

# **BLACK RESILIENCE IN AMERICA**



# DEFINITION

\*“The *process* of adapting well in the face of *adversity*, *trauma*, *tragedy*, *threats*, or significant sources of *stress*”

# BLACK WALL STREET

On **May 31 and June 1, 1921**, mobs of white residents attacked Black residents, homes, and business, as well as cultural and public institutions in the **Greenwood District of Tulsa Oklahoma**, an oil boom city.

Greenwood District (more than 35 blocks of thriving shops, hotels, theaters and more) was also know as “**Black Wall Street**” – one of the ***wealthiest Black Communities*** in the United States. As a result of this attack, (35) blocks were systematically looted and burned, destroying (190) businesses and leaving (10,000) people homeless.

The property loss estimated by the Tulsa Real Estate Exchange was the equivalent of **\$31 million** in 2017, likely an underestimation.

The district was founded by Black men and women – many of whom were **descendants of slaves**.

# BLACK WALL STREETS cont.'

- \* HAYTI COMMUNITY– **DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA**
- \* THE FOURTH AVENUE DISTRICT – **BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA**
- \* **BOLEY - OKLAHOMA**
- \* SWEET AUBURN – **ATLANTA, GEORGIA**
- \* WEST NINTH STREET – **LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS**
- \* FAITH STREET – **JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI**
- \* BRONZEVILLE – **CHICAGO, ILLINOIS**
- \* JACKSON WARD – **RICHMOND, VIRGINIA**

# ADVERSITY

- \* Social Adversity
- \* Discrimination
- \* Illnesses
- \* Structural barriers
- \* Health Inequalities
- \* Race Related Stressors
- \* Health Risk Behavior
- \* Poverty
- \* Food Insecurity

# TRAUMA

- \* Enduring slavery
- \* Separation of the family
- \* Slaves could be shipped to a different plantation
- \* Jim Crow
- \* Mass incarceration
- \* Black on black crime
- \* COVID-19 Pandemic
- \* Police brutality
- \* Ramifications of Discrimination & Structural Racism
- \* Suspended Grief

# TRAGEDIES

- \* America's tragedy - Slavery (“The Original Sin”)
- \* FBI Counterintelligence Program
- \* Civil War
- \* The quest for Democratic equality
- \* White backlash (The Presidency of Barak Obama)
- \* Race Problems
- \* Killings of our black men at the hands of police
- \* Policing of Black Americans
- \* Disenfranchise voters
- \* Making it harder to vote (No longer a right but a luxury)
- \* The miss-education of (CRT) Critical Race Theory

# THREATS

- \* **Education**
- \* **Institutionalize Racism & Sexism**
- \* **Criminal Justice**
- \* **Racial Disparities**
- \* Racism continues to be a **HAZARD** to **Black Families' Health**
- \* **Health**
- \* **Employment**
- \* **Fatherhood**
- \* **Intergenerational Poverty**
- \* **Mentorship**
- \* **Violence**



# STRESS

Author and Educator Joy DeGruy-Leary, Ph.D., coined the phrase:

**“POST- TRAUMATIC SLAVE SYNDROME”** – this theory explains etiology of many of the adaptive survival behaviors in African American communities throughout the United States and the Diaspora.

It is a **condition** that exists as a consequence of multi-generational oppression of Africans and their descendants resulting from centuries of chattel slavery – a form of slavery which was predicated on the belief that African Americans were inherently/genetically inferior to whites.

# STRESS cont.'

This was then followed by institutionalized racism which continues to perpetuate injury, thus resulting in **M.A.P.**,

**M:** Multi-generational trauma together with continued oppression,

**A:** Absence of opportunity to heal or access the benefits available in the society; leading to:

**P:** P**OST-TRAUMATIC SLAVE SYNDROME**

(Professor April Thames, associate professor of psychology and psychiatry, authored a study that showed that genes that **promote inflammation** are expressed more often in **Blacks** than in **Whites**, said exposure to racism factors into the disparities in health outcomes, including illness and death from COVID-19.)

# BREAKING THE CHAINS

## ESSENCE ARTICLE (2005)

**POST-TRAUMATIC SLAVERY SYMDROME (PTSS)** – Many believe that the sheer breadth and scope of slavery’s assault on the Black Spirit created an extreme, long-lasting kind of stress. And because the *fears* and *coping* and *survival strategies* were *never alleviated* or *analyzed*, many believe that they have been passed from one generation of African-Americans to the next.

**Dr. DeGruy** states that “We know that people do not have to directly experience an event to be traumatized by it, and research has shown that severe trauma can affect multiple generations.”

Our ancestors learned to adapt to living in a hostile environment and we normalized our injury. And because they didn’t get free therapy after slavery, these behaviors were passed through the generations.

# BREAKING THE CHAINS cont.'

- \* Overly **punitive discipline** from parents – keep them in line rather than allow someone else. (master/overseer)
- \* Parents fear of **loving them too much** – never a guarantee that the families wouldn't be split apart. Abandonment issues!
- \* **Down play praise** – leaving children wondering, Am I good enough?
- \* Slavery was a **loss** of: homes, family, language, customs, spirituality, freedom and mastery over one's life
- \* **Fear** – that make you feel powerless, no sense of entitlement

# MENTAL HEALTH

A person's condition with regard to their psychological and emotional well-being. "Our *mental health* influences **how we think, feel, and behave in daily life.**"

- \* It **affects** our ability to handle stress
- \* **Face** and overcome challenges
- \* **Maintain** and build relationships, and
- \* **Recover** from difficulties and setbacks

We all experience *disappointment, loss, and change* which is a normal part of life, however, these emotions and experiences still cause *sadness, anxiety, and stress*.

