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Foreword by Soong-Chan Rah

HEALING RACIAL TRAUMA

THE ROAD TO RESILIENCE



InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com

Taken from *Healing Racial Trauma* by Sheila Wise Rowe.

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Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. www.ivpress.com.

CHAPTER ONE

WOUNDS

*They have treated the wound of my people carelessly,
saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace.*

JEREMIAH 6:14

We are tired of having our checks cut off without warning or investigation because of malicious gossip and lying officials! We are tired of hostile social workers and supervisors!"¹

On the afternoon of June 2, 1967, The Mothers for Adequate Welfare, a group of poor Black and a few White mothers staged a protest at the offices of the Public Welfare Department on Blue Hill Avenue in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Hastily handwritten flyers were taped to telephone poles and shop windows inviting the community to join in the protest.

The sit-in was peaceful even after the mothers, unable to air their grievances, refused to leave. They spent the night in the foyer huddled together on the grimy linoleum floor. The next day things quickly took a turn for the worse after the mothers aired their demands but received no promise of redress. The mothers wrapped a bicycle chain around the handles of the glass double entry doors to prevent the police from entering and the staff from leaving. The police called for reinforcements. A mass of uniformed officers arrived and smashed the glass to reclaim the building.

One of the mothers shouted from an open window, “They’re beating our Black sisters in here!” The police dragged the battered but still defiant mothers out of the building, down granite steps covered in blood and shards of glass, and threw them into awaiting police vans. The crowd outside erupted and rushed the police, who in turn indiscriminately clubbed and arrested people. Despite pleas for calm from local church leaders and community activists’ word of honor, the unrest spread throughout the community. A riot ensued across ten blocks of Blue Hill Avenue.

For several decades Southern Black folks carrying suitcases full of prized possessions fled poverty and threats of lynching to pursue the elusive dream of a better life in Western and Northern cities like Boston. By the early 1960s, turbulence and race riots plagued much of the country yet bypassed Boston. The city had a self-congratulatory air because its predominantly African American community of Roxbury exercised restraint while other cities burned. Everything changed that humid day in June.

I was seven years old at the time. That night in my aunt and uncle’s apartment, I watched the nightly news report bearing witness to mothers treated like chattel and an agitated crowd cursing and hurling rocks at the police. The reporter said the violence would likely carry on throughout the night. As we watched in stunned silence, suddenly we heard someone pounding on the front door. I hid nearby but within earshot as my uncle barked, “Who is it?” He unlatched the deadbolt, and on the other side of the door stood my dad, Robert Wise, dressed in black. His speech was halting as if he had run a road race: “We don’t have to take this crap anymore. Come on; let’s go beat up some Whiteys.” My uncle declined, and with a dismissal of his hand my father bolted down the stairs. I spent the night listening for the front door to open or a floorboard to squeak upon Dad’s return. Eventually, he made it home safely. Perhaps he shared with my mother (also

known as Momae) what happened that night, but not a word was said in my presence.

The rioting carried on for three days, as over one thousand demonstrators armed with rocks, bottles, and matches clashed with police officers armed with guns and billy clubs. When the smoke cleared, Blue Hill Avenue looked like a war zone strewn with debris and charred apartment buildings and storefronts. I wondered, *Was Dad partly responsible for the devastation?* Years passed before I knew of the deferred dreams of my dad and the depth of his well of trauma, grief, and rage.

In a 1968 speech titled “The Other America,” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. pointedly remarked, “In the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard.”² Dr. King’s remark is as relevant today as it was back then.

The recent deaths of unarmed Black men at the hands of the police, the immigration crackdown, and the rise in White supremacists have led to protests across the country, and inner cities still burn. I believe that riots are also the language of the unhealed.

When God says, “They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14), he acknowledges that he sees and knows that we bear wounds that have not been taken seriously. Although there is significant research on the social, economic, and political effects of racism, little research recognizes the emotional and physical effects of racism on people of color.³

Proverbs 13:12 tells us: “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.” In his potent poem “Harlem,” written in 1951, Langston Hughes gives another view of the impact of life without hope when he asks: “What happens to a dream deferred?” Langston shows how we may watch it die, live with it as an open wound, or express it outwardly as rage.

