



Voices Change Lives

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## Dr. JoyDeGruy



Dr. Joy DeGruy is a nationally and internationally renowned researcher, educator, author and presenter. Her seminars have been lauded as the most dynamic and inspirational currently being presented on the topics of culture, race relations and contemporary social issues. She is a tell-it-like-it-is ambassador for healing and a voice for those who've struggled in search of the past, and continue to struggle through the present.

As a result of twelve years of quantitative and qualitative research, Dr. DeGruy has developed her theory of **Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (P.T.S.S.)**, and published her findings in the groundbreaking book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome - America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*. P.T.S.S. is a theory that explains the etiology of many of the adaptive survival behaviors in African American communities throughout the United States and the Diaspora.

The book incorporates her research in both America and Africa, as well as her twenty years of experience as a social work practitioner and consultant to public and private organizations. In the book and her presentations, Dr. DeGruy examines the conditions that led to the Atlantic slave trade and allowed the pursuant racism and efforts at repression to continue through present day. She then looks at the seemingly insurmountable obstacles that African Americans faced as the result of the slave trade. Next she discusses the adaptive behaviors they developed—both positive and negative—that allowed them to survive and often even thrive.

Dr. DeGruy concludes by reevaluating those adaptive behaviors that have been passed down through generations and where appropriate. She explores replacing behaviors which are today maladaptive with ones that will promote, and sustain the healing and ensure the advancement of African American culture.

Dr. DeGruy's newly released *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: The Study Guide* revisits the topics she covers in *P.T.S.S.* and provides a detailed mapping of how one can begin the change process in your personal life, employment, family and in your community. She illustrates how—with thoughtful self-exploration—each of us can evaluate our behaviors and replace negative and damaging behaviors with those that will promote, ensure and sustain the healing and advancement of African Americans.

Her clients have included academic institutions such as Oxford University, Harvard University, Columbia University, Fisk University, Smith College, Morehouse College, University of Chicago, and Portland State University where she is currently an Assistant Professor. She has keynoted at a number of national conferences including the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education and the White Privilege Conference.

Dr. DeGruy has also presented to federal and state agencies such as The Federal Bureau of Investigation, Probation and Parole agencies, Juvenile Justice Judges Association, and Police agencies. Major corporations and companies such as Nordstrom, Nike, the NBA Rookies Camp, and the renowned G-CAPP program, all have experienced Dr. Joy's expertise and charisma.

A highly sought-after expert, she has appeared on CNN, ABC, NPR, Pacifica Network stations nationwide and in *The New York Times*, *Essence Magazine*, *The Journal of Black Psychology* as well as numerous other publications.

In addition to her own books, she has chapters in *Should America Pay: Slavery and The Raging Debate on Reparations* (Harper Collins Publishing, 2003) and in *Impact of Genocide & Terrorism Post Slavery Syndrome: A Multigenerational Look at African American's Injury, Healing and Resilience* (2010).

Dr. DeGruy holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Communications; two master degrees in Social Work and Psychology; and a PhD in Social Work Research. With over twenty years of practical experience as a professional in the field of social work, she gives a practical insight into various cultural and ethnic groups that form the basis of contemporary American society.

## **DR. JOY DEGRUY**

### **TOPICS FOR WORKSHOP, SEMINARS AND LECTURES**

The workshops, seminars and lectures conducted by Dr. DeGruy are reflective of her commitment to the healing and well-being of all people.

#### **Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome**

The Theory of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome suggest that centuries of slavery followed by systemic racism and oppression have resulted in multigenerational adaptive behaviors—some of which have been positive and reflective of resilience, and others that are detrimental and destructive. In brief, Dr. DeGruy presents facts, statistics and documents that illustrate how varying levels of both clinically induced and socially learned residual stress related issues were passed along through generations as a result of slavery.

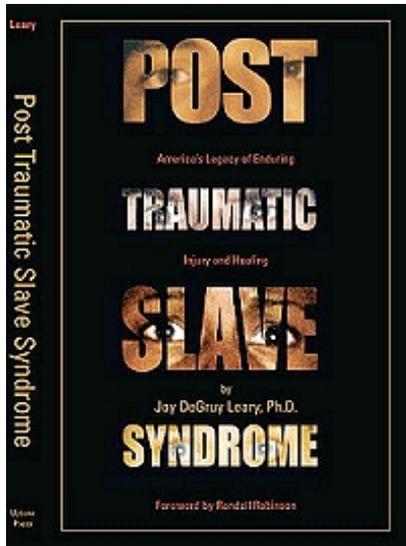
#### **Culture Specific Models of Service Delivery & Practice**

This seminar couples evidence-based practice models and culturally responsive intervention approaches. Thus the values, customs and traditions that characterize and distinguish different groups of people become the tools through which providers can determine how to proceed in assisting, supporting and strengthening individuals, families and groups from a particular cultural group. Informed by an anthropological familiarity with the pertinent behaviors, ideas, attitudes, habits, beliefs, and so forth that are peculiar to that group.

#### **African American Male Adolescent Violence**

This workshop examines the relationship between current and historical stressors unique to economically disadvantaged African American male youth. Dr. DeGruy investigates issues of violence victimization, violence witnessing, urban hassles, racial socialization, issues of respect and the presence of violence among these youth.

