

EXCERPT



Permission to Be Black *My Journey with Jay-Z and Jesus*

February 23, 2021 | \$17, 192 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4727-3

In this book, A. D. "Lumkile" Thomason gives African American millennials permission and language to name their experiences with racial trauma. Written in a colorful, authentic, hip-hop-flavored style, this book combines serious Bible engagement with reflections on hip-hop, the arts, and pop culture.

"Redefining Blackness"

I'll say what many don't have the words, and often courage, to say. We need the soul-searching power of God's Spirit to flow through his people to value our lives or we won't make it. We, Black men and women, need the *permission to be Black*, permission never granted to us in light of America's history.

I dare not speak for all people of the African diaspora, but my Blackness needs to be redefined. I believe wisdom is insight that transcends all stories and people groups, but opinions and cultural mores do not.

After sitting with my therapist, Don Furious, I would reflect on Blackness and the mythical "Black card." The Black card is the imaginary license we give or take away from Black folks after measuring their level of struggle to make it in the world. It's based on skin hue, neighborhood, broken family narrative, and of course their knowledge of Black cultural icons, songs, and B movies. If you don't understand the importance of *Love Jones*, why are we even friends? (Just kidding.)

I realized that, as Black folks, we have never had a resource that spoke to our mental and social healing. We never had a resource to extinguish the attacks on our manhood and womanhood. I would argue that we have lived a life of fragmented healing. It is a life lived outside the identity of our full story. The pastor did his or her best, but Don Furious taught me that the spiritual component of people is not the totality of our humanity. There are some things you simply cannot pray away. You need others to help you heal, and this is a gift from God. God is calling us out of this myopic way of processing healing. The new way requires a cultural "quintuple consciousness" (with apologies to Du Bois). God is calling us from compartmentalization to an integrated lifestyle. People are longing for a community that embraces our narrative while demonstrating what it means to be mentally, physically, spiritually, and psychologically healthy.

In the past, when Black people have sought after this type of holistic health, they have been shunned and accused of "acting White," being sellouts, being "soft," and so on. For many Black people, pursuing holistic wellness of the mind, body, narrative, psychology, and soul has defaulted to "praying and shouting" for deliverance. Others cry for help through acts of violence and territory protection. In reality we need unconditional love, "skin time" with someone of the opposite sex (who is not looking for sex), and a therapist who understands the kingdom of heaven and its importance in the healing process.

Internalized trauma gives off a mental stench we have become accustomed to smelling. It's like the first time you smell chitlins in your grandma's kitchen. Unless you enjoy this delicacy, your first reaction is probably to wonder why anyone would cook or eat something that smells like ten men defecated into a pot of boiling water. However, after a while the smell fades because your nose has adjusted to the odor; you've become "nose-blind." I believe we as a people have become nose-blind to the horrid stench of internalized trauma, and it is time to get free.

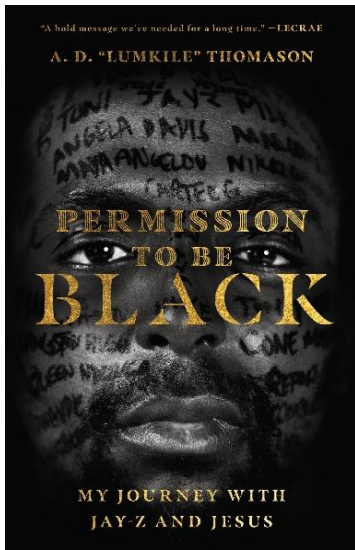


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*“Permission to Be Black is for the culture, and it’s a bold message we’ve needed for a long time. Rooted in Christ’s truth and in hip-hop’s honesty, A. D. reveals why we, as Black people, must embrace our pain and vulnerability in order to find the healing and courage that we need—and that only God can supply. I highly recommend this book. But this is much more than a book recommendation; for me *Permission to Be Black* is a must-have life guide for all.” —Lecrae, songwriter and recording artist.*

The ability to love and be loved is possible only once someone has gone through the healing process of redemption and full restoration. Without this experience, we cannot understand internal health in its purest form. Healing gives us clarity that helps us communicate and understand how to love and be loved. What does this have to do with “the tools,” a new Black card, and Jay-Z? Glad you asked.

