



# Historical Trauma: Reclaiming the Narrative

*“Those who cannot remember the past  
are condemned to repeat it.”* George  
Santayana, philosopher



**SAM SIMMONS, LADC  
BEHAVIORAL CONSULTANT**

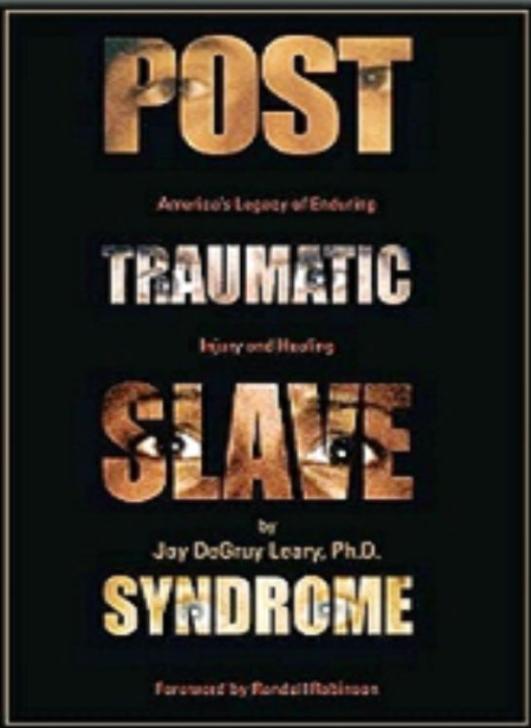
# Historical Trauma



- **Historical (intergenerational) Traumas** is a collective and cumulative emotional wounding across generations that results from massive cataclysmic events that targeted a group of people. Thus, even family members who have not directly experienced the trauma can feel the effects of the event generations later.
- Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart, PhD, conceptualized historical trauma in the 1980's, as a way to develop stronger understanding of why life for many Native Americans is not fulfilling "the American Dream". \* Brave Heart (1995); Evans-Campbell & Walters (2000)

# P.T.S.S.

- Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is a condition that exists as a consequence of centuries of chattel slavery followed by institutionalized racism and oppression have resulted in multigenerational **adaptive behavior, some positive reflecting resilience, and others that are harmful and destructive.**
- Theory of P.T.S.S. was developed by Dr. Joy DeGruy as a result of twelve years of quantitative and qualitative research.