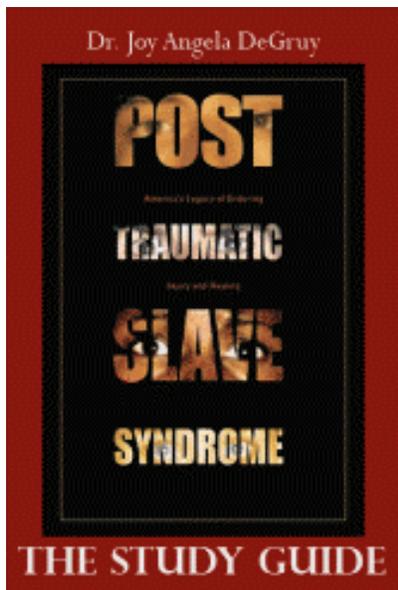
## Joy DeGruy Publications



### *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome:*

#### *America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*

While African Americans managed to emerge from chattel slavery and the oppressive decades that followed with great strength and resiliency, they did not emerge unscathed. Slavery produced centuries of physical, psychological and spiritual injury. *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* lays the groundwork for understanding how the past has influenced the present, and opens up the discussion of how we can use the strengths we have gained to heal.



### *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome:*

#### *The Study Guide*

The Study Guide is designed to help individuals, groups, and organizations better understand the functional and dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors that have been transmitted to us through multiple generations; behaviors that we are now transmitting to others in our environments of home, school, and work and within the larger society. The Study Guide encourages and broadens the discussion and implications about the specific issues that were raised in the P.T.S.S. book. Readers will walk away with practical tools to help transform negative attitudes and behaviors into positive ones.

# Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome

As a result of twelve years of quantitative and qualitative research Dr. DeGruy has developed her theory of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, and published her findings in the book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome - America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*. P.T.S.S. is a theory that explains the etiology of many of the adaptive survival behaviors in African American communities throughout the United States and the Diaspora.

The book incorporates her research in both America and Africa, as well as her twenty years of experience as a social work practitioner and consultant to public and private organizations. Dr. DeGruy first exposes the reader to the conditions that led to the Atlantic slave trade and allowed the pursuant racism and efforts at repression to continue through present day. She then looks at the seemingly insurmountable obstacles that African Americans faced as the result of the slave trade. Next she discusses the adaptive behaviors they developed—both positive and negative—that allowed them to survive and often even thrive.

Dr. DeGruy concludes by reevaluating those adaptive behaviors that have been passed down through generations and where appropriate. She explores replacing behaviors which are today maladaptive with ones that will promote, and sustain the healing and ensure the advancement of African American culture.

## What is P.T.S.S.?

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (P.T.S.S.) is a condition that exists as a consequence of multigenerational 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. This was then followed by institutionalized racism which continues to perpetuate injury.

Thus, resulting in M.A.P.:

- \* M: Multigenerational trauma together with continued oppression;
- \* A: Absence of opportunity to heal or access the benefits available in the society; leads to
- \* P: Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.

Under such circumstances these are some of the predictable patterns of behavior that tend to occur:

## Key Patterns of behavior reflective of P.T.S.S.

### Vacant Esteem

Insufficient development of what Dr. DeGruy refers to as primary esteem, along with feelings of hopelessness, depression and a general self destructive outlook.

### Marked Propensity for Anger and Violence

Extreme feelings of suspicion perceived negative motivations of others. Violence against self, property and others, including the members of one's own group, i.e. friends, relatives, or acquaintances.

### Racist Socialization and (internalized racism)

Learned Helplessness, literacy deprivation, distorted self-concept, antipathy or aversion for the following:

- \* The members of ones own identified cultural/ethnic group,
- \* The mores and customs associated ones own identified cultural/ethnic heritage,
- \* The physical characteristics of ones own identified cultural/ethnic group.

## JOY ANGELA DEGRUY

### Education

Ph.D. 2001 Social Work and Social Research Portland State University  
M.A. 1995 Clinical Psychology Pacific University  
M.S.W. 1988 Social Work Portland State University  
B.S. 1986 Speech Communication Portland State University

### Employment

Assistant Professor, Portland State University School of Social Work  
2001-present

President, Joy DeGruy Publications, 2005-Present

Trainer/Social Work Consultant, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory  
1999-2001

Instructor, Portland State University Graduate School of Social Work 1998

Graduate Research Assistant, Portland State University Graduate School of Social Work Albina  
Community Project 1999

Instructor, Portland State University School of Education 1995

Principal, JDL & Associates 1993-2005

Associate Consultant, Nichols and Associates 1993-present

Director Evaluation & Curriculum, Self Enhancement Inc. 1988-1993

Associate, Willard and Associates 1986-1996

Case Manager, Outside-In & The Council For Prostitution Alternatives 1984-1988

### Dissertation

African American Male Youth Violence: "Trying to Kill the Part of You that Isn't Loved, August 8,  
2001, Eileen Brennan, Chair

### Refereed Publications

#### Published Book

Leary, DeGruy, Joy. *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*,  
Uptone Press, 2005

#### Published Study Guide

Leary, DeGruy, Joy. *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome The Healing: A Study Guide to Post Traumatic  
Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, Uptone Press, 2008

#### Refereed Book Chapters

Book Chapter: *International Handbook on Disaster & Mass Trauma: Cultural and spiritual rituals and*

practices for meaning-making and resilience Impact of Genocide & Terrorism Post Slavery Syndrome: A Multigenerational Look at African American's Injury, Healing and Resilience, 2010

Crawford, J., Nobles, W.W, Leary, DeGruy, Joy. Reparations and Healthcare for African Americans: Repairing the Damage from the Legacy of Slavery (pp. 251-281). Winbush, Raymond A. (Eds) Should America Pay: Slavery and The Raging Debate on Reparations Harper Collins Publishing, 2003

#### Refereed Articles

Briggs, H. E., Briggs, A. C., Leary, J. D. (2006). Family Participation in System Change. Best Practices in Mental Health: An International Journal.