Let’s go back to Jay’s song “Family Feud” and the line, “We all screwed, cause we never had the tools.” When I heard this, I felt like I’d discovered the Lost City of Gold—better yet, vibranium. My people and I have been screwed for a very long time because we have never had the tools to get healing. I would even argue we didn’t know they existed.

This revelation was followed by grief and excitement. I needed to get this truth—these tools—to my people who were in need, and if that meant doing it the Killmonger way, so be it. (Sorry, T’Challa!)

As I talked with Don Furious, it became evident that the legacy handed down to me was a belief that if you ignored trauma, it would go away. But strongholds don’t go away. Some commonly used phrases related to this practice were: “There are some things you don’t talk about,” “You just endure,” “You just keep moving,” “Ain’t nobody got time for that,” or “Let go, and let God.” These phrases were used to uphold a false sense of strength in Blackness. Meanwhile, our bodies internalized the pain while Satan—a real enemy—mentally beat us to a bloody pulp. How? Burying the pain was seen as strength, and it was shameful to admit you needed to talk about the depression caused by trauma. This is what we called “healing.” If I didn’t break the cycle, this unhealthy practice would be my legacy as well.

Black people of the African diaspora in America are walking around wounded, in pain, and in need of healing. Why? Because while we describe our Blackness as a symbol of strength and gumption, it has become a symbol of pain and evidence that we don’t know what we don’t know. (We also tend to stigmatize anyone who demonstrates the slightest knowledge of the tools we need for healing.)

Why am I writing this book? We are seeing a first for the people of the African diaspora. In 2020, information and relationships are brought to our fingertips with a simple swipe and touch of the word “search.” Information is no longer hidden, and the identities that have long been ascribed to the people of the African diaspora, my ancestors, are seen for the stereotypes and mental prisons they are. I am writing this book to set us free, to talk about the diverse creations we are, and to call us out of fragmented living into wholeness. Yes, God communicates these promises in his Word. Unfortunately, the misapplication of his Word—by White folks historically and Black people culturally—leaves many believing God is powerless in certain areas. It’s why many of us used Jay-Z to get through life in addition to the church. Since we lack the tools to help us understand and apply the love of God to the full person, many believe God has no answers. God is not impotent. He does have all the answers. We were just schooled incorrectly, both culturally and spiritually.

Consider Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s controversial 1965 report commissioned by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, the report has had far-reaching implications:

That the Negro American has survived at all is extraordinary—a lesser people might simply have died out, as indeed others have. . . . But it may not be supposed that the Negro American community has not paid a fearful price for the incredible mistreatment to which it has been subjected over the past three centuries.

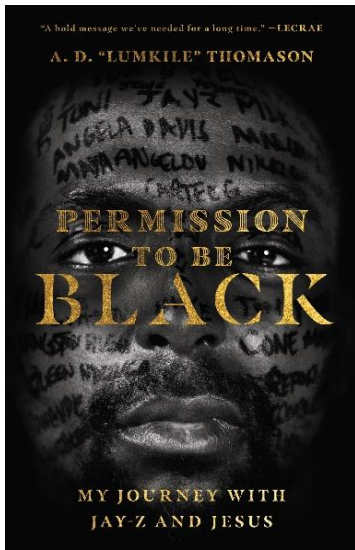


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“Whiteness has wreaked havoc on the lives of Black men with its violence and overall dehumanization. In *Permission to Be Black*, A. D. Thomason, with intimacy and vulnerability, pulls back the veil on this destruction and shows how Jesus makes a way to live in the fullness of life despite the trauma inflicted. I’m just a mediocre middle-class White guy, but I needed this message of Christ-centered transformation.”

—Shane Blackshear, host of the *Seminary Dropout* podcast

President Johnson responded to this report by saying, “For this, most of all, white America must accept responsibility. It flows from centuries of oppression and persecution of the Negro man. It flows from the long years of degradation and discrimination, which have attacked his dignity and assaulted his ability to produce for his family.” I would add that it has assaulted his ability to emote for the ultimate health of his family.

Generational trauma is passed down. Black folks in America have been exposed to this trauma since we came over in boats, and we’re still feeling it today. As the saying goes, hurt people hurt people. However, if that’s so, the opposite can also be true. Healed people can heal people. Healthy people who heal from these wounds need to share the tools they used to break the cycle of trauma. Historically, most of these tools could be accessed only if you had enough money—what we called “white money” when I was growing up. But with the digitization of the world and allies rising across ethnic lines, these tools are now in our reach. Through them God is setting many of my people free.

I am writing this book to redefine Blackness and establish a new “Black card,” so to speak. Carriers of this card will no longer be ashamed of admitting that past traumas have hurt them. They will embrace the truth that it is healthy to learn how to understand trauma and heal from it. Trauma isn’t just war flashbacks. It’s having to raise your siblings because you were fatherless. It’s having to raise yourself because your mother was dealing with her own crises. It’s having a father who left you and your siblings at home while he roamed the streets looking for a fix. It’s being neglected because you were raised by a single parent who dealt with their trauma in silence. Aside from my own experiences, I’ve heard countless stories like this from others.

For too long being able to provide for yourself and others in these situations has been seen as strength or a sign of health. This new card admits the pain, grieves it, and comes out of the darkness into an Eden, the first of its kind. It’s why Black folks in America both listen to Jay-Z and love Jesus (Yeshua), because both speak to our pain. Jay-Z spoke to the struggle of our everyday life and pain, while Jesus speaks to the spiritual freedom from this world we will experience when we are fully with him. For too long both have seemingly had nothing to do with each other because of compartmentalized thinking. I write to bring them together.

One thing I constantly see played out in the Black experience is the “weapon” of endurance. This served my people over centuries because of their inability to deal with their pain. In a community where no one had time to tend to anyone else’s pain, they internalized their traumas and didn’t know how to start the journey toward health. The new day of redemption is here.

Here’s to inner healing that seeks to match the smiles on the outside. Here’s to not being screwed, because I am going to show you the tools the real enemy—the adversary—does not want you to have. Here’s to redefining Blackness and freedom.

—Adapted from the preface, “Beyond Our Family Feud”



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"I hope this book can be a call to freedom: joy is a gift of God to creation. Admitting something has the ability to hurt you is not soft, it is courageous and reflects God's standard of healing and health." **Adam "Lumkile" Thomason**, author of *Permission to Be Black*

Confronting Racial Trauma With "Kingdom Therapy"

Adam "Lumkile" Thomason is a speaker, poet, and award-winning filmmaker. He has spoken around the nation and in places such as Sudan, South Africa, China, and Palestine. As an adjunct professor at Kilns College, he teaches on human rights, de-colonizing your faith, and filmmaking. Adam has a doctoral of Education degree (EdD/ThM). His dissertation focused on race relations, the slave trade, and reconciliation. He also has a master's in Biblical Studies. Adam has more than seventeen years of experience preaching and teaching the peace of Jesus in ethnically divided countries, cultures, and communities. He and his wife, Dawntoya, live in the Atlanta area with their family.

While many see a confident, six-foot-five black man when they interact with Adam, he has lived most of his life in fear and anguish, deeply wounded by encounters with violence, abandonment, and family tragedy. Hiding behind a tough exterior, Adam earned his "black card" but felt joyless inside. Even traveling around the globe to play professional basketball could not resolve his despair.

But in the art of Jay-Z, Adam discovered stirring honesty that gave voice to his own expressions of longing. And in the gospel of Jesus, he experienced the healing and salvation that had long evaded him. Now through what he calls "kingdom therapy," he's figuring out how to redefine the Jay-Z and Jesus that make up his blackness. Adam uses his artistry as a poet and storyteller to share how he confessed his internalized pain and embraced the liberating joy of Christ. He writes for millennials, emerging adults, and anyone else who's ready to acknowledge the reality of racial trauma and our need to confront it.



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