



**A PATHWAY  
TO OUR PEACE**  
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# Death is something that each of us process differently. I can attest to that.

The passing of my great-grandmother was the first time I processed the pain of a relative moving on to the unseen realm. But I was 10. I knew my great-grandmother, but I didn't know her as well as I knew my grandmothers.

I knew them intimately.

When each of them died, I processed their deaths differently than I did with my great-grandmother. I sorely lamented their passing on. However, my faith helped me absorb the blow of the pain I felt.

When my unborn son passed, it was a different pain altogether and processing that pain was entirely different. He didn't get to live life outside of the womb. He died 11 years ago, yet I still think of what could have been when I hear the thunder that is the running feet and laughter of my children in my home.

Yet no matter who it was, I took solace and found closure simply because we could bury them. To have the opportunity to lay them at rest gave me closure and comfort. Sadly, not every Black person gets that opportunity.

36 years ago, the city of Philadelphia dropped a bomb on Black people. Philadelphia Police dropped a bomb on a house occupied by MOVE; a political movement that combined Black revolutionary ideas with environmental and animal rights. In all, eleven people were killed, five of them children, 61 homes were destroyed and 250 residents remained homeless.

State violence at the hands of Philadelphia

Police on Black folks didn't start with that bombing. There's a 190 year history of it. It's why stop-and-frisk remains an issue in the city. It also explains the authorizing of tear gas on peaceful protestors of the murder of George Floyd.

Just last year, the city of Philadelphia apologized for the MOVE bombing. However, their apology didn't come with an opportunity for the remaining members of MOVE to bury their dead. Over the 36 year period, both the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University shared occupancy of the remains of two of the children who died in the bombing. Those remains were featured in a video for an online course.

As members of MOVE seek to obtain those remains, it was discovered that in 2017, the city's health commissioner chose to cremate the remains of another member of MOVE who died in the bombing. He did this without consulting members of MOVE. He made a unilateral decision. He has since apologized and resigned at the mayor's request.

This isn't a story about the city of Philadelphia. The city of Philadelphia is but one example of municipalities throughout the nation, including Baltimore, Ferguson, Milwaukee, Detroit, Chicago, and San Francisco, that have levied terror on Black people in the form of state violence; terror so great that the United Nation's Human Rights Council has investigated the terror. State violence against Black people lives in our collective memory, whether it took place a year ago or thirty-six years ago. Like a child who carries the memory of touching a burning flame, Black people carry with us a collective memory so that we assure our own survival. That violence is traumatic.

**It's traumatic when we replay the violence inflicted upon us in our minds. It's traumatic to carry around that memory and it's painfully traumatic when we receive revelation about the memory. It's traumatic to learn of how the remains of Black people are dehumanized by the state and its institutions.**

**It's traumatic learning that the body cam of an officer who killed a Black person says something different than their initial report. Burying one's dead is one thing, but how can one have closure when one is lied to about how their loved one died?**

**That violence is racial trauma and studies show that racism has an adverse effect on Black people.**

**Racial trauma can involve a "negative, sudden, and uncontrollable experience or crisis." Alternatively, it can involve an "ongoing physical or psychological threat that produces feelings of fear, anxiety, depression, helplessness, and post-traumatic stress disorder."**

**A 2018 study found that the experience of individual, institutional, and cultural racism are uniquely predictive of post-traumatic stress symptoms. A 2019 study found that racism is considered a fundamental cause of adverse health outcomes for racial/ethnic minorities and racial/ethnic inequities in health.**

**2020 served as an unnecessary reminder.**

**Not only did we witness the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, Ahmaud Arbery, and Walter Wallace to name a few, we saw a pandemic run rampant in Black communities across the nation, killing Black people at twice the rate of white people due to compounding racism and the sheer evil of a racist commander and chief.**

**Many of our family and friends who've become family were sick from COVID because of underlying medical conditions as a result of systemic racism or because they were essential workers as a result of systemic racism.**

**We watched Black parents debate whether or not to send their children back to schools; many of which are poorly funded, poorly ventilated, dilapidated.**

**These are schools that suspended Black children and referred them to law enforcement disproportionately, they are without curricula that affirms Black identities and without Black teachers to teach it.**

**We agonized over their having to choose whether to send their children back to school knowing that 75% of all child deaths from COVID were Black and brown children, yet**

**recognizing that remote learn often leaves Black and brown children most vulnerable to falling between the cracks.**

**We watch attempts made by white people in Detroit, Atlanta, Milwaukee and Philadelphia to take away the Black vote when it was found that those voters in won their states for President Joe Biden over then president Donald Trump. What followed was the trauma of an insurrection at the start of this year; a year offering its own trauma that we carry.**

**Carrying the weight of our collective memory, the very trauma of that memory, comes with a cost.**

**Certainly, we're aware of the initial impact of trauma: sadness, anxiety, frustration, confusion, a lack of sleep, self-medication and exhaustion. But the long-term effects are even worse. Trauma induces stress and in response to stress, our bodies produce and release the hormone cortisol to help us manage. However, too much cortisol in our system, from ever present racial trauma, can lead to increased risk for developing conditions such as depression and heart disease.**

**We may believe that we're carrying memo-**

**ry for our survival. However, we're only securing for ourselves a slow death. Whether immediate or deliberate, living under the weight of a white supremacist social order will kill us.**

**So, the critical question becomes how do we live and live as our fully human selves in an anti-Black society?**

**I don't have the answer.**

**I am sure that you, the reader, is without the answer as well. Such an answer depends on the various needs of individual people. Although we are part of a collective with a shared set of experiences and a shared history, we are not a monolith. But if the goal is to exercise our humanity more fully, then the answer may be simpler than you or I may think.**

**We can't be scared; we must continue being our courageous selves.**

**Our health, wealth, and liberation can't come from emulating societal norms. Utilizing the tools of our social order e.g. racism, capitalism, patriarchy and religious xenophobia, will only manifest what we already. Contrary to popular belief, being courageous isn't about getting the bag. Having money certainly helps, but getting money is not crossing the finished line. Neither is being courageous about domination, not when we seek to no longer be dominated. Being courageous is about transcending the mechanisms of our oppression to create a vision for the world that not only secures our liberation but liberation for everyone else.**

**Paulo Freire declared the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed is to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. That certainly sounds counter to a focus on the health and wellness of Black people. However, our fight to achieve a society that falls along the right side of history requires that we be morally consistent.**

**What 2020 also reminded us is that when we, Black people, do well, the entire society does well.**

**We realize that as the Black employment rate rises, so does the employment rates of all people. When Black women are respected, protected, and not neglected, we can say the same for just about every person in society. With our efforts to ensure our health, wealth, and liberation, we must recognize that our condition is a foreshadowing of sorts for the condition that awaits all of humanity, and so it must never be lost on us that as we fight for us, we also fight for all.**

**This does not mean that it is our responsibility to save everyone.**

**Systemic racism isn't rooted in anything African and no African, in the motherland or throughout the diaspora, is responsible for ending it.**

**However, we must create spaces and places where our identities can be affirmed and where we can develop and implement strategies to combat this social order where which we live and as we create and engage in spaces where we are able to love each other and fully be who we were created to be, we must continue to do what we've always done; share our light with the world. Fore it is when we dim our light that we die.**

**Selah.**