Briggs, H. E., Briggs, A. C., Leary, J. D., Briggs, A. C., Cox, W. H., & Shibano, M. (November 2005). Group Treatment of Separated Parents and Child Interaction. Research On Social Work Practice, 15 (6), pp. 452-461

Leary, J. D., Brennan, E., Briggs, (November 2005). The African American Adolescent Respect Scale: A Measure of a Prosocial Attitude, Research On Social Work Practice, 15 (6) pp. 462-469. 2005

Briggs, H. E., Briggs, A. C., Leary, J. D., (Summer 2005). Promoting Culturally Competent Systems of Care Through Statewide Family Networks. Best Practices in Mental Health: An International Journal. 1 (2), pp. 77-99.

Briggs, H. E., Briggs, A. C., Leary, J. D., (2001). Shields and Walls: The Structure and Process of Racism in American Society. Psychology and Education, An International Journal 38 (2), 2-14.

#### In Review

DeGruy, J. A., Kjellstrand, J. M., Briggs, H. E., & Brennan, E. M., Respect and Racial Socialization as Protective Factors for African American Male Youth. (2010) Journal of Black Psychology

Briggs, H. E., Paulson, R. I., Briggs, A. C., Leary, J. D. Institutional Racism in America. (2004). Best Practices In Mental Health: An International Journal

#### Revise and Resubmit

Briggs, H. E., Cox, W. H., & Shibano, M., Briggs, A. C., Leary, J. D., (Special Issue). Group Treatment of Three Single Case Parent and Child Interactions. Journal of Behavior and Social Issues. (December 2007)

#### Scale

Leary, J. D., Briggs, H. E & Bank, L. The African American Female Respect Scale (2007)

#### Scholarly Works in Process

##### Research

Leary, J. D. The Survey of African American Faculty Experience and Perceptions  
Portland State University

#### Scholarly Works in Process

Book Chapter: Black Love: Racism and the Family Institution  
A Multigenerational Analysis of African American's Injury, Resilience and Healing

#### Articles

Briggs, H.E., & Leary, J.D. (2008). Vulnerable Young African American Males and Females: A Socio Cultural Theory. Journal of Black Psychology.

### Monographs (Nonrefereed)

Leary, J. D. Examining the Lingering negative Effects of the Institution of Slavery on Living African Americans and on Society in the United States. Illinois Transatlantic Slave Trade Commission Research project

Leary, J. Kiam, R., Briggs, H. E. (2003). Culturally Responsive and Accountable Organizations. In H. E. Briggs & T. Rzepnicki (Eds.). Bridging the Gap Between Research and Practice: A Festschrift Honoring the Contributions of Elsie Pinkston. Volume 1 & 2. Chicago: The University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration.

### **Completed exhibitions, performances, productions, films, etc.**

The State of Black America, New York-WABC, "Like It Is" Hosted by Gil Noble  
Randal Robinson, Rev. C.T. Vivian, Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood  
September 2004

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, New York-WABC, "Like It Is" Hosted by Gil Noble September 2003

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, New York-WBAI 99.5 FM New York City Pacifica Radio 2003

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, National Public Radio, Hosted by Tavis Smiley December 2002

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## **PRESS ARTICLES**

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### **Blacks still inmates of America's past?**

By Yugen Fardan Rashad | ThePortlandAlliance.org | January 2006

Let's start with the old adage "If it sounds too good to be true that's because it is." Okay, who is this author and where can I find the source of such a high boast? What would you say if I told you the author resides in Portland, is African American and is female?

Well, Happy New Year! For the sake of suspense, allow me an extra second to make my point that much more salient.

This is the season of making resolutions. Some will cook black-eyed peas for good luck. Others will set a date to quit smoking or start a diet. I propose something a bit more profound to a mostly white, liberal, progressive, educated and left-leaning readership: read a newly published book by a black woman who lives in northeast Portland.

Not because the author is an assistant professor of social work at Portland State University. Not even because she's a leading scholar on axiology, relational models and cultural competencies. Or that she has toured extensively throughout the lower 48 states, Alaska and the Caribbean with her message. No.

The greatest reason is that she has researched — and reveals long-held secrets about racism, inferiority-superiority concepts and American slavery. There is a difference. Dr. Joy DeGruy-Leary dissects the building blocks of Western philosophy, which embraces the fallacy of measuring intelligence by racial means. She breaks down the Western origins of dysfunction in black male-female relationships and families, white superiority, wealth and guilt.

Put simply, she brings to the forefront of American consciousness the question that arose when the Los Angeles Police Department introduced a badly beaten black man, Rodney King, to the country.

In her new book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (Uptown Press) DeGruy-Leary answers the question, “Why can’t we just get along?” with scholarly insight.

She writes with precision on the issues of why the American colonies sanctioned the arbitrary rape, torture, lynching and castration of black people. We read about the retroactivity of the emotional, psychological and economic scars sustained by blacks following chattel slavery, black codes, Jim Crow and race discrimination in America.

Leary queries the point at which a person or group is impacted by the repeated leverage of atrocity. Examples abound in her book. What resonated with me was how bewildered mothers employed coping behaviors to protect their children and husbands from the fierce, thieving hands of nomadic slave masters that ripped their families apart. These behaviors persist today, unnecessarily denigrating and arresting the intelligence and dignity of the black family.

