

William Oliver, PhD
Indiana University

Deconstructing Our Trauma in Pursuit of Healing

Guiding Principle

“Before we accuse the other man, let us examine ourselves first.”

Elijah Muhammad (1965)

Overview

- Selected American and African American Challenges
- The Root Traumatic Event
- Outline for the Establishment of a Culture-based Transformation /Empowerment Agenda

Births to Unmarried Women by Race (2006)

- White 27%
- Latinas 53%
- Black 75%

Children and Poverty

- White 10.1%
- Latinos 28.1%
- Black 34%

Parental Education and Child Poverty

- 74% of children whose parents work and have less than a high school diploma live in low-income families.

Homicide Death

- In 2002 White men had a homicide death rate of 3.6/100,000
- In 2002 Black Men had a homicide death rate of 35/100,000
- 94% of black homicide victims are killed by other blacks

Homicide Death, 2002

Ages 15-24

- White Males- 4.7/100,000
- Hispanic Males- 31/100,000
- Black Males- 84/100,000

Note: Black Male rate 17 times greater than white males

Black Men and Incarceration

- **White male** offenders had an incarceration rate of **481/100,000 in 2007**
- **Black male** offenders had the highest imprisonment rate **of 3,138 prisoners per 100,000 U.S. residents)** of all racial groups, male or female.

Children and Parental Incarceration

- 3.6% of White children born in 1990 had a father go to prison.
- One of every 4[25%] African American children born in 1990 had a father go to prison.

Children and Parental Incarceration by Education

- **White Children** 7 % of children whose fathers dropout of high school experienced parental incarceration.
- **Black Children** 50% of children whose fathers dropout of high school experienced parental incarceration.

Explanations/Consequences

Why are Black people over represented among those experiencing problematic circumstances?

- Poverty
- Lack of education
- Disrupted families
- Drug use
- Low self-esteem

Explanations

- Race neutral de-industrialization of the economy
- Loss of low skill, high wage industrial manufacturing jobs
- Globalization of the economy leading to the loss of jobs

Trauma and Healing

- Healing implies that there has been an injury?
- What is the nature of the injuries experienced by African Americans that contribute to the disproportionate involvement of black males in problematic behavior?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- It is a type of anxiety disorder which usually occurs after a person experiences or witnesses a traumatic or violent event.
- This event can be a one-time experience or a continuous/chronic trauma.

Post Traumatic Slavery Disorder

PTSD unique to the African Diaspora/The African Holocaust

- Major Elements of the African Holocaust
 - Captivity
 - The Middle Passage
 - Slavery (1617-1865)
 - The Jim Crow Era (1865-1968)

Consequences of African Holocaust

- Erosion of the Provider/Protector aspect of manhood
- Disruption of black families
- Disruption of connection/familiarity with cultural heritage [religion, language/culture]

Post Traumatic Slavery Disorder

Exposure to overt institutional racism

- Systematic deprivation of equal access to opportunity
 - Education
 - Employment
 - Right to vote
 - Access to public accommodations
 - Coerced subordination in interracial encounters

Post Traumatic Slavery Disorder

Exposure to overt cultural racism

- **Systematic effort to erode the cultural integrity** of Africans in America via the promotion of racial stereotypes in American popular culture.
- Historical omissions in the education of young Americans.

Consequence of Exposure to Institutional and Cultural Racism

Emergence of an Intergenerational Cultural Crisis

- Historical Amnesia
- Lack of appreciation of the history and culture of African peoples
- Lack of cultural confidence
- Lack of cultural competence

Consequences as Causes of Trauma/The Cycle of Trauma

- Academic under achievement
- Drug use
- Criminal Involvement
- Incarceration
- Poverty
- Family Disruption
- Abuse in the Family
- Violence in the community
- Concentration of Families lacking support

Pursuit of Healing: A Cultural Empowerment Model

Guiding Principle

**“We should not ask others to do for us,
what we should do for ourselves.”**

Elijah Muhammad (1965)

Major Goals of the Transformation Agenda

- Disrupt attachment to “the Streets” and Street Culture.
- Empower black men to assume roles and behaviors that contribute to social stability in the community.
- Reduce the reach of social control systems within the community.