POST

America's Legacy of Enduring

TRAUMATIC

Injury and Healing

SLAVE

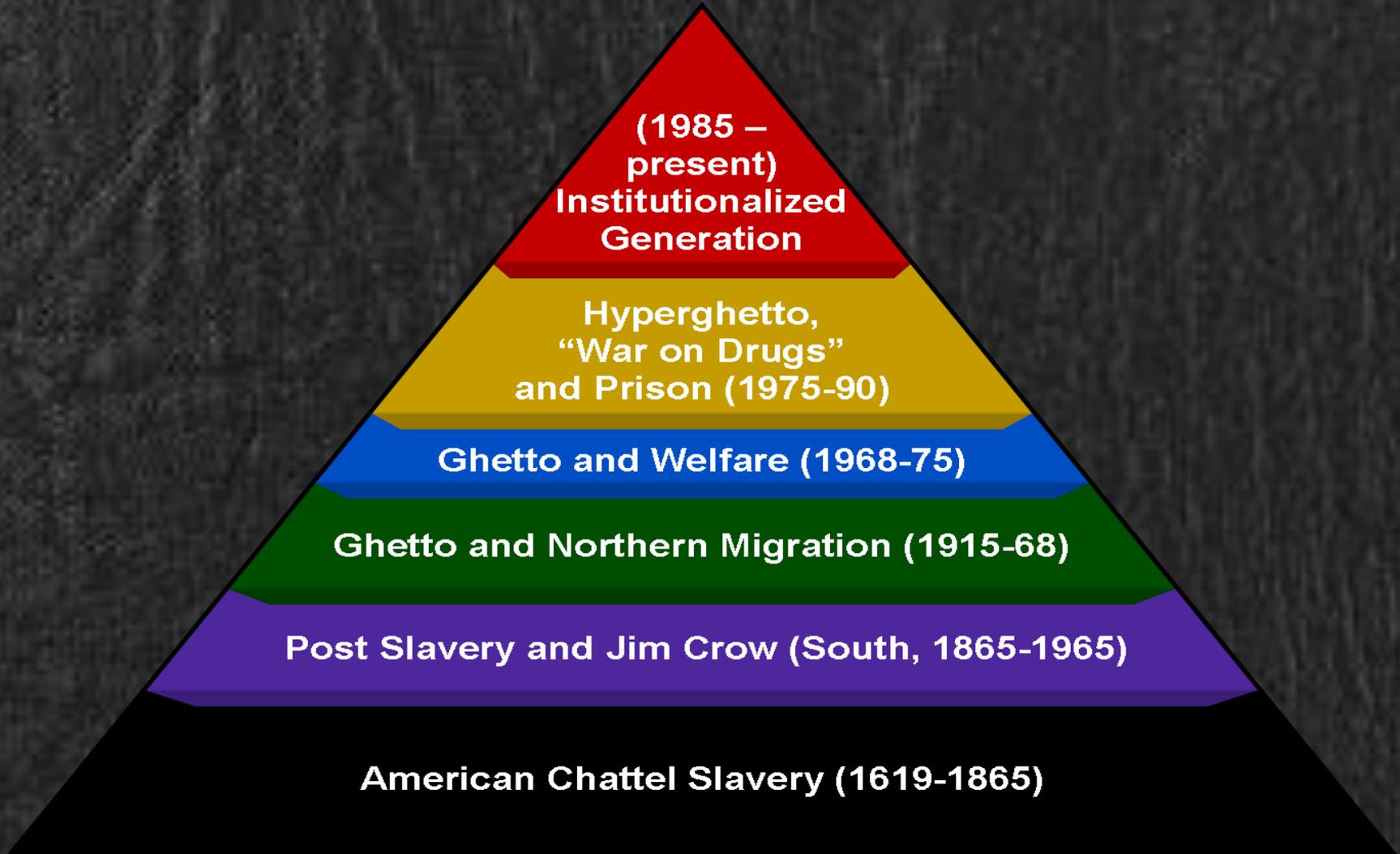
by

Joy DeGruy Leary, Ph.D.

SYNDROME

Foreword by Randall Robinson

# Trauma Points



# American Chattel Slavery (1619-1865)

- **Chattel Slavery** (personal property, bought and sold as commodities) first arrived in Jamestown, Virginia
- Ban on importing African slaves 1808
- **Breeding farms** produce more slaves.
- Male sent to other plantations to mate with slave women, **like a Bull**.
- Birth records on many plantations omitted the names of fathers, listing only mothers



# Jim Crow (South, 1865-1965)



Duluth, MN  
June 15, 1920

- **Slavery Abolished The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment 1865**, except as a punishment for crime...**one year later prisons overflowing with Black inmates.**
- **Jim Crow** legally enforced segregation & **Ku Klux Klan: 1865 ex-Confederates**
- **Share Cropping** - keep blacks tied to the plantation.
- **Lynchings (often included castration) 1882 to 1964**, at least 4,742 in southern states and 219 in northern states

# “Great Migration” and Ghetto (1915-68)



- They were leaving the farm and share cropping.
- Menial and industrial manufacturing jobs; segregated housing and employment.
- **1919 “Red Summer”** 13 days of racial violence on the South Side of Chicago, 23 blacks and 15 whites dead, 537 people injured, and 1,000 black families homeless.

# Ghetto and welfare (1968-1975)



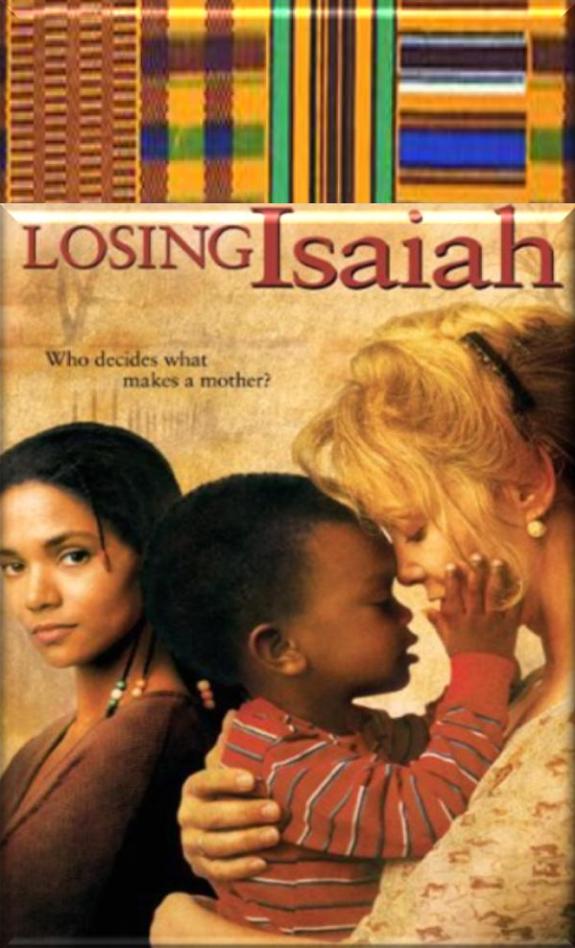
In 1960 22% of African American children lived with single parents. In 1968, rose to 31.4%, by 2011, doubled to 64% percent (U.S. Census Bureau). Current report it has tripled to 72%.

