, our pride often keeps us from speaking to anyone.” (ibid.) Walker’s account of the black male experience references the unaddressed psychological stress experienced in their daily lives and how this has led to a tarnished mental state of inflicted trauma. Internalized white

²⁵ Harrison, Aubrey. “Black Males Don’t Cry.” American Psychological Association. November 2015. Accessed March 27, 2019. [See bibliography for full reference]

²⁶ Walker, Torriane. “The Trouble With Being a Strong Black Man.” Abernathy. July 13, 2016. Accessed March 27, 2019. [See bibliography for full reference]

supremacist ideology continues to show “how deeply ingrained the idea of the strong Black man who can handle anything life throws at him is, and how conforming to that idea has damaged [them].” (ibid.) Black Americans have control over how this trauma affects them but “have never been taught how to deal with their emotions.” (ibid.)

Associate professor of social work and McSilver Faculty Fellow at New York University, Alma Carten critiques America’s neglect of African American mental trauma in her article *How the Legacy of Slavery Affects the Mental Health of Black Americans Today*. American society continually fails to have authentic conversations about the ramifications of internalized white supremacist ideology but also “the mental health impact of forgiving acts of white racism and repressing justifiable feelings of anger and outrage — whether these are horrific acts of terrorism or nuanced microaggressions.”²⁷ Carten also refers to the consequences of repressed feelings. Here she states how “acts of white racism may be psychologically damaging and lay the foundation for future mental health problems and behaviors symptomatic of post-traumatic stress syndrome.” (ibid.) Clearly Carten addresses the high potential psychological trauma of internalized white supremacist ideologies and how its repression can lead to ill mental health behaviors for African Americans. There are a wide array of traumas faced by black Americans. Tassigle D. Rowe, Professor of Psychology at Pepperdine University, and Kamilah M. Woodson, Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology at Howard University, confer on these points of trauma when they elaborate on the phenomenon of historical trauma in their article *How to Heal African-Americans' Traumatic History*. They define ‘historical trauma’ as, “... the cumulative phenomenon where those who never directly experienced trauma

²⁷ Carten, Alma. "How the Legacy of Slavery Affects the Mental Health of Black Americans Today." *The Conversation*. September 20, 2018. Accessed March 27, 2019. [See bibliography for full reference]

(enslavement, rape, lynchings, murder) can still exhibit signs and symptoms of the trauma.”²⁸

What can be understood here is the link between the colonial mindset and contemporary times with regards to mental and emotional discrepancies in African Americans. Rowe & Woodson (resonating with Bell Hooks’ prior reference of lacking self-love) continue this insight and speak more closely to the experience of black Americans “harboring of unexplained anger, expressed as aggression and rage. Often they internalize oppression by accepting the lie of inferiority; which can then lead to self-loathing.” (ibid.) What can be noted is the consistency of unaddressed trauma that continues to function “as a persistent sickness, a deadly virus — [...] in the African American community and in the larger society.” (ibid.) This trauma needs to be addressed.

In order to begin addressing African Americans vast emotional trauma, a quality implementation of Emotional Intelligence (EI) needs to be developed by this group.

Psychotherapist, professor, and author Brandon Jones addresses this directly in his article *Emotional Intelligence of the Black Male*. He says, “Trauma is a huge deterrent in developing quality emotional intelligence skills. Once trauma is introduced into someone’s life (especially during childhood) it distorts a person’s ability to develop this crucial skill. This is why it is essential to address the intergenerational trauma we experience...”²⁹ These EI skills referred to by Jones is reflective of Goleman’s elaborations on EI domains and how they can better serve African Americans with addressing trauma as well as opening the discussion for EI in their communities. It is important to note that this is not the sole answer to the wide array of issues

²⁸ Rowe, Taasogle Daryl, and Kamilah Marie Woodson. "How to Heal African-Americans' Traumatic History." *The Conversation*. June 19, 2018. Accessed March 27, 2019. [See bibliography for full reference]

²⁹ Jones, Brandon. "Emotional Intelligence of the Black Male." *Abernathy*. August 06, 2017. Accessed March 17, 2019. [See bibliography for full reference]

black Americans endure on a constant basis but, “Improving on these areas individually will have a significant impact on [their] collective.” (ibid.)

