

Psychology from the Margins

Volume 4 *Applied Psychology and Minoritized Groups: Using History to Inform Present Practices*

Article 1

2022

Black Market: An Exploration of Black Mental Health in America

Alexandria D. Burroughs
Our Lady of the Lake University

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Recommended Citation

Burroughs, Alexandria D. (2022) "Black Market: An Exploration of Black Mental Health in America," *Psychology from the Margins*: Vol. 4, Article 1.

Available at: <https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/psychologyfromthemargins/vol4/iss1/1>

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Black Market: An Exploration of Black Mental Health in America

Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank Dr. Hendren for encouraging me to submit this article for publication. I would also like to show appreciation to Dr. Solorzano and Bria Myles for making edits and providing feedback on how to improve this article.

“To be African American is to be African without any memory and American without any privilege”--- James Baldwin

The story of the Black and African American community in America is one filled with trauma, horror, and some of the worst crimes against humanity ever committed. Despite the ubiquitous and glaring atrocities committed against the African American community, a cultural and racial plethora of Americans, including fellow members of the Black community, encourages society and the youth to move on and forget about the past without even acknowledging the lasting pain, trauma, racism, and influence such horror still has on the treatment of the African American community in this country. Racism has poisoned the soul and blood of American society since the Europeans first landed on the shores, and since then, America and Americans have invested much in denying it (Degruy, 2017). The denial of the dehumanization, blatant racism, and oppression of the Black community has become pathological, which has allowed the illness of racism to fester for over 400 years and is a major contributing factor to the current racial awakening the country is now facing.

Change is commonly met with resistance, especially in America, regarding racial justice. The current images and news stories of pushback, violence, and blatant acts of racism are a part of the vicious cycle this country has become accustomed to. Many Americans are unaware of this never-ending loop because the real disturbing history of this country and the lasting physical and psychological effects on the oppressed are rarely taught and discussed. DeGruy (2005) is a renowned researcher in psychology, and she is best known for her research on Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). PTSS is a term used to describe the multigenerational trauma and injustices experienced by African Americans - from the dawn of slavery to the recent deaths of Black citizens at the hands of police (Hinton, 2020). The multigenerational trauma and injustices are a primary contributing factor to many of the physical and psychological needs of the Black community. Still, at the same time, it contributes to the suspicions African Americans have toward the health profession. Throughout history, the medical profession mistreated the African American community by using them as test subjects and believing that Black people are strong, do not need health care, and have higher rates of schizophrenia than White people or other ethnicities (Hinton, 2020). Despite the lack of adequate and competent treatment from the health profession, the African American community still persevered from being three-fifths of a human to holding the most powerful position in the country. It is essential to recognize the resiliency of African Americans throughout the past 400 years of slavery and oppression and the emotional scars that the community still feels (Hinton, 2020). This review aims to explore the history and examine its effects on the racial disparities and treatment of the African American community in the mental health system.

Slavery (1619-1865)

In the 15th century, the Roman Catholic Church held much power. Many monarchs and influential political figures deferred to the church for advice on their political agendas. In the 1619 Project (Elliot & Hughes, 2019), which examines the legacy of slavery in America, they discussed how the Roman Catholic Church divided the world in two, giving Portugal a monopoly on trade in West Africa and Spain the right to colonize the New World. Pope Nicholas V gave Portugal exclusive rights to territories it claimed along the West African coast and the trade from those areas. The decree from the Pope gave the Portuguese the right to invade,

plunder and “reduce their persons to perpetual slavery.” At the same time, Spain invested in colonizing the New World quickly, so Queen Isabella argued that they needed enslaved people, and the Native Americans could not be enslaved because they were now Spanish subjects (Elliot & Hughes, 2019). Spain then entered into a contract with Portugal that authorized the direct shipment of captive Africans for trade. Other European nations (France, England, Denmark, etc.) joined in this trade of Africans because they sought economic and geopolitical power. These countries competed to colonize the New Worlds and, with these ambitions, created a new form of chattel slavery. It was based on race and would lead to some of the worst atrocities committed against humans in history (Degruy, 2017).

Forced labor was not uncommon during this time, but it was not previously based on race. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade or Middle Passage introduced a form of racialized slavery. African people were not seen as human but as commodities to be bought, sold, and exploited (Degruy, 2017). During the Middle Passage, hundreds of enslaved people were crammed into the bottom of ships, like cargo, less than two inches apart. They had to sit in their own and others' urine, feces, vomit, and menstruation for weeks and months with minimal time spent on deck. Many slaves died of disease or suicide by jumping over the edges of the boat. The inhumane treatment of the slaves grew worse throughout the years. When America won its independence after the Revolutionary War, slaves no longer counted as whole human beings. By law, they were now considered three-fifths human to reduce the number of representatives southern states could have in congress. The dehumanization of enslaved people led to horrific brutalization, weaponizing, and politicizing of religion, with many prominent men stating their opinions of Black people as facts. T. R. R. Cobbs, who was an American lawyer, politician, and author in 1858, said,

"This inquiry into the physical, mental, and moral development of the Negro race seems to point them clearly fitted for a laborious class. Their physical frame is capable of great and long exertion. Their mental capacity renders them incapable of successful self-development and yet adapts them for the direction of a wiser race. Their moral character renders them happy, peaceful, contented, and cheerful in a status that would break the spirit and destroy the energies of the Caucasian or Native American".