Leary juxtaposes the effects of American slavery with the trauma African-Americans sustain in post-modern times. Much of this sustained trauma is the cause of current economic impotence, psychological trauma and health disparities we grapple with today.

And in the most compelling moment of the book, Leary deals with the central reason why this history remains buried. The book brings forth this hidden history, and begs for a metaphor of a people buried in the collective conscious, who carry the impact of untenable, episodic trauma and grief. This chapter of American history is glaringly absent from public discourse. Until *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* was written.

Yet Leary begins a healing process by confronting the subject, which offers a liberating moment for the reader and the nation.

As I read why black youth manifest anger, a lack of morals and an abiding sense of dread and nihilism, I was suddenly astonished as to why the question could even be asked. Not until *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* did we have a treatise — tangible proof located in a place where popular wisdom says to put information if you want to hide it from black people — a book. Well, not this time. And, this time, white Americans can’t hide either. It is required reading for every American. This is not a Black Thang!

Without blinking — or winking — Leary has researched the details of this particular aspect of American life. We learn about the rudimentary nature of how and why the Founding Fathers hurled so much hatred at another group on the basis of skin color and national origin, an attitude and perception which remains and guides behavior towards black people to this day — world wide.

No sane person should want to claim a system built on lies, deceit and hatred. And yet many successful blacks and whites are unaware of the role they play in this denigration, and further justify their enterprise through “cognitive dissonance.”

To pass by this book is to agree with the way things are. So, in 2006 let’s make that change. As a society we can work to close the achievement gap, eliminate disparities in employment, prison roles, addictions, preventable death and improve the quality of life for the human family. The choice is clear: anecdote over antidote for America. Thank you, Dr. Leary.

# Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome: Book Review

By Kam Williams | Dallasblack.com | January 11, 2006

“When African-Americans accept the deprecating accounts and images portrayed by the media, literature, music and the arts as a true mirror of themselves, we are actually allowing ourselves to be socialized by a racist society. Evidence of racist socialization can be readily seen when African-American children limit their aspirations... It can be seen when we use the accumulation of material things as the measure of self-worth and success.

So, in spite of all our forbears who worked to survive and gain their freedom; in spite of the efforts of all those who fought for civil rights... we are continually being socialized by this society to undervalue ourselves, to undermine our own efforts and, ultimately, to hate ourselves. We are raising our children only to watch America tear them down.

Today, the legacy of slavery remains etched in our souls. Understanding the role our past plays in our present attitudes, outlooks, mindsets and circumstances is important if we are to free ourselves from the spiritual, mental and emotional shackles that bind us today, shackles that limit what we believe we can be, do and have. Understanding the Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome plays in our evolution may be the key that helps to set us on the path to well-being.”

-- Excerpted from Chapter 5, Slavery's Children

You know an experience has been transformational when it repeatedly brings you to the brink of tears, and this is exactly what transpired while poring over the pages of Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing. For me, reading this sensitive exploration of the African-American psyche was the emotional equivalent of an all-day session on a shrink's couch, as I felt many pangs of recognition as layer after layer of deep-seated traumas were diagnosed and discussed, not as personal neuroses, but as the plausible, predictable, and shared response of many blacks to the predicament of being raised in a racist society.

The author, Joy DeGruy Leary, Ph.D. is nothing short of brilliant in the way in which she approaches the subject, prodding you to place present-day behaviors in a proper historical context. Plus, Dr. Leary, a Professor of Social Work at Portland State University, draws on her 18 years of practical work in the field dedicated to mental health and cultural resilience. For it is her contention that the subjugation of African-Americans did not end with slavery and that freedom only meant the master's whip was replaced by the illusion of equality and opportunity.

This was witnessed in the Jim Crow laws, lynchings, de facto segregation, grandfather clauses, poll taxes, restrictive covenants, redlining, gentrification and other assorted measures which arose to maintain the status quo. In reaction to the ongoing oppression, black people developed an identifiable set of survival skills, some of which were self-destructive. And it is these harmful symptoms which Dr. Leary is interested in eliminating in order to put her people on the road to healing.

So, after initially expressing the notion that the dysfunction found in African-Americans is nothing to be ashamed of, she exhibits all the care and concern of a doting parent in discussing the introspective path to rebuilding one's self-esteem. Easier said than done, this involves many steps, perhaps the most difficult being a long, hard look in the mirror to know oneself. For only after confronting and exorcising some societal demons, will one be well enough to interrelate with one's community from a fresh perspective, as a tender person, fully-informed, considerate and uncompromisingly honest.

Required reading, or should I say therapy, for every African-American.

# Interview: Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome

Reprinted from In These Times, March 10, 2006

## Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: Dr. Joy DeGruy talks about her provocative new book

By Silja J.A. Talvi

Racism erodes our very humanity. No one can be truly liberated while living under the weight of oppression, argues Dr. Joy DeGruy in her new book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*.

DeGruy, who teaches social work at Portland State University, traces the way that both overt and subtle forms of racism have damaged the collective African-American psyche-harm manifested through poor mental and physical health, family and relationship dysfunction, and self-destructive impulses.

DeGruy adapts our understanding of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to propose that African Americans today suffer from a particular kind of intergenerational trauma: Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS).