Fundamental Bias

- Healing of black men and empowerment of the black community may be achieved through commitment to a “Collective Agenda” that emphasizes cultural transformation.
- Healing at the individual level, will not necessarily lead to community empowerment without commitment to a Collective Agenda.

Multiple Problems require Multiple Solutions

- We must **stop looking for one solution** to our problems.
- Our current condition is a product of multiple causes and there is a need for multiple solutions.
- Paul Robeson on the nature of our struggle.

Multiple Problems require Multiple Solutions

- Transformation and empowerment must become a priority within the organizations and institutions that we control:
 - Faith institutions
 - Civic organizations/Social Clubs
 - Professional organizations

Multiple Problems require Multiple Solutions

- **Establishment of a Collective Agenda** to counter the consequences of a ferocious commitment to individualism and material success in the post segregation era.
- The Slavery Agenda
- The Jim Crow Era Agenda
- Post Jim Crow Era Agenda

Countering the Consequences of Cultural Racism

- Sustained effort is needed to address the impact that cultural racism has had on the psyche of African Americans.
- Establishment of “Saturday Academies” designed to expose our youth to our history, culture, and enhance their competency to negotiate academic and vocational training.

Critically Critique Black Popular Culture

- How did we shift from “the Dells, the Whispers, Blue Magic, the Delfonics, the Ojays, the Miracles, the Temptations, the Dramatics to “Tip Drill?”
- Expand the images of manhood and womanhood portrayed in lyrical and video products.

Community-Based Support Groups

The Support Group Agenda

- Personal challenges and experiences/Life stories
- Develop a personal vision or goals
- Provide a context in **which men are held accountable** for standards of conduct that contribute to social stability and progress.

Community-Based Support Groups

- Provide a context to engage in individual and community restoration activities that promote emotional and social stability.

Teenage Pregnancy Prevention

- Teen Pregnancy and Poverty
- Poverty is associated with a broad range of social problems that erode social stability
- Community-based implementation of evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention models.

Fatherhood Support/Mentoring

- Young fathers need support in meeting the responsibilities associated with providing for and nurturing their children.
- Fathers need support in developing the skills to co-parent their children.

Fatherhood Support and Mentoring

Critical Lesson/Message

- Adult men provide for themselves/The Old Boy Syndrome
- Adult men provide for their children
- Sexual access does not constitute ownership of one's wife or girlfriend.
- Men should devote some effort to community service
- Men should cultivate a spiritual life

Fatherhood Support/Mentoring

Critical Lessons

- Proactive assembly of support
- Our boys must learn the lesson of forgiveness

Education and Vocational Retention

- Implement strategies and programs that increase academic success.
- Encourage a value that equates adulthood with obtaining education and training.
- Education and vocational training is a form of crime prevention and fundamental to family formation.

Community Partnerships with Social Control Agencies

- Local law enforcement
- Local Courts
- The Department of Corrections
- Probation/Parole
- Child Protection Agencies
- Local Schools

Monitoring and Advocacy of Social Control Agencies

- Establish a mechanism to collect data on the policies and processes of major social control agencies.
- Produce an annual report on the impact of social control agencies in the African American community.

Community-based Reentry Programming

- Collaborations between DOC and Community organizations to facilitate the transition from prison to the community.
- Our organizations must address prisoner reentry via programming and policies initiatives.

Presentation Resources

- **Franklin, A. J. (2004).** From Brotherman to Manhood-How Black Men Rescue Their Relationships from the Invisibility Syndrome. New York: John Wiley.
- **Johnson, Ernest (1998).** Brothers on the Men-Understanding and Healing Anger for African American Men and Women. New York: Pocket Books.
- **Madhubuti, Haki (1990).** Black Men-Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? Chicago: Third World Press.
- **Muhammad, Elijah (1965).** Message to the Black Man. Chicago

Presentation Resources

- **Oliver, William (2006).** The Streets: An Alternative Black Male Socialization Institution. *Journal of Black Studies*, 36 (6): 918-937
- **Patterson, Orlando (1998).** *Rituals of Blood-Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries.* New York: Basic Civitas Books.
- **Reid, Omar et al., (2005).** *Post Traumatic Slavery Disorder-Definition, Diagnosis and Treatment.* Charlotte, NC: Conquering Books.
- **White, Joseph & Cones, James (1998).** *Black Man Emerging-Facing the past and seizing a future in America.* New York: W.H. Freeman.