- Welfare rules “no adult men in the home”.
- Decrease in low education industrial manufacturing jobs.
- Drugs, crime and family disintegration (all inter-related) took a heavy toll on the inhabitants of the inner city.

# Hyperghetto and Prison (1975-1990)



- The exodus of jobs and middle class
- **Hyperghetto** extreme concentration of poverty and underprivileged groups.
- Blacks and whites use and sell drugs at about the same rate, but blacks are 20 times more likely going to Jail.
- Drugs had major impact on the women and children.
- Concentrated police presents.



# Institutionalized Generation (1985 –)

- Generation developed after the crack era. Born from the mid 1980's to present.
- Enriched with services providers external to family members.
- Creating an inferiority and dependent mindset.
- Element of internalized oppression and extreme level of learned helplessness.

## System Examples:

- Child protection
- Foster Care
- Welfare Social Work
- Juvenile Corrections
- Jails and Prisons

# Trauma Response and The Effects of Historical Trauma

# Threat Response Cycle

Fight or Flight



## Charge:

- Muscle contraction
- Adrenalin and Cortisol secretion
- Increased heart rate
- Survival energy production

## Discharge:

- Tingling
- Trembling
- Tears
- Completion of defensive movements

Adapted from Somatic Experiencing®, a school of somatic (i.e., body-focused) therapy for healing trauma.

# Threat Response Interruption

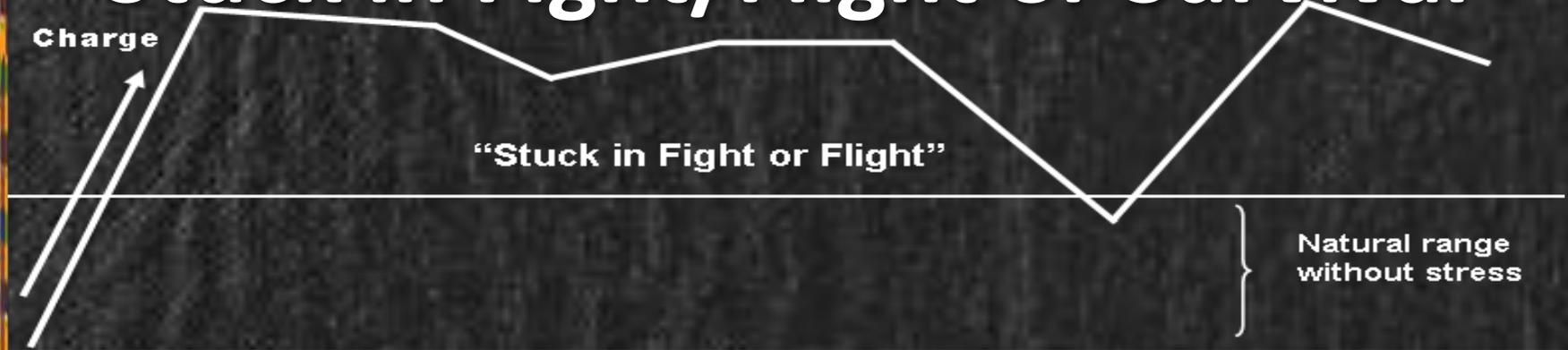


## Some Causes:

- **Not wanting to feel out of control:** stop ourselves “get a grip (literally)” and “Just get over it,”
- **Situational priorities:** (attend to a child’s needs)
- **Ongoing threats** (recurring abuse/violence, racial microaggressions, oppression)
- **New situations that prompt more Threat Responses:** (denial of traumatic events by others)

Adapted from Somatic Experiencing®, a school of somatic (i.e., body-focused) therapy for healing trauma.