I had the pleasure of establishing contact with Brandon Jones to execute a Q & A via email to gain further insight from his article and perhaps receive more evidence to support the unacknowledged emotional intelligence in African American community. This contact with Jones proved to be fruitful in addressing pending questions in regards to African American Emotional intelligence and the stigma of seeking to address trauma:

[...]

Could you elaborate more on how African-Americans develop a negative stigma towards honing emotional intelligence and addressing mental health?

Addressing mental health is something we have not culturally been socialized to do. We have been socialized to “suck up” the pain, expect for our lives to be hard, and for “bad” or negative things to happen to us. So, when it comes to addressing mental health, we don’t because we do not see ourselves as having mental health problems. We call it being “Black” and apart of the struggle. As far as emotional intelligence, this is a term/concept that many of us have never heard of or vaguely know about.

I also address a similar question here and gave a deeper analysis:

<https://youtu.be/t8b3wUdUppw>

Please share your thoughts on how racism, prejudice, and internalized white supremacist thinking has affected emotional intelligence and behavior in African-Americans.

All three of these have greatly affected us. We (many of us) act confused and irrational about many important things in life because we have not been informed, have been shut out, and/or harmed for attempting to do better for ourselves. We have never had a time when we could grieve and grow collectively without the threats that white supremacy provides.

Dr. Joy Degruy is a great resource for this - https://youtu.be/3Jh7uvfi_aM

How can, or does, an individual begin to identify emotional impairments and begin to understand and repair them?

For me it starts with looking at two areas of life:

First, any trauma or adverse experience(s) you’ve had and being honest about that/that experience(s).

This is one of the things that keep us stuck because we do not want to be real about the pain we have suffered in life.

Second, looking at the distorted thinking patterns we have about ourselves and the things in everyday life.

See link for more context - <https://psychcentral.com/lib/15-common-cognitive-distortions/>

What are some ways in which African-Americans can begin to address internal trauma?

1. Be honest about it.
2. See some professional health to address the issue(s)
3. Find healthy outlets to take care of themselves
4. Understand that healing is a journey and some traumas do not just go away.

How does addressing individual EQ in African-Americans help the community at large?

The idea is if everyone works on their own issues, then we can begin to engage each other more positively. Which in turn should create better family structures. Which should lead to better organization, strategy, and planning in the community. I believe this would give us a collective purpose to invest back into the community and the future (legacy) of our youth. [...]³⁰

³⁰ Jones, Brandon. "Emotional Intelligence in Black Communities and Families Inquiry." E-mail message to author. March 27, 2019. [See bibliography for full reference]

Conclusion: Final Repairs

African Americans are faced with substantial issues as they attempt to survive within the larger political structure of contemporary American society. Most of these social and political issues are largely out of an individual's control but are a constant reminder of the inferiority they're confronted with on a daily basis. African Americans as individuals can better themselves and their communities by becoming more informed and addressing the things they can control. (i.e. personal emotions in daily life, including awareness of the fall-out from colonialism.)

Black Americans can become more informed on the historical frameworks of American societal structures and mindsets. The full quote by Fanon, partially referenced in the beginning of this text is relative to note here:

*The claim to a national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture. In the sphere of psycho-affective equilibrium it is responsible for an important change in the native. Perhaps we haven't sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.*³¹

In sum, Fanon informs readers to think more critically about colonialism, its substantial effects of the future "national culture" (ibid.), and the savagery that colonialism has had on the history of the colonized people. Du Bois makes assertions on both ends of the spectrum when he claims that:

³¹ Fanon, Frantz, and Jean-Paul Sartre. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth, 1977.

*[i]t is not enough for the Negroes to declare that color-prejudice is the sole cause of their social condition, nor for the white South to reply that their social condition is the main cause of prejudice. They both act as reciprocal cause and effect, and a change in neither alone will bring the desired effect. Both must change, or neither can improve to any great extent.*³²

The takeaway here is the emphasis Du Bois makes on African Americans to be aware that change had to also come from them as well in order for the desired effect to surface and succeed. This is also the case in African American communities of today. Hooks implores readers to be more aware of the white supremacist ideology that is continually perpetuated through the larger American society; “As white supremacy remains the order of the day, we must always work to control our representations, to offer a progressive vision. [...] The resources to heal our wounds are already at our disposal.”³³ Black Americans must utilize the historical information of the colonist mindset to inform themselves of its origin. This will help in understanding how it has transformed with western culture in the current time. Silverstein challenges people of America to take into perspective and eliminate “the assumptions about what it means to be black or a minority in the United States.”³⁴ This in turn will begin to diminish the white supremacist ideologies that are perpetuated through the larger, political climate and more so, African American communities.

