



Contending with Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome,¹ and dealing with the ongoing legacy of African Chattel enslavement!

Alton Bell explores how slavery continues to impact Black people's lives and what steps can be taken to counter its negative and detrimental effects

Introduction

Have you ever had a traumatic experience in your life? Perhaps you were involved in an accident, lost a close relative, or received bad news that had a profound impact on you for years after.

People who go through traumatic experiences are encouraged to seek help from professional counsellors and are encouraged attend a minimum of at least 6 counselling sessions to come to terms with their trauma.

Now imagine that your father was 'flogged' with a rope with bits of metal embedded in the fringes, and this occurred before his 'baby mother' and his children for no apparent reason. The beating was so severe that the beaters did not stop until blood gushed out of his back. After this flogging, he was expected to report for work in the cane fields the next morning at dawn. And if he did not show up, he would be beaten again and again and again. Now imagine a woman in her early 20s, she already has three children, one for the master, one for the overseer and another for the local man who received the flogging. She is desperate to form a lasting relationship, but she cannot say no to the Backra's² advances. Typically, before she turns 30 years old she will probably have 9 children for as many men in the locality.



This was the situation facing the majority of the slaves and their progeny on the plantations in the Caribbean where I was born. This harsh treatment meant that their life expectancy once they arrived on the plantation was a mere 7 years. Not only was the trauma of beatings not dealt with, the complete destruction of the family unit was one of the goals of the planters. They deliberately took men from one plantation to another to produce offspring. This practice was particularly prevalent after the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire in 1807. The 31 years³ between this time and the abolition of slavery itself, saw a massive increase in the breeding of children to work on the plantations in their effort to maintain the profit levels for their British landowners.

The trauma from slavery is passed down from generation to generation ad infinitum. This has never being identified let alone dealt with. Beating is a standing joke among the Caribbean Diaspora, as many parents still 'beat' their children today.

¹ This term was coined by Dr. Joy Degruy Leary an African American research psychologists.

² The Backra was a mixed race person produced from the liaison of the planter and local slave girls. He was called Backra since he was the one who beat the slaves until their backs were bleeding and hence raw.

³ One generation is about 30 years.