# Stuck in Fight/Flight or Survival



- Anxiety, agitation, hypervigilance, difficulty relaxing.
- Conscious/unconscious expectations of being treated unfairly.
- Difficulty with staying engaged in relationships/jobs/projects.
- Distrust/judgment against people in one's own community.
- **Tendency to connect the dots** that do not belong together.
- **In Children:** Hyperactivity, compulsive talking, truancy, runaway, bullying.

Adapted from Somatic Experiencing®, a school of somatic (i.e., body-focused) therapy for healing trauma.

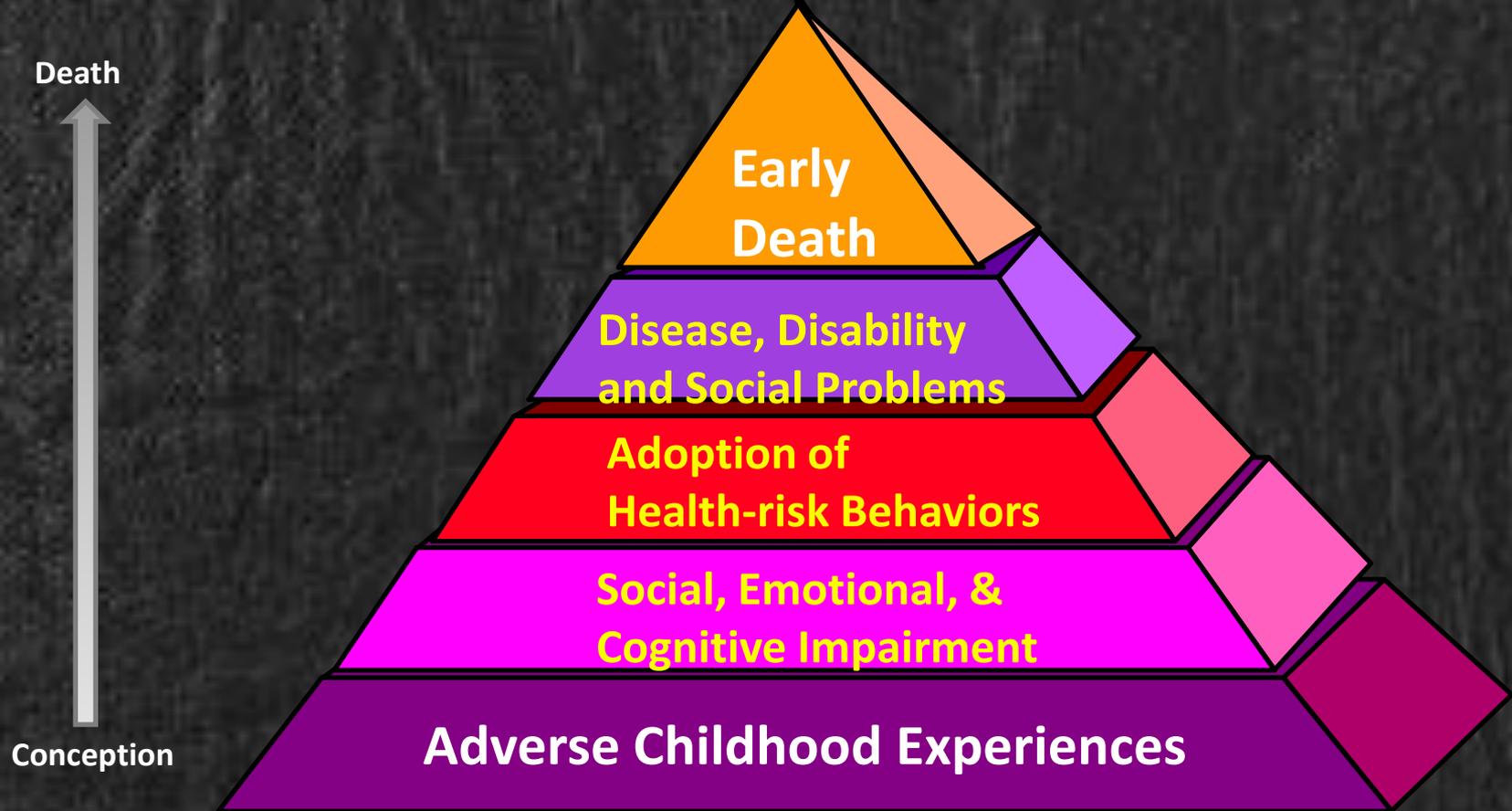
# Struck in Freeze and Dissociation



- Depression, emptiness, detachment and difficulty defending self.
- Conscious/unconscious belief that things/people cannot change.
- Not speaking up about inequity/resentment/shame/self blame.
- Indifference, withdrawal from one’s own community.
- Inability to connect the dots that are right in front of them
- **In Children:** difficulty processing information, “loner,” fearfulness, clinging.