AN INVITATION

People of color have endured traumatic histories and almost daily assaults on our dignity, and we are told to get over it. We have prayed about the racism, been in denial or acted out in anger, but we have not known how to individually or collectively pursue healing from the racial trauma.

We need healing and new ways to navigate ongoing racism, systemic oppression, and racial trauma that impairs our ability to become more resilient. Resilience is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties or to “work through them step by step, and bounce back stronger than you were before.” In relation to racism, resilience refers to the ability “to persevere and maintain a positive sense of self when faced with omnipresent racial discrimination.”⁴ Resilience is not an inherited trait; how we think, behave, and act can help us to grow in resilience.

In this book you will meet a few people of color along the way and read their stories of oppression, healing, and resilience. I am one of them, an African American woman, author, speaker, trauma counselor, and also a survivor. The others are not random people of color but dear friends and family members whose stories carry lessons for us all. The fact that we are a diverse group is countercultural. Historians have revealed that from the earliest days of First Nation genocide and the enslavement of Africans there has been a concerted effort to keep people of color separated and to develop a caste system of sorts. Rather than seeing the commonality that we have as people of color, we have been grading whose experience is worse. In his speech “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “When Pharaoh wanted to prolong slavery, he kept the slaves fighting among themselves. Whenever the slaves got together that was the beginning of getting out of slavery. Now let us maintain unity.”⁵

We begin our journey with the assurance from Matthew 1:23 that “God is with us”—Emmanuel. He comforts the brokenhearted and heals and binds up our wounds (Psalm 147:3). As you read this book, my invitation to people of color is that you might experience your own life story affirmed and acquire new solidarity with other people of color. Also that you will obtain tools to help heal your racial trauma and to persevere on the road to resilience. My invitation to White folks is to be open to however these stories may challenge you to be a better friend and ally to people of color. Perhaps you will hear echoes of your own trauma that you need to address. My hope is that this book will lead you to greater empathy and activism.

People of color know that racism and racial oppression is real. We’ve felt the sting of each racist incident whether it was overt or covert, intentional or unintentional. Yet we’ve often been unaware of the full impact of the racial trauma that remains. It’s important that we clarify exactly what racism and racial trauma are and how they affect us.

TYPES OF RACISM

Racism comes in different forms; it’s pervasive and involves more than just the hatred of people of color. Racism is prejudice, discrimination, antagonism, or the systematic oppression of people and communities of color. In Psalm 139 we read that all humans are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Yet racism declares the lie that one racial group is superior to all others. This myth is perpetuated by the actions or inaction of the government, churches, families of origin, the media, and viral videos. The lie is accompanied by gross generalizations and caricatures of the “other.” Local and global inner cities are sometimes depicted as godless hellholes, Black women as always angry, and young men of color as suspects and predators. In the world and within the church some people

uncritically ingest these distortions, and there are dire consequences. People of color face an ongoing struggle against racism that is interpersonal, systemic, spatial, environmental, internalized, or that involves White privilege.

Interpersonal racism. The most commonly understood form of racism is interpersonal racism. This involves a person demeaning and degrading the gifts, calling, motives, and body of a person of color. There is an underlying belief that the gross generalizations are valid, and as a result some people have permission to participate in or silently witness prejudice, discrimination, or racism.

My ancestors languished under the horrors of slavery and the segregation laws in Virginia, and their lives were devastated by interpersonal and systemic racism. My great-granddaddy James Coston also experienced interpersonal racism. Although he had limited formal education because the Colored schools only went up to the seventh grade, he was self-taught. Great-Granddaddy read the newspaper to stay on top of current events and engaged in lively exchanges with Whites in front of the five-and-dime. However, the ominous cloud of interpersonal racism hung over each encounter. Granddaddy never knew when the precipitation would turn to sunshine or lashing rain and thunder. The White people in the town called him Coston, but more than he'd care to count he was called "boy" or "nigger."