# MENTAL HEALTH cont.'

Physical healthy people are *better able to bounce back* from *illness* or *injury*; people with **strong** mental health are *better able to bounce back* from **adversity, trauma,** and **stress**. This skill is called “**RESILIENCE.**”

Despite constant exposure to racism and racial trauma, African Americans exhibit resilience and hardiness in the form of outward success, which causes society to have a narrative that “African Americans” are so resilient without realizing the historical harm this has done to a race of people.

# MENTAL HEALTH cont.'

## Tools for coping

- \* Be flexible
- \* Practice patience and kindness
- \* Be more optimistic
- \* Live in the present
- \* Value and build good relationships
- \* Know your limits
- \* Know how to handle rejections,  
make up a back-up plan and like spending time alone

# RESILIENCE

## Our people have survived:

- \* A *government-sanctioned* slave trade
- \* *Suffered* through the legally endorsed Jim Crow era
- \* *Led* the civil rights movement
- \* *Handle* Adversities
- \* *Weather* the storms of life
- \* African Americans have *loved America* when it didn't love them back
- \* Black women have *kept* the Democratic Party viable
- \* First Black Women on the *Supreme Court*
- \* *Movement* of “Black Lives Matter”
- \* The First Black Mayor of Homestead
- \* We *BEND* but do not *BREAK*



# RESILIENCE cont.'

- \* Resilient People Accept the Baseline
- \* Resilient People Are Flexible
- \* Resilient People are Willing to Learn
- \* Resilient People Seek Solutions
- \* Resilient People are Resourceful
- \* Resilient People are Creative
- \* Resilient People Set Realistic Expectations
- \* Resilient People experience stress, setbacks and difficult emotions, but they tap into their strength and seek help from support systems to overcome challenges and work through problems

# TYPES OF RESILIENCE

- \* **Physical Resilience**
- \* **Mental Resilience**
- \* **Emotional Resilience**
- \* **Social Resilience**

# SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE

- \* The ability to maintain a *positive spirit* even in the face of adversity.
- \* Our unique *Black spirituality, literature, art, music, food, protests*, and courageous *joy-filled* daily lives prove one clear indisputable fact:

**OVERCOMING IS WHAT WE DO!**

# What does the Bible say about *Resilience?*

- \* Our Faith
- \* We are not alone
- \* We find meaning
- \* God is working them together for our good

**Scripture** – “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”

# (5) Skills of Resilient People

- \* Self Awareness
- \* Mindfulness
- \* Self Care
- \* Positive Relationships
- \* Purpose

# Skills of Resilient people cont.'

- \* **Make** every day meaningful
- \* **Learn** from experience
- \* **Remain** hopeful and optimistic
- \* **Take** care of yourself
- \* **Persevere**
- \* **Decrease** negative thoughts and bring focus on the most meaningful aspect of an experience
- \* Trauma and Adversity can give you a **heightened** appreciation for life to clarify what actually matters to you
- \* They **do not expend** their energy in reciting why the problem is difficult or unfair. They channel that time, mental, and emotional energy to find **SOLUTIONS**
- \* Be **proactive**

# Skills of Resilient People cont.'

- \* **Enjoy** life and have the ability to laugh and have fun
- \* Are able to **deal** with stress and bounce back from adversity
- \* **Practice** self-care and make yourself a priority
- \* **Disconnect** from electronics and social media
- \* **Engage** in meditation and /or mindfulness
- \* **Avoid** heavy substances
- \* **Feel** a sense of meaning and purpose, in activities and relationships
- \* Are **flexible** and **adaptive** to change
- \* Are able to **build** and **maintain** fulfilling relationships
- \* Get **help** from a licensed mental health professional when needed

# OUR HEALING

How **WE** survived the **Middle Passage** and **Slavery** speaks to what an amazing and resilient people we are.

In the face of it all, we still **retained family**, community and a strong sense of spirituality. We know how to take care of people, to take care of one another. But most important we have **maintained our humanity**, in that we have not, as a group, become barbaric toward those who committed the worst atrocities against us.

African people are **highly spiritual**, and that spirituality kept us alive during slavery and still thrives today.

Our sense of **interconnectedness** was increased. If the mother was sold we took the children in as our own.

Teach our children and neighbors that the **Black Communities** are worth investing in.



# OUR HEALING cont.'

**Support** and **assistance** is needed to produce vital healing at a rate that exceeds the injury and decay.

**Healing** must occur on multiple levels because the injury occurred on multiple levels: **individuals, families, communities** and **society itself** were undone by slavery.

- \* We must begin with telling the **TRUTH**
- \* Reworking the **Educational System**
- \* Talk about this theory called “Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome”
- \* We must never forget that we are a strong people who endured something as brutal and unrelenting as our enslavement period.
- \* Whatever happens to us in this century will depend on how well we use those strengths we gained in the past.
- \* TUPAC said: **“BLACK FAMILIES ARE ROSES GROWING IN THE MIDST OF CONCRETE.”**