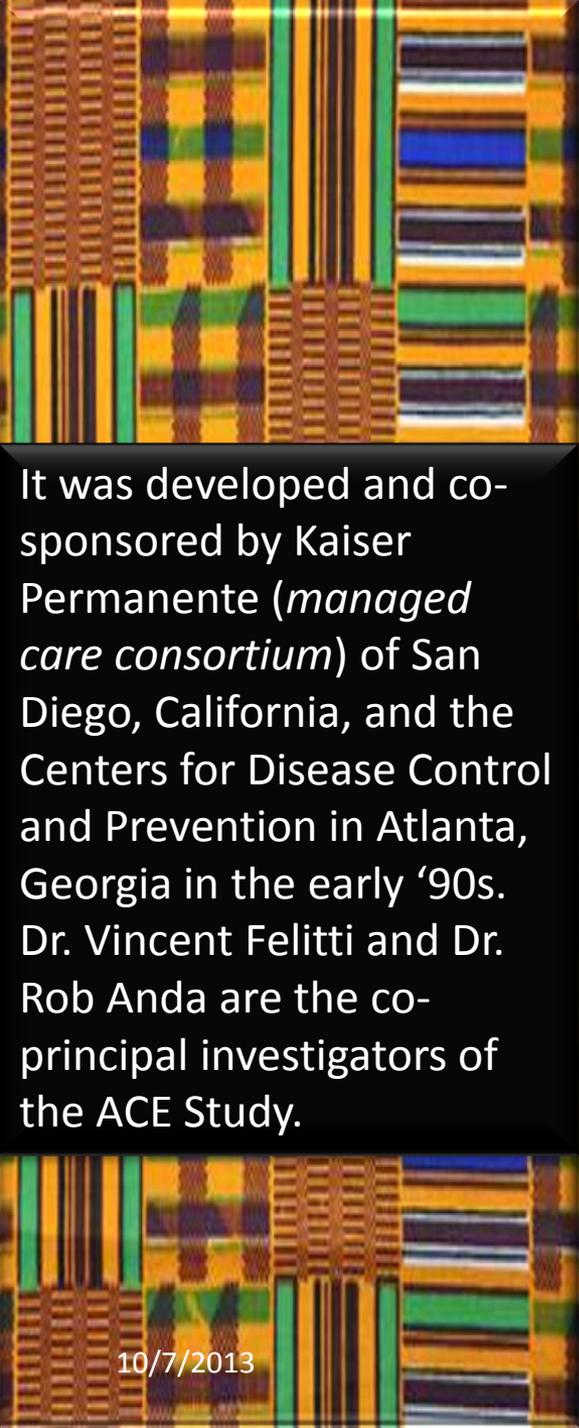
Adapted from Somatic Experiencing®, a school of somatic (i.e., body-focused) therapy for healing trauma.

# (ACE) Study Pyramid



Mechanisms by which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being throughout the Lifespan

Source: The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study website: [www.acestudy.org](http://www.acestudy.org), "About the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study."



# What Are ACEs?

## Adverse Childhood Experiences

- ACEs are experiences in childhood that are unhappy, unpleasant, hurtful.
- Sometimes referred to as toxic stress or childhood trauma.

It was developed and co-sponsored by Kaiser Permanente (*managed care consortium*) of San Diego, California, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia in the early '90s. Dr. Vincent Felitti and Dr. Rob Anda are the co-principal investigators of the ACE Study.