Systemic racism. Systemic racism manifests institutionally or structurally. Institutional racism is defined as "the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their color, culture or ethnic origin."⁶ Institutional, structural, and systemic racism is perpetuated in schools, medical facilities, housing, financial services, government, employment, courts, law enforcement, and the military. Systemic racism not only fails to provide equitably but has the power to subjugate people and communities of color and actively hamper their forward movement.

At five years old, my dad's young life was torn apart by institutional racism as tuberculosis ran through Accomack County, Virginia, and soon visited his home. There were no hospitals for Black folks; medical care consisted mostly of home remedies. Dad's childhood soon ended as he watched his paternal grandfather and uncle die and his father's health decline. After months of coughing and sweating, his dad passed away. As the number of TB cases rose in the Black community, the state finally opened a TB hospital. Before the year was over, my dad also lost his mother and baby brother. Dad and his younger brother, Edward, were taken in by Granddaddy James and Grandma Mary, their maternal grandparents, who raised the boys as their own. The trauma of losing so many family members haunted my dad.

Granddaddy James was steadfast in his belief that faith in God, education, and economic independence were keys to freedom for Blacks. Granddaddy instilled this love in his grandsons. He and his brother opened a general store in the Black community located on the outskirts of town. They purchased goods from local White suppliers, and soon the store was well-stocked and flourishing. Black folks no longer needed to go into town to shop at the White-owned stores and hurry back before the sunset curfew. My dad and his grandparents experienced institutional racism firsthand: within a year the White merchant association in the town petitioned the supplier to stop selling goods to Granddaddy, and without stock, his store closed. For the community the closing of the store had more meaning than just an economic attack on one man. It was the death of a symbol and a promise of autonomy and prosperity. But other more ominous symbols were allowed to remain.

Public space racism. For decades people of color like Granddaddy were force-fed symbols such as Confederate Civil War statues, flags, and plaques prominently and proudly displayed in town and the state capital. Sometimes, the racial terror symbol was a burning

KKK cross in a field. These symbols represent public space racism in which metacommunication, a conversation happening beneath the surface, determines who is dominant, who is worthy, and who belongs. Today, battles are occurring over removing these artifacts and placing them in museums, where they belong.

Spatial racism. Dominance is also communicated through spatial racism—spaces and structures are purposefully designed to divide or change the demographics of communities. For decades highways, railroad tracks, and inaccessible areas visibly separated the rich and poor, and White folks and people of color. Because of the recent influx of White folks returning to cities, there’s been a push to remove these structures to make cities “more livable.” This has disrupted some economic centers of people of color; with gentrification they’ve been priced out of their neighborhoods. In 1987 the removal of the elevated Orange line train in Boston resulted in fewer commuters and customers in Dudley Square, a Black hub, which caused businesses to close and folks to move away. Although Dudley Square is now experiencing a renewal, some wonder if it will ever return to what it once was.

Environmental racism. Environmental racism is a collective form of racism that affects poor communities and those of color. These communities are disproportionately exposed to air, water, and chemical pollutants and also denied the same high-quality municipal services that White communities receive. Flint, Michigan, for example, experienced a water crisis when the city switched the water source to one contaminated with lead. The switch occurred in 2014, and Flint still doesn’t have 100-percent clean drinking water.

White privilege. The ancestors of people of color were resilient, and Granddaddy James was no different—he stood firm even after the sabotage of his businesses. His next enterprise was a farm that had an access road he shared with a neighboring White farmer. When the farmer discovered that the new farmer was Black, he

erected posts and padlocked a chain across the road, making it impossible for Granddaddy's horse and cart to take the produce to market. This act was White privilege and entitlement in action, the unmerited benefit that White people receive, unconsciously or consciously. It is born out of a sense of higher worth, power, and the right to the best resources and rewards because of Whiteness.

In the face of incredible odds, Granddaddy took his White neighbor to court. The White farmer was stunned when the judge sided with Granddaddy and ordered him to pay a tidy sum of \$500, worth about \$8,000 today. However, the obstacles placed in Granddaddy's way did not stop. At harvest time he brought his farm produce to market and watched as White farmers got \$5 a bushel while he was lucky to get \$3.