The systematic dehumanization of African slaves was the initial trauma, explains DeGruy, and generations of their descendents have borne the scars. Since that time, Americans of all ethnic backgrounds have been inculcated and immersed in a fabricated (but effective) system of race "hierarchy," where light-skin privilege still dramatically affects the likelihood of succeeding in American society.

DeGruy suggests that African Americans (and other people of color) can ill afford to wait for the dominant culture to realize the qualitative benefits of undoing racism. The real recovery from the ongoing trauma of slavery and racism has to start from within, she says, beginning with a true acknowledgment of the resilience of African-American culture.

"The nature of this work," DeGruy writes in her prologue, "is such that each group first must see to their own healing, because no group can do another's work."

### **What kind of reaction have you received to your book? And has that reaction differed based on who is in the audience?**

Overall, the response has been very positive, although I'm sure the naysayers are out there. The difference in reaction is noticeable when I deal with grassroots folks in the African-American community. With them, the response has been extremely emotional. It's as though I'm speaking people's personal stories, which seems to give them a feeling of hope.

Of course, I'm not the first person to initiate this kind of work into the intergenerational nature of trauma in the African-American community. What I did differently is that I pulled from many

different historical sources and scholarly disciplines. In essence, I created a "map" of knowledge so that people could see how African-American self-perception has been shaped.

**Throughout your book, you emphasize that an acute, social denial of both historical and present-day racism has taken on pathological dimensions. You write that this country is "sick with the issue of race."**

The root of this denial for the dominant culture is fear, and fear mutates into all kinds of things: psychological projection, distorted and sensationalized representations in the media, and the manipulation of science to justify the legal rights and treatment of people. That's why it's become so hard to unravel.

Unfortunately, many European Americans have a very hard time even hearing a person of color express their experiences. The prevailing psychological mechanism is the idea, "I've not experienced it, so it cannot be happening for you."

Truly, how can anyone tell me what I have and have not experienced? This is a very paternalistic manifestation of white supremacy, the idea that African Americans and other people of color can be told, with great authority, what their ancestor's lives were like and even what their own, present-day lives are like. The result for those on the receiving end of this kind of distortion is an aspect of PTSS. People begin to doubt themselves, their experiences, and their worth in society because they have been so invalidated their whole lives, in so many ways.

**Attempts to encourage European Americans to join in on a more honest, national dialogue about "race" and racism often results in defensive posturing and positioning. Common responses include "slavery happened a long time ago," or people saying that they're tired of being made to feel guilty about something they didn't do. How do we respond to this detachment from the crucial issues of the legacy of slavery?**

It's irrelevant that you weren't alive during slavery days. I wasn't there either! But what we as a nation face today has been heavily impacted by our history, whether we're talking in the gulf between the haves and have-nots; education gaps between white and black children; or the racial disparities in our prisons.

I don't believe in making people feel "guilty." We have to recognize that remnants of racist oppression continue to impact people in this country.

Much of my work really is about black people looking at ourselves and understanding how our lives have been shaped by what we've been dealt. I don't want to wait for permission to examine this or to hear that looking back into our histories is somehow counterproductive.

**An eye-opening experience for you was your first visit to New York's largest and most overpopulated jail facility, Rikers Island. What kinds of insights did you gain about PTSS from talking to imprisoned African-American young men about their lives?**

It was remarkable to see their physical disposition. They walked into the room with their heads held low, shuffled in . for lack of a better word, [they looked like] slaves. They had lost their way, and there was no light in their eyes whatsoever. Young people typically have a high level of energy. While there was a feeling of angry rebelliousness, the prevailing feeling of hopelessness was staggering.

It's also significant that it took about a half-hour for them to realize that I was talking to them, not at them. In that brief moment, I felt as though I gave them hope. Their body language had already changed by the time they were getting ready to leave. They had become students by the end of our time together.

These young people are being raised by these institutions, and then unleashed back into their communities to wreak havoc. Most of these young men grew up in poverty, and they have the experience of being black and poor in a materialistic society that says if you have nothing, you are nothing. In comparison, when I was in Africa I witnessed incredible poverty unlike anything I had ever seen before. I always talk about how tall and proud the people walked. Their greatest shame was their lack of education, not their lack of wealth. But in America, you are what you have, what you wear.

**You write about the fear that many African Americans have of being "exposed" or having family or community "dirty laundry" aired. "Never let them see you sweat," as the expression goes.**

Shame is such a big issue in our society in general. What many African Americans have internalized is a sense of shame about just not being "good enough." That's a horrible thing to be sentenced to for your life.

When a person walks around with that sense of shame and self-hatred, they are likely to function poorly in society, no matter who they are. Add the extra layer of racist socialization, of being devalued, and what it means to be just human in America, and all those things just makes the shame worse. We as African Americans don't get a pass on all the problems that humans have to deal with in life: finances, career choices, personal crises, relationships, and so forth. But when we add that to this intergenerational trauma in the context of a society that is in denial about its racism, people's lives can become overwhelmed, even frozen in place.

I'm saying let's just take a few of those burdens off of people's shoulders. Look at what we, as African Americans, have been able to do even with those burdens on our shoulders. Can you imagine what we could accomplish if some of those burdens were removed?

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**Silja J.A. Talvi** is a senior editor at *In These Times* , an investigative journalist and essayist with credits in many dozens of newspapers and magazines nationwide, including *The Nation* , *Salon* , *Santa Fe Reporter* , *Utne* , and the *Christian Science Monitor*. She is at work on a book about women in prison (Seal Press/Avalon).