# Adverse Childhood Experiences Are Common

- **Household dysfunction:**

- Substance abuse 27%
- Parental sep/divorce 23%
- Mental illness 17%
- Battered mother 13%
- Criminal behavior 6%

- **Abuse:**

- Psychological 11%
- Physical 28%
- Sexual 21%

- **Neglect:**

- Emotional 15%
- Physical 10%

# ...Lead to

- **Health-Risk Behaviors...**

- Smoking
- Overeating
- Physical inactivity
- Heavy alcohol use
- Drug use
- **Promiscuity**

- **...Which Cause Disease, Disability and Social Problems in Adulthood**

- Nicotine addiction
- Alcoholism
- Drug addiction
- Obesity
- Depression and Suicide
- Injuries
- Unintentional pregnancy
- Heart disease
- Cancer
- Chronic lung and liver disease
- Stroke
- Diabetes
- **Sexually transmitted diseases**

# Brain Development

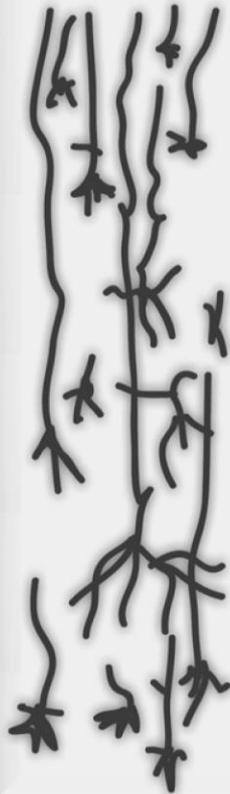
# Early Brain Development



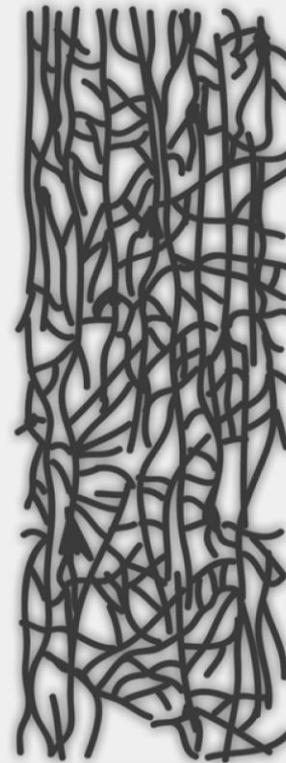
- Nurturing, responsive, and individualized interactions from birth build healthy brain structure.
- Healthy brain architecture is the necessary foundation required for optimal future learning, behavior and health.
- If trauma/toxic stress occurs early in life, the brain becomes wired to survive it.

# Synaptic Density

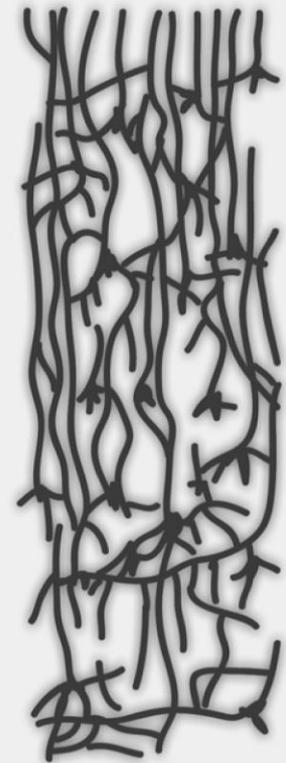
birth



6 years old



14 years old

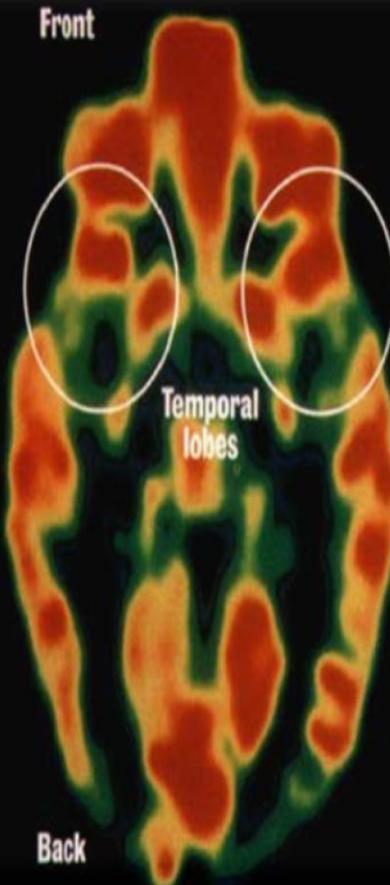


At age 14 you will notice that there are now fewer connections between the brain cells than there were at age 6. This is because the least "experienced" connections tend to withdraw at about the time of puberty. This process is called "pruning".

# Stress and the Brain

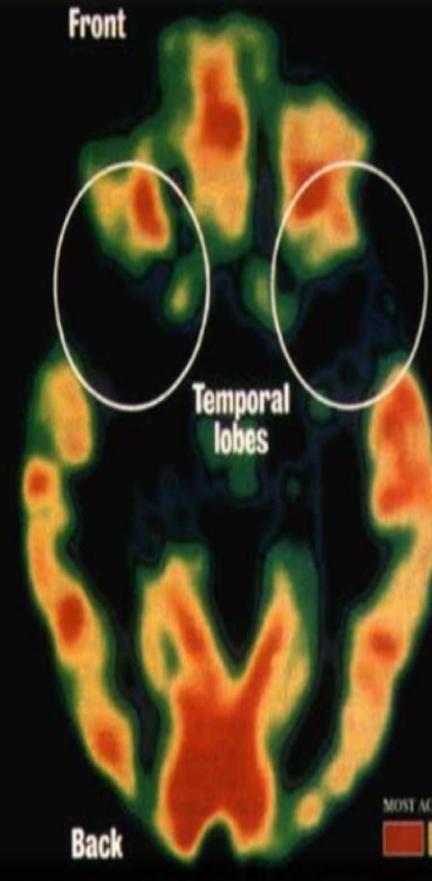
## Healthy Brain

This PET scan of the brain of a normal child shows regions of high (red) and low (blue and black) activity. At birth, only primitive structures such as the brain stem (center) are fully functional; in regions like the temporal lobes (top), early childhood experiences wire the circuits.



## An Abused Brain

This PET scan of the brain of a Romanian orphan, who was institutionalized shortly after birth, shows the effect of extreme deprivation in infancy. The temporal lobes (top), which regulate emotions and receive input from the senses, are nearly quiescent. Such children suffer emotional and cognitive problems.



MOST ACTIVE      LEAST ACTIVE



**Current View**

- **Survival Stress Management:** A process of adapting to stressful situations by **acting or reacting without thinking of the consequences of our choices**; immediate satisfaction or instant self-gratification; resulting in increased stress and/or depression:
  - Judgmental and distorted thoughts and feelings, impatience, exploitation, aggression, **abuse and violence directed against one's self or others.**
  - Addictive substances and behavior (i.e., drugs, alcohol, sex, shopping, fast money, gambling, food, video games, etc.) produces a limited sense of relief requires repetitions.
- **Lost of a narrative resiliency**
- **Generational Suspicion**

# Adults and Parents

- Between the ages of 18 to 40, effected by “Crack Era” 1984-1990.
- Frequently have experienced abandonment and/or traumatic experiences as both perpetrator and victim.
- Poor emotional regulation/Numbness
- Having to work hard to manage emotions in daily encounters with racial microaggressions and discrimination.
- May have little or no healthy involvement with mainstream and community institutions that foster healthy self-esteem, success and hope for a future.



# Adolescents

- Between the ages of 13 to 25
- Have attachment issues
- Many raised by a single parent
- Experienced trauma both as **perpetrator and victim.**
- Sex for Significance, Security and Belonging
- Male Needy or Female-dependent
- Hyper-masculine identity featuring:
  - Fear/Shame Inducement
  - Misogyny (Dislike of Women or Girls)
  - a high physical pain threshold but low emotional threshold
- **Glorification of death** i.e. Biggie and Tupac
- Rite of passage involves an trauma (death, incarceration, unplanned pregnancy, etc.)