Internalized racism. The struggles and barriers that Granddaddy faced are not unique to the United States in the 1940s. They continue to this day and have broken some people of color. They have accepted the limitations placed on them and their communities and have internalized racism, conceding defeat and hopelessness. Some have engaged in colorism with others in their same ethnic or racial group, which is the prejudice or discrimination against folks with a darker skin tone.

Defensive othering. Some people of color have internalized racism by relishing their role as the “exceptional negro” or the “model minority” stereotype of a compliant Asian person. Yet underneath the façade there is self-hatred, which sides with the oppressor and gives tacit approval to the tools of oppression. It's been noted in the journal *Sociological Perspectives* that people of color sometimes engage in defensive othering: “By demonstrating that they share the same attitudes and disdain toward co-ethnics who fit with the stereotypes, they attempt to join the dominant group.”⁷ In this way we also try to convince ourselves of peace, peace, when there is no peace.

FORMS OF RACIAL TRAUMA

Racial trauma is real. Every day in the United States and across the world women, men, and children of color experience racism and witness lives and livelihoods devalued or lost as if they do not matter. The result is that people of color are carrying unhealed racial trauma.

Racial trauma can be defined as the physical and psychological symptoms that people of color often experience after a stressful racist incident. These personal or vicarious incidents happen repeatedly, causing our racial trauma to accumulate, which contributes to a more insidious, chronic stress.⁸ When we experience a threat, our brains are wired to prepare our bodies to fight or flight. This stress response causes our nervous system, hormones, mind, and body to be on high alert. We believe we need to take immediate action against an actual threat. However, if the risk or the traumatic stress is not dealt with, our brains and bodies don't fully stand down, and we get stuck in an endless loop. Our traumatic stress triggers a physical and emotional response that then feeds our traumatic stress.

According to the report titled *The Impact of Racial Trauma on African Americans*, the effects of racial trauma include fear, aggression, depression, anxiety, low self-image, shame, hypervigilance, pessimism, nightmares, difficulty concentrating, substance abuse, flashbacks, and relational dysfunction. People of color also carry unhealed racial trauma in their bodies. The physical symptoms include hyperactivity, heart disease, headaches, and poor concentration.⁹

The sin of racism affects us severely and deeply, yet we remain silent or in denial, a response we learned from our ancestors for whom silence meant survival. While we continue to suffer in silence, bearing the wounds of racial trauma exacts a toll on us. There are various ways that people of color experience racial trauma:

historical, transgenerational, personal, physical, vicariously, and through microaggression, gaslighting, and moral injury. Unpacking each of these will provide a window into how racial trauma has been transmitted in our own lives and the damage it does to our mind, body, soul, spirit, and communities.

Maybe you were raised to follow the rule that whatever happens in our house stays in our house. This message of secrets and silence was not limited to us and our household but seemed to also refer to the history of our people. That message was like yeast that spreads and now affects how we live and move and have our being.

Historical racial trauma. Historical racial trauma is shared by a group rather than an individual and spans multiple generations who carry trauma-related symptoms without having been present for the past traumatizing event.¹⁰ Slavery and the forced removal of First Nation tribes from their land caused historical trauma that continues to impact African Americans and First Nation tribes.

Anna Piccard writes that the high rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, and suicide of First Nation tribal members are a direct consequence of the violence, mistreatment, and abuses experienced at boarding schools, where First Nation children were forcibly moved for assimilation purposes. The children lost their language and cultural identity. The long braids worn by the boys were cut, and the children were given “White” first and last names. Although many have not experienced the boarding schools firsthand, the racial trauma and “injuries inflicted at Indian boarding schools are continuous and ongoing.”¹¹ In response to the alarmingly high number of First Nation children removed from their homes, the Indian Child Welfare Act passed in 1978 gave First Nation parents and communities the legal right to have input about their children’s placement in off-reservation schools, in foster care, and in adoptive homes.

Transgenerational racial trauma. The specific experience of trauma across a specific family line is called transgenerational racial

trauma. Epigenetics is the study of how the transmission of information from one *generation* to the next affects the genes of offspring without altering the primary structure of DNA. Some studies are inconclusive about whether racial trauma can be passed down genetically. But other research has shown that “our minds may forget, but our bodies don’t, and deep inside of every cell a memory trace is stored of every event we ever experienced and the sensations and feelings that occurred with them.”¹² Researchers are also exploring how racial trauma affects our bodies; for example, diseases such as heart disease and cancer seem to be passed down transgenerationally. The Bible speaks of spiritual strongholds that occur when particular causes or beliefs are vigorously defended or upheld, either secretly or openly. We may be particularly prone to certain strongholds because individual attitudes or actions were modeled in our families or community. Racism in all forms is a stronghold that must be broken.

Other studies show that historical and transgenerational racial trauma can be transmitted to our descendants through family dynamics, storytelling, or folklore, and can affect our emotional and physical health. We have significant ties to our ancestors: “These bonds often determine the answers to a myriad of questions such as: ‘Who am I?’ ‘Who am I to my family?’ ‘Who can “we” trust’ and ‘who are our enemies?’ ‘What ties me to my family?’ And, most importantly, ‘of these ties, which do I reject and which do I keep?’”¹³ Our connection to our ancestors is not only personal; it’s also collective. Entire communities of color have endured historical racial trauma like slavery, the Japanese internment, or First Nation genocide and have collectively asked similar questions. The answers affect how our communities function even now.

Personal racial trauma. My dad experienced personal racial trauma, yet he was unaware of his need for healing. While growing up he and his brother routinely dodged rocks and screams of “nigger” as they made their trek to their Colored school. He lost

his parents and brother early in his life. He witnessed how Granddaddy James's aspirations were blocked at every turn and how this affected the family financially and emotionally. All of this left an indelible mark on him. I wonder if those early experiences fueled Dad's anger and passion for justice after he joined the Navy and moved to Boston. During the height of the civil rights movement, Dad and Momae joined the Nation of Islam, an African American Muslim sect. As followers of Malcolm X, they were fully immersed in radical community activism. The aim was to empower and transform Boston's Black community by any means necessary. On February 21, 1965, Malcolm X was assassinated, and my parents were devastated and disillusioned. They left the Nation of Islam. By the summer of 1965, hoping to improve our education, they enrolled my siblings and me in Operation Exodus, a voluntary school desegregation program. We joined a small number of Black students bused to schools in White communities. The education was better, but the interpersonal racism we endured—the name-calling and questioning of our intellects—was relentless and left us traumatized. Three years later Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered, and my parents recommitted their lives to Christ. But my dad was silent about the trauma of losing his parents, his brother, and then Malcolm and Martin.

Physical trauma. Years later, in April 1976 during the school desegregation era in Boston, Black attorney Ted Landsmark came to Boston City Hall for a meeting. He was met by a group of angry young White antibusing protesters from South Boston and Charlestown. They assaulted Mr. Landsmark with fists and feet, and as he tried to run away, a protester took the staff of a giant American flag and attempted to impale him. This racist beating caused emotional and physical trauma for Mr. Landsmark.

Vicarious trauma. The assault also caused vicarious trauma for many of us who saw it on TV or in the newspaper. Vicarious

trauma occurs after we hear detailed trauma stories or watch dashcam videos of what the deceased or the survivors endured. It can feel like we are actually experiencing the event. It causes stress, fear, and physical symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress. The iconic photo of the Landsmark incident, titled “The Soiling of Old Glory,” won a Pulitzer Prize and symbolized the contentious history of being Black in Boston and America and our mixed feelings about the flag.

Although Barack Obama served for eight years as our nation’s first Black president, recent events have further exposed the truth that the United States is not a postracial society; racism is alive and well. On the morning after the 2016 election, kids and college students went to school, and adults returned to work. Some conservative and evangelical Christian news outlets boasted; many communities of color wept. That same day someone painted a racist message in large bold letters across a sprawling wall in Durham, North Carolina: “Black lives don’t matter and neither does your votes.” On social media the fear and trauma of people of color were mocked, and White allies were deemed overreacting “snowflakes,” an insulting term suggesting they are as fragile as a speck of snow. By the time Thanksgiving rolled around the dividing lines of hostility were drawn around dinner tables, in the classroom, and at churches and businesses across the country. For many people of color there didn’t seem to be much to be thankful about. I often found myself on the verge of tears and was vicariously traumatized after each news report of another Black man gunned down. I prayed, but fear lingered around the edges. I was anxious about the safety of my Black son and husband: *What if there is a traffic stop or a case of mistaken identity?* My emotions were a crescendo of anger, denial, sadness, resignation, indifference, cynicism about reconciliation, and bone-tiredness that ebbed or flowed at the latest slight or all-out assault on other people of color and me.

Microaggressions. Sometimes it is hard to share our story because the racism appears as a vapor. This “day-to-day stress can affect mental health when a large number of minor events add up and wear down a person, thus making her or him vulnerable to poor health. In the context of racism, daily hassles are described as microaggressions.”¹⁴ Microaggression comes in the form of slights or messages communicated verbally or nonverbally. Microaggression may be unconsciousness to the perpetrator, so when the bias is exposed, it is denied, or the person of color is accused of being overly sensitive.¹⁵ Racially insensitive remarks are made such as “you are so articulate,” or nonverbal messages are sent when a security guard tails us in the mall. Regardless of whether we are a teenager in a hoodie, a member of the Senate, a janitor, a celebrity, or a PhD, at some point most of us have experienced microaggression or have been profiled. Microaggression results in racial trauma; it is a lobbed grenade that creates damage because it comes when least expected and sends a message that we are alien. Harvard University professor Henry Louis Gates experienced this when he was arrested for trying to get into his own house in tony Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Racial gaslighting. When people of color experience racism and microaggression we need others to bear witness to the fact of what happened. Racial gaslighting often happens when there is no corroboration. The term *gaslighting* is taken from the title of the 1940s film *Gaslight*, which told the story of the systematic emotional abuse of a woman by her husband. In an attempt to undermine his wife’s sanity and her perception of reality, the husband lies and shames her privately and publicly. Racial gaslighting describes the ways individuals or institutions try to manipulate or question people of color’s sense of reality, often to assert or maintain control, superiority, or power.

Racial gaslighting happens when a White person hears a story of racial injustice and replies that the person must have done

something to deserve it (they were too angry or sensitive), concludes that the person is imagining racism and just needs to get over it, or responds with a deafening silence. A public form of racial gaslighting happens when those who have no friends of color and who have never had an honest conversation with a person of color retweet and repost things that are not true yet are uncritically accepted as fact.

MORAL INJURY

The term *moral injury* has emerged from trauma work with service women and men who participated in, witnessed, or failed to prevent acts that transgressed deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.¹⁶ Racism and systemic oppression can cause moral injury. Moral injury can be perpetrator-based or betrayal-based. Perpetrator-based moral injury is caused when people act in a way that goes against their deepest beliefs. Betrayal-based moral injury can occur when those in power—such as the government, law enforcement, the church, and parental figures—fail to act compassionately and justly. Rita Nakashima Brock writes, “Seeing someone else violate core moral values or feeling betrayed by persons in authority can also lead to a loss of meaning and faith.”¹⁷ In the end we are left disillusioned with distortions about God and others. When people of color experience a moral injury from racism, we may become angry at the injustice and also at God for not preventing it. We may question the existence of a loving God, lose trust in him, or isolate from the Lord and others.

Moral injury also happens when White brothers and sisters in Christ unwittingly behave like the world or the abusive and gaslighting husband. Rather than exhibiting the love of Christ, they follow a culture that categorizes people; turns a blind eye to slavery, lynching, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration; and now wants to build walls to keep people of color out. When the church fails to protect the most vulnerable, moral injury occurs because we

expect the church to be and do better. When this happens repeatedly, the church's failure to create bridges and denial of the reality of people of color has resulted in suspicion, anger, deep wounding, and moral injury for people of color like me.

It has been said that young kids learn about God from watching how their parental figures behave. A parent or guardian with unhealed racial trauma may have taught us lessons that damaged our early perception of God. I learned that if God was like my dad, then God was volatile, unpredictable, and would ultimately abandon me. I was left with a moral injury. I didn't trust God to be there for me when I most needed help.