# The Oregonian

## Slave syndrome is about blacks fixing themselves

Wednesday, June 09, 2004



S. RENEE MITCHELL

Race is not a topic I prefer to write about. It tends to be too emotionally charged. Folks quickly lose perspective. Rational thought is abandoned. Defensive postures are immediately adopted.

So when a few readers asked me to write about post-traumatic slave syndrome, I cringed. I had heard Joy DeGruy Leary, who has researched this for 15 years, lecture on this subject before.

DeGruy Leary maintains that blacks did not heal from past centuries of trauma, and today, still face racism and oppression. So the festering emotional and psychological damage germinates for generation after generation.

And that is what perpetuates learned helplessness, violent behavior and antipathy toward other black people, she says. That is what is at the heart of Portland's gang shootings. That is why so few blacks own homes or businesses.

DeGruy Leary is passionate and convincing in her delivery. But I never felt like she was offering excuses, just insight. So after she asked the other blacks in the room to change the way they think about themselves and each other, I left the room feeling empowered.

So I was shocked when I heard that the novel theory ([www.posttraumaticslavesyndrome.com](http://www.posttraumaticslavesyndrome.com)) was being introduced into a Beaverton criminal case.

Isaac Cortez Bynum is accused of murdering his 2-year-old son, who died of a brain injury. An autopsy found Ryshawn, who had broken ribs, also had as many as 70 marks of various ages on his legs, buttocks, back and chest.

Last month, DeGruy Leary was called to testify about post-traumatic slave syndrome. But the information, she says, addressed why Bynum may have participated in self-destructive behavior. She said she never intended for it to be tied to how the child was treated.

"It's totally the antithesis of my work," says the assistant professor at Portland State University's Graduate School of Social Work. "I'm saying we do need to take responsibility for our actions."

What's more, says DeGruy Leary, she has never met Bynum nor talked to him. So she was never in a position to psychoanalyze him. "My role," she says, "had nothing to do with that part."

But misunderstandings are common when people venture, unguided, into a racially sensitive minefield. We need to look no further than the latest headline about a coach, a teacher or a politician making some politically incorrect statement to be reminded that it's easy to take a wrong turn. You need to either be intimately familiar with the terrain or you should align yourself with someone who can enlighten you.

So, consider me a cultural tour guide. By defining post-traumatic slave syndrome, DeGruy Leary created a persuasive avenue for black people to identify their self-destructive behaviors. She wants them to understand why they interact so hostilely with each other.

She questions: Why do we feel so ashamed of our natural hair texture? Why don't we trust each other more? How much of that stems from a false belief system and unhealthy traditions that were seeded during slavery?

"They have not questioned it," DeGruy Leary says. "There are lots of patterns and behaviors that we need to change. But you cannot change, heal or correct what you don't understand."

Historical trauma is being researched by other cultural archeologists, too, such as Mikihiro Tatara, who is Japanese; Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, who is Native American; and Alvin Poussaint, a psychiatry professor at Harvard Medical School, who is black.

The goal is for people of color to recognize how they pass unresolved grief to their children. And then, to go through a cultural self-assessment that helps change their beliefs or behaviors.

"It has nothing to do with white people," DeGruy Leary says. "It's about giving black people the tools to help themselves. . . . I'm going to stand on it because it's the truth, and our children need to know it's the truth."

DeGruy Leary's medicine is not for everyone. And when you swallow it right, this truth hurts. But it heals, too.

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[OUR LEGACY]

# BREAKING THE CHAINS

ESSENCE asked three experts to explain how the bonds of slavery continue to hold Black folks captive and how we can set ourselves free