T.R.R. Cobbs' belief was similar to Aristotle's idea of a ‘natural slave.’ Aristotle believed that humans could reason, which allows us to regulate our appetites and impulse, but those who do not have this capacity for rational deliberation would be ‘natural slaves’ (Lowe, 2019). People who lack this ability need to be directed by those who can rationally deliberate. Aristotle argues that owning such people would be just because someone without the capacity for rational forethought would choose poorly if left to their own devices, so slavery benefits them (Lowe, 2019).

Mental Health Treatment and Diagnosis

The popular belief that African Americans were the ‘natural slave’ permeated the nation but became wildly popular in the south. This point of view further cemented White supremacy as the desired model and the culture of African Americans as the subhuman underclass. During this time, enslaved people endured whippings and rape, being bought and sold, their families broken apart, starvation, and being subjected to medical experiments and surgeries without anesthesia.

In addition, laws made it illegal for slaves to learn how to read or write and legally enabled enslavers to kill their slaves as punishment (Degruy, 2017). Any things that the slave population was subjected to would cause mental illness in any human, but because they were not considered human, leading physicians at the time debated if slaves could even experience mental illness.

John Galt, a prominent pre-Civil War physician and the physician of the Eastern Lunatic Asylum in Williamsburg, Virginia, believed that Blacks were immune to mental illness (Davis, 2018). Galt hypothesized that enslaved Africans could not develop mental illness in the immunity hypothesis because they did not own any property, engage in commerce, or participate in civic affairs such as voting or holding office (Davis, 2018; Umeh, 2019). During this time, women and children could also not partake in these activities, making the only population at risk of developing mental illness White men. According to John Galt's hypothesis, the risk of "lunacy" would be the highest in people emotionally exposed to the stress of profit-making (Umeh, 2019).

Not everyone agreed with this view about enslaved Africans and mental illness. Dr. Benjamin Rush, the father of American Psychiatry, was the leading medical professional during the years following the American Revolution. He disagreed with John Galt's hypothesis about the absence of mental illness among enslaved Black people. Dr. Rush believed that the enslaved suffered from abnormal behaviors called "negritude" (Umeh, 2019), which was due to having dark skin (Warner, 2021). He believed it was a type of leprosy and the only cure was to become White (Warner, 2021). This goal to become White could only happen through marriage, so Dr. Rush strongly argued against the intermarriage between races to prevent negritude from spreading beyond the Black population (Umeh, 2019). There is no record of Dr. Rush treating anyone for this disease or how he came to this conclusion (Umeh, 2019). However, something that is not often discussed when it comes to the contribution of Benjamin Rush to Black mental health is that he was a leading figure in mental health reform and a co-founder of the first anti-slavery society in America (Jackson, 2008). Dr. Rush observed that Africans became insane soon after entering the toils of perpetual slavery. It is unknown why this observation often gets lost when discussing early views of mental illness and African Americans. Still, it is integral in understanding the traumatic impact enslavement and oppression have on Africans and their descendants (Jackson, 2008).

Other prominent medical professionals at the time promoted mental illnesses such as Drapetomania and Dysaesthesia Aethiopia. Drapetomania was a disease that caused the enslaved population to flee their plantations (Warner, 2021). In other words, trying to escape to freedom was pathologized as a mental illness. Dysaesthesia Aethiopia was defined as a disease that caused a state of dullness and lethargy, which would now be considered depression. Many modern-day historians have recognized that Drapetomania and Dysaesthesia Aethiopia are understandable responses to the conditions of enslavement (Umeh, 2019). Still, White medical physicians during these times assumed that these actions and behaviors were manifestations of mental illness (Umeh, 2019). The belief that these behaviors in slaves are manifestations of mental illness is another example of the view that T.R.R. Cobbs spoke to that the 'negro' is happy and content in their position of slavery because that is their natural station in life.