African Americans can become more aware of Emotional Intelligence and hone those skills to better survive in the harshness of the contemporary social climate. Goleman, in this regard, speaks to how emotional literacy in schools are rare or unheard of despite large interest in today’s American society. Goleman reassures the reader that “no program [...] is an answer to every problem. But given the crises we find ourselves and our children facing, and given the

³² B., Du Bois William E. *The Souls of Black Folks: Revised and Updated Bibliography*. New York: Penguin, 1982.

³³ Hooks, Bell. *Salvation: Black People and Love*. Harper Perennial, 2016. p. 224

³⁴ Silverstein, Jason. "Why White People Don't Feel Black People's Pain." *Slate Magazine*. June 27, 2013. [See bibliography for full reference]

quantum of hope held out by courses in emotional literacy, we must ask ourselves: Shouldn't we be teaching these most essential skills for life to every child—now more than ever?"³⁵ EI must be taken seriously in African American communities and teachings in order to become more informed of its existence as a true part of human intellect. McLaren states to her readers, "You should tend to yourself as a shrine and support your balance and agility with activities that bring all parts of you into play [...] Honor your multiple intelligences..."³⁶ African Americans must address and tend themselves to further their EI and acknowledge their imbalances to gain understanding.

Black Americans can begin to address traumas on a personal level to begin steps towards self-awareness and understanding. Jones makes a passionate claim in this regard in his article when he exclaims that "this is just a piece of the puzzle that will get us closer to completing a picture of justice, peace, and equilibrium. The work is on us! Keep pushing!"³⁷ Rowe & Woodson also assign a mission of "Focusing on strengths [that] can help descendant African Americans learn to overcome challenges and tap into reservoirs of strength and self-determination."³⁸ Carten pushes American society out of its comfort zone "as the US faces what would appear to be an epidemic of race-based attacks committed by whites, it is time to examine how our history of racism affects the mental health of African Americans as well as that of whites."³⁹ Walker reflects on the strain of unacknowledged emotions pleading with the African American community to free themselves from their own emotional prisons:

³⁵ Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam Books, 1995. p. 286

³⁶ McLaren, Karla. *Language of Emotions*. Boulder, Co: Sounds True, 2010. p. 301

³⁷ Jones, Brandon. "Emotional Intelligence of the Black Male." Abernathy. August 06, 2017. Accessed March 17, 2019. [See bibliography for full reference]

³⁸ Rowe, Taasogle Daryl, and Kamilah Marie Woodson. "How to Heal African-Americans' Traumatic History." *The Conversation*. June 19, 2018. Accessed March 27, 2019. [See bibliography for full reference]

³⁹ Carten, Alma. "How the Legacy of Slavery Affects the Mental Health of Black Americans Today." *The Conversation*. September 20, 2018. Accessed March 27, 2019. [See bibliography for full reference]

*Damaged people create damage. When you have whole communities of men who haven't been taught to express any emotion except aggression or know any type of conflict resolution beyond escalation, every confrontation has the potential to turn deadly, which has repercussions for us as a people far beyond any one incident. We need help. Too many of us are locked inside emotional prisons and the cost of maintaining an uncaring, untouchable image is literally killing us.*⁴⁰

Harrison activates black communities to “create a space” that is safe for black youth to be vulnerable and express themselves healthy; “It's going to take a community of passionate, dedicated individuals [...] The first step is showing up and listening.”⁴¹ We've shown up, we're listening; but in order to truly acknowledge and see these damages and traumas, we must turn on the lights.

⁴⁰ Walker, Torriane. "The Trouble With Being a Strong Black Man." Abernathy. July 13, 2016. Accessed March 27, 2019. [See bibliography for full reference]

⁴¹ Harrison, Aubrey. "Black Males Don't Cry." American Psychological Association. November 2015. Accessed March 27, 2019. [See bibliography for full reference]

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