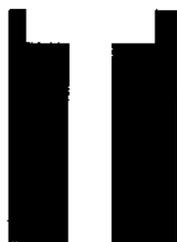
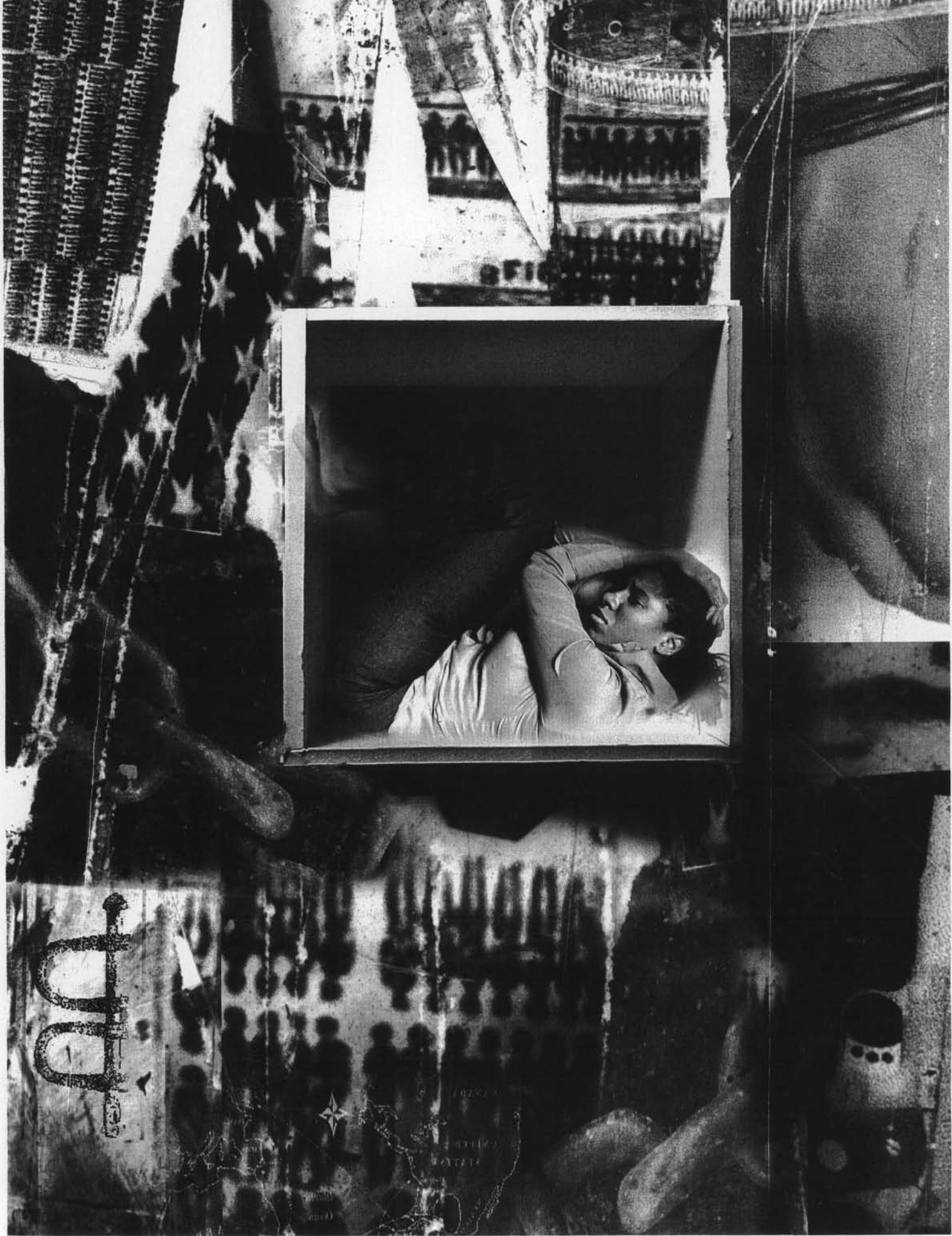


Photo Illustration by Anastasia Vasilakis

Though slavery ended nearly 140 years ago, the brutal, savage servitude endured by our ancestors continues to haunt our very souls, long after we've been "set free." In fact, a growing number of our most critical thinkers believe that African-Americans suffer from a form of psychological trauma that has been dubbed post-traumatic slave syndrome. Though not everyone has bought into this controversial theory, those who have 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.

ESSENCE asked three of the many experts who have looked at this syndrome to help us understand why the model of post-traumatic slave syndrome is useful for explaining how some troubling problems in our community—from Black-on-Black violence to skin-color drama—may have their roots in slavery. According to our authorities—Joy De-Gruy-Leary, Ph.D., a professor of social work at Portland State University, who has studied the centuries-old effects of slavery on today's Black behavior; Brenda Wade, Ph.D., >



a San Francisco clinical psychologist and coauthor of the book *What Mama Couldn't Tell Us About Love: Healing the Emotional Legacy of Racism by Celebrating Our Light*; and Gail E. Wyatt, Ph.D., a professor of psychiatry at UCLA and author of *Stolen Women: Reclaiming Our Sexuality, Taking Back Our Lives*—only by understanding how a terrible legacy from our past continues to play out in our present can we begin to heal.

—THE EDITORS

## THE CONTINUING BONDS OF SLAVERY

**ESSENCE:** None of us are slaves today, and we don't know anybody who is or was a slave. So why would we be traumatized by something we haven't actually experienced?

**Joy DeGruy-Leary:** 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. For example, some children and grandchildren of World War II European holocaust survivors have also suffered trauma related to those events even though they were born years after the war ended. That horror lasted for approximately 12 years and resulted in considerable suffering through generations. Compare this to the slave experience in which a similar series of atrocities were perpetrated on a group of people over the course of 250 years. But no one has ever measured the impact that slavery had on us, what it's meant for us to live for centuries in a hostile environment. We have been hurt, not just by the obvious physical assaults, but in deep psychological ways that are connected to centuries of abuse.

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.

**ESSENCE:** Everyone, regardless of race, has dysfunctions. But what are some of the specific behaviors we exhibit today that can be traced directly back to slavery?

**Gail Wyatt:** Parenting is a good example. During slavery, to keep their children out of harm's way, parents tended to be overly punitive. They would punish their children, often with aggression, to keep them in line rather than allow them to be punished by someone else: the master or the overseer. Parents also may have been overly punitive to look powerful to their children to hide the fact that they were powerless. For these reasons, this overly punitive parenting has been perpetrated by families. Though parents of other races punish children physically, many of us grew up in families where corporal punishment was the norm and where even a child's questioning was often met with a great deal of aggression from parents.

**DeGruy-Leary:** I've seen so many other parents struggle with this, and they had to learn to hug their own children. For some of us, there's a fear of loving too much, because during slavery there was never any guarantee that families wouldn't be split apart. In a word, it's *abandonment*, abandonment deep down. And so there's this difficulty that we have in really embracing each other the way we need to, even our own children. It's similar with praise. The slave master may have noted that the child is "coming along," but the mother would state his bad qualities—he's stupid, shiftless, unruly, can't work—to keep him from being sold. Many of us normalized

that pathology and now, even though a parent may be very proud of a child, there is a downplay of praise. That creates children who wonder *Am I not good enough?* or who are desperate to make their parents proud.

## SEXUALITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

**ESSENCE:** How does the legacy of slavery affect our sexuality?

**Wyatt:** During slavery Black women had no control over whom they had sex with. Rape was a daily occurrence; even Black men raped Black women. Slave owners justified exploiting Black women by creating the stereotype that we were oversexed, always ready. That stereotype endures even today, and many of us continue to react against it by denying our sexuality and being afraid of sex. Others embrace the stereotype, which you can see anytime you turn on a hip-hop video full of out-of-control, oversexed Black women.

**Brenda Wade:** You also see it in how we feel about our bodies and how we teach our daughters to feel about theirs. A woman who has been sexually molested or abused feels intense fear, shame and anger, even though she may not show it. During slavery we had whole generations of women who were sexually abused, women who learned that their bodies were not their own. The legacy is that we teach our daughters to be ashamed of their bodies. We try to protect them by explaining sex and sexuality in a punitive, prohibitive way. We say, "Girl, keep your legs together," rather than arming them with real information about healthy sexuality, relationships, pregnancy and birth control.

**DeGruy-Leary:** Slavery also

**"What African-Americans have learned to live with and survive speaks to what an amazing**

affected our men's sexuality. When the importing of slaves became illegal, slave owners took to breeding humans for labor. Our value became more than simply our ability to do hard labor; reproducing children for labor now was important—for men and women. We see that behavior replicated today in our communities, particularly with men. We see them linking their value to how many children they've made, even if they don't take care of them.

## DIVISIONS AND POWERLESSNESS

**ESSENCE:** How have the divisions that were created by the institution of slavery remained with us?

**Wyatt:** In the South, Blacks outnumbered Whites tremendously during slavery, so the only strategy for keeping us from overthrowing the whole system was to divide and conquer us. The owners pitted field slaves against house slaves, brown-skinned against light, men against women. These divisions created a race of people who often do not trust one another.

**Wade:** Down through the generations, women have been taught that you can't count on men and you can't trust them on any level—not just sexually, but also economically, emotionally and physically. Men believe they can't trust women, that women are trying to get into their wallets. Young Black men have learned to be aggressive and hostile toward one another. Moreover, during slavery, families were literally divided, men, women and children were taken from one another and sold. So even when people were able to form relationships and create family, it was all tenuous, because at any moment the slave owner could say, "I'm going to sell you." I believe that created a sense of tentativeness and impermanence in relationships

that we sometimes see today. Combined with the trust issues, this may help explain the divorce rate in our community—which is estimated to be 20 percent to 30 percent higher than for White couples.

**Wyatt:** At the same time, we did find ways to stick together. House and field slaves did work together. House slaves sneaked food to others who couldn't get into the house or eavesdropped to gather information about who was going to be sold, which could be the impetus for people going on the underground railroad or escaping. Despite the divisiveness, we as a people still understand the importance of sticking together in order to survive.

**ESSENCE:** How has slavery shaped the way we now feel about ourselves?

**Wade:** When you think of the trauma of slavery, you think primarily of loss—loss of homes, family, language, customs, spirituality. Slavery created a total loss of freedom and mastery over one's life. How would people respond to that emotionally? Primarily with fear-based responses. People who feel afraid and powerless don't

**and resilient people we are.**

have a sense of entitlement, don't feel that they deserve anything or have the power to ask for what they need. You see it in the superwoman syndrome: the Black woman who overfunctions, taking care of everyone's needs in her family, her community, at work, but not feeling entitled to a raise or promotion and unable to ask for help or get her own needs met. Though people of other cultures have similar feelings, ours is deeper because it comes from trauma patterns passed from slavery.

**Wyatt:** These losses become so conditioned that a person begins to assume a smaller sense of self than they actually have. That can lead to an impression that "I am less than, and I should be oppressed. I don't have the skills others have, I don't deserve to be happy, successful or loved."

## OUR HEALING

**ESSENCE:** Has any good come out of our oppression?

**DeGruy-Leary:** That African-Americans have learned to live with and survive such oppression—and in many instances we have actually thrived—speaks to what an amazing and resilient people we are. We are a strong people who survived the Middle Passage, and then later on withstood centuries of violent oppression. In the face of all that, 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.

**Wade:** Slavery deepened our sense of spirituality. African people are highly, highly spiritual, and that spirituality kept us alive during slavery and still thrives today.

**Wyatt:** It also increased our sense of interconnectedness. During slav-

ery we learned to bond with other slaves who weren't related to us. After your mother was sold, the woman who fed you and took care of you became your mother.

**Wade:** That sense of community, the way we have pulled together in dramatic ways, created one of the most powerful movements of the twentieth century, civil rights. We learned in slavery and must con-



tinue to teach our children that Black communities are powerful.

**ESSENCE:** How do we move forward?

**DeGruy-Leary:** So much more research, support and assistance is needed to produce vital healing at a rate that exceeds the injury and decay. But I want to stress that healing must occur on multiple levels because the injury occurred on multiple levels: Individuals, families, communities and society itself were undone by slavery. Therefore our approach has to be one that addresses the injury in all these areas. Rites-of-passage programs that honor and celebrate our history and culture speak to individual change. Reworking the educational system would speak to a shift in the whole society. But we have to begin with simply telling the truth. For so many of us, the moment we just hear the term *post-traumatic slave syndrome* an understanding begins to take shape. We've never been able to talk about it because we never knew what to call it. But to put a name to it, to be able to articulate it, to be able to express it without the fear, the guilt, blame or anger is healing. It strengthens us.

**Wyatt:** 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.

**Wade:** Amen. □