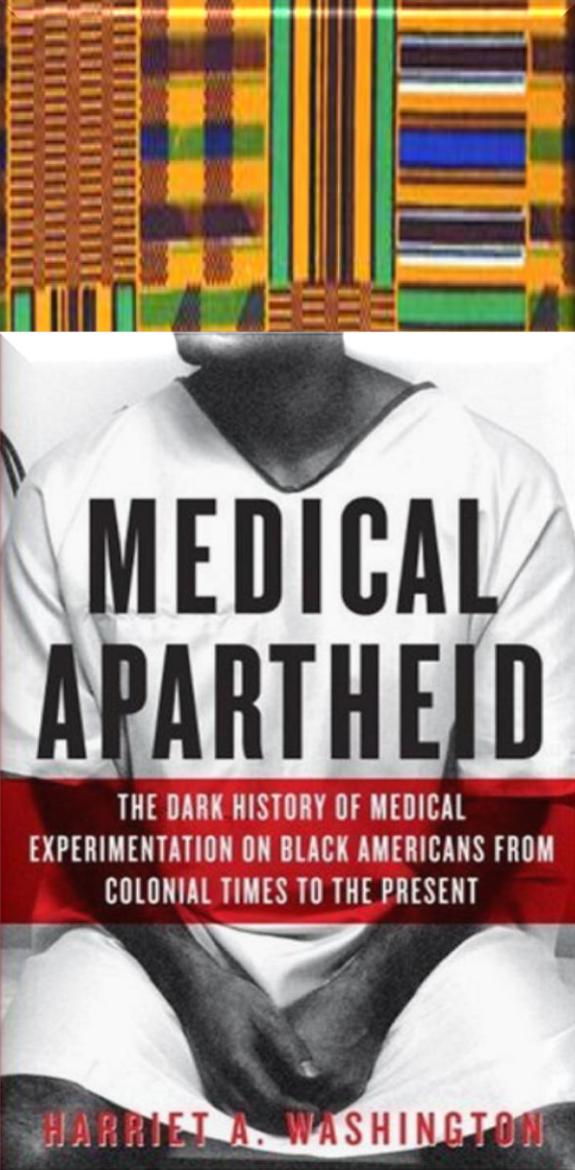


# and the Trauma Continues....

- Intimate partner homicide is the leading cause of death for African-American women ages 15 to 45.
- As of Dec. 31, 2011, of male prisoners under state and federal jurisdiction 23.1% were Hispanic, 32.4% were White and 38.7% were Black.
- Jonathan Ferrell (black) seeking help after an accident was shot 10 times by a Charlotte, NC Police Officer.
- Young black males die from gun violence at a rate 2.5 times higher than Latino males, and 8 times higher than white males.



# Obstacles to Healing



- **African American Beliefs:**
  - Strong cultural stigma attached to **mental illness and trauma**
  - Strong cultural mandate that “**dirty laundry is washed at home**”,
  - Mistrust of health system rooted in racism in the form of research.
  - Distrust of other institutions (legal system involvement, and agency attitudes)
- Continued institutional racism and oppression.
  - **Racial Microaggression:** intentional or unintentional insults that target a person or group.
- Lack of culturally competent services and research
  - Historical or multigenerational trauma continue to be treated as secondary or **dismissed as irrelevant.**
  - limited frame of reference around racial issues

# The Work

- **Healing Groups Focused on Black Men** allowing African American Men to explore the links between their experiences with trauma, while assist them in building skills to refrain from traumatizing women, children, or themselves and start healing. Example is Healing Generations Curriculum at The Family Partnership.
- **Healthy Relationship Curriculum** focus on the African American community to break the intergenerational cycle of relationship violence. Example is BeMore at The Family Partnership.
- **The Black Men Healing Conference** mission is to offer an alternative way of thinking about community empowerment by exploring and addressing historical trauma.
- **Historical Trauma Training** focused on both professionals and community leadership to address the importance of being aware of historical trauma to improve outcomes and collaboration in and outside the community.

# Promoting Healing

- 
- **Trauma-informed community** approach that recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma has played in lives of the community, to start the healing process. And incorporate this approach in new and existing programs.
  - Fund research to consider historical trauma and racism as a form of trauma that could account for health disparities.
  - Increasing knowledge of parents about their stress, trauma and effects on their children, leading to healing.
  - African American institutions, community leaders and health professionals need to develop and support mental health intervention initiatives that are specifically geared to African Americans.
  - Leadership courage to role-model the willingness to start their own healing journey.

# It's Time to...

- **Break chains of silence**
  - Listen.
  - Pay attention.
  - Believe.
  - Forgive.
  - Respond with **compassionate accountability.**
- **Making a Commitment to our children.**
- ***Deal with the pain...to start the healing!!!***

# For more information...



*“The village that hides the truth cannot expect to heal but to pass on the pain.”*

[WWW.HEALINGBROTHERS.COM](http://WWW.HEALINGBROTHERS.COM)

[WWW.SAMUELSIMMONSCONSULTING.COM](http://WWW.SAMUELSIMMONSCONSULTING.COM)

Samuel Simmons CONSULTING  
3033 27TH AVE S, P.O. Box 6120  
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55406-9998  
612-721-0106