THE HEALING JOURNEY BEGINS

The magnitude and impact of racism and racial trauma became more evident to me when I participated in a racial trauma conference in Alabama. Monuments, plaques, and other nods to slavery and the confederacy are displayed throughout the state capital, Montgomery. In the city center is the imposing Court Square fountain, the former location of Montgomery's slave market. A historic marker there states: "Slaves of all ages were auctioned, along with land and livestock, standing in line to be inspected. . . . In the 1850s, able field hands were brought for \$1,500; skilled artisans \$3,000. In 1859, the city had seven auctioneers and four slave depots."

Overlooking the city center is the recently opened National Memorial for Peace and Justice, conceived by Equal Justice Initiative's founder, lawyer and activist Bryan Stevenson. The memorial, also known as the National Lynching Memorial, is similar to the Holocaust Memorial, where the words of Deuteronomy 4:9 are prominently displayed: "But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the

days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children." The National Lynching Memorial is a sacred space of remembrance and repentance. The memorial exposes the truth that from 1877 to 1950 over four thousand African American men, women, and children were lynched, often by enraged White mobs, the KKK, and law enforcement. Inside the memorial structure suspended from the ceiling are eight hundred six-foot metal monuments, each engraved with the names of victims and the county where they were lynched. Some counties had one lynching while others had so many that the monuments were covered with names. I was overwhelmed and hoped that I would not locate Accomack County, Virginia, where my people are from. When I could no longer read the names and counties I sat in silence. I read placards along a wall that noted some of the reasons for the lynchings: A Black man scared a White girl; a Black farmer refused a White man's offering price for his cottonseed. I slowly walked outside on the grounds of the memorial where there are replicas of the monuments laid out like coffins. When I found Accomack County I was undone, stunned, and angry.

The next day I visited the Legacy Museum, located on the site of former slave-trading quarters. Down a dark corridor directly inside the museum is a startling scene. Holographic images of the enslaved kept in pens. As I approached the images, they literally spoke of their pain and horror: a grieving mom looking for her children, children separated from their mother crying, "Mama, Mama," and the sound of women wailing Negro spirituals. Further inside the museum I was overwhelmed by audio, visuals, memorabilia, and images of racism and racial trauma in shocking detail. More of my painful history laid bare: four hundred years—from slavery, Jim Crow segregation laws, mass incarceration—and the racial injustice continues. Some areas offer bits of hope: references

to the civil rights movement and a room with images of freedom-fighting heroes and heroines. Some names were familiar; others were new to me. As much as I needed to see hope, I also needed to see the painful truth. I held my emotions in check, but the whole experience was too much for me. I stumbled from the museum onto the sidewalk and hunched over trying to contain my sobs. Then I began to wail. I looked up and saw a White woman, also a conference participant, whose face was wet with tears. Our eyes locked; she gently shook her head and mouthed, “I have no words.”

My mind flooded with the words and stories I’d written of the different forms of racism and racial trauma. It’s one thing to write about it and another to see and feel it in graphic detail displayed in one place. For people of color, those definitions are more than words—they are trauma.

As painful as my experience was, it confirmed that the stories of racial trauma and oppression of African Americans and other people of color must be shared. In each successive chapter you will read of how racial trauma affected not just my friends of color and me but also our families and communities. We each bore one or more symptoms of racial trauma: fatigue, silence, rage, fear, lament, shame, and addiction. These stories are records of our journey on the road to healing and resilience. Each of the stories and the reflection and prayer prompts at the end of every chapter can help you to identify and treat the root and symptoms of racial trauma in your life. My hope is that this book will help you to make peace with your own story and obtain a renewed hope for the future.

REFLECTION AND PRAYER PROMPTS

1. How have you experienced racism and racial trauma throughout your life and in your family?
2. Who are the safe folks who can help you to process and pray through any pain, fear, or anger that has surfaced for you?
3. To the best of your ability, complete the genogram located at the end of the book. The genogram may help you to identify racial trauma passed down from your ancestors. If you have gaps in knowledge, you may need to get the oral history from your family members.

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