Dr. Samuel Cartwright was a prominent Louisiana physician, leading authority on the medical care of 'negroes', and a pro-slavery physician who believed he could cure the two diseases. He even believed in early intervention to help prevent the two illnesses which involved whipping the slaves that reflected sulky and dissatisfied behavior (Jackson, 2008). Dr. Cartwright also encouraged the overseers to use whipping as the primary source of treatment

when the disease progressed to running away. One of the most obscure claims from Dr. Cartwright was when he noted that a symptom of Drapetomania and Dysaesthesia Aethiopia were skin lesions commonly on the back (Jackson, 2008). Historians now argue that the whipping most likely caused the skin lesions. Still, Cartwright failed to recognize the connection between the emotional states of the enslaved and the treatment he recommended for their condition (Umeh, 2019). It is hard to believe that such a prominent and respected physician could not make the correlation between the two, so it begins to prompt some to wonder if there was some presence of cognitive dissonance amongst White physicians at the time. Early White Americans believed themselves to be good Christians during this time, yet they committed some of the worst crimes against humanity (DeGruy, 2017). Maybe not making the correlation between skin lesions and whipping, unconsciously or consciously, was his way of reconciling his belief in himself and the treatment he was advocating. This cognitive dissonance was further shown by Dr. Cartwright's belief that "Negroes should be kept in a submissive state and treated like children with care, kindness, attention, and humanity, to prevent and cure them from running away" (Jackson, 2008). This thought contradicts Dr. Cartwright's earlier cruel method of prevention of whipping, but he still admitted that enslaved people need to be treated with kindness and humanity. His conflicting thoughts are evident in his two proposals for preventative treatment.

During the Pre-Civil War era, asylums became a means to treat the mentally ill. However, these asylums barred enslaved treatment even though many prominent physicians believed that slaves suffered from mental diseases like Drapetomania and Dysaesthesia Aethiopia. Mental health experts during this time believed that housing Blacks and Whites in the same facilities would detrimentally affect the healing of Whites (Umeh, 2019). Because slaves were not welcomed into the asylums, they were housed outdoors near the institutions or jails. Some accounts report enslaved children being cared for in the yards of the asylums (Jackson, 2008). Many asylums were independently run and ran without government funding and oversight. They frequently refer to the children as inmates and were commonly misdiagnosed and wrongly accused of crimes which ultimately extended their stay in the asylum yards and exposed them to more mistreatment (Umeh, 2019). While the children were in these facilities, they were responsible for hard manual labor on farms owned by or near the institutions. Does this then beg the question of were these children even mentally ill? Severe mental illness that warrants asylum admission disrupts everyday functioning. If these children had a mental illness, they would not be able to carry out the task required in hard manual labor. If children were wrongfully diagnosed, it would have likely benefited local farm owners and the institutions. Therefore, there was a motive to diagnose these children wrongfully. Yet again lies another example of the misdiagnosing and abuse of the African American community.

Coping Strategies

Despite all the hardships, oppression, and brutalization the enslaved community faced, they still managed to find ways of coping with the stressors of enslavement. One of the main ways the slave community released stress was through religion. While the early White colonizers weaponized religion to support the institution of slavery, the Black community used it to deal with anxiety and uncertainty and as a method to achieve aspirations. Religion represented a method of coping that was both personal and community-based (Gordon, 2014). When the enslaved community would attend worship services, they would sing and dance and often enter a

state of flow (Campo, 2015). Today, this form of worship is present in the Black community through outward actions of praise like ‘catching the spirit’ or ‘speaking in tongues.’ Another coping mechanism that the enslaved people used was community. The enslaved often came together in death by holding funeral services for the deceased. At these services, they would gather and offer up their personal stories or memories of the dead, and they used this to let each other know that they were human and loved (Campo, 2015). In addition, older women who could no longer work the fields would help with childcare, and slaves would meet late at night away from the enslavers and overseers to have venting sessions. Here, they would vent all their frustrations, fears, and worries to people who knew what they were going through (Campo, 2015).

Ownership was scarce for the slave community, mainly because they were considered property, but they still used it to cope. To gain just small amounts of ownership, many enslaved people would sell their surplus of goods, rent out their services, and save up the little money they had to use for their escape journey. Ownership gave the enslaved back a sense of control and autonomy over their lives (Campo, 2015). The slaves were also allotted minimal amounts of food, so they used the appropriation of food to cope with starvation. The slaves sometimes resorted to stealing, hunting, fishing, or relying on their gardens for more food options (Campo, 2015). Enslaved people spent most of their day performing hard, strenuous work and often in sweltering weather. Their food was not enough to sustain them, especially in their daily work. Still, the African American community found another way to survive deplorable conditions. Lastly, the enslaved community would use evasion as another coping mechanism, meaning enslaved people would often run away (Drapetomania, according to some leading physicians), cause self-injury or fake injuries to get out of their forced duties on the plantations (Campo, 2015; Gordon, 2014). The resourcefulness and resilience the slaves showed during these traumatizing times will continue to permeate the Black community as they endure several more years of oppression and brutalization.

Reconstruction and Black Codes (1865-1890)

After much activism from people such as the famous former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1864, abolishing slavery in America. After abolishing slavery, the African American community was not focused on revenge or violence; they were just focused on their freedom and finally having the opportunity to build something for their families (DeGruy, 2017), but White southerners and now the fallen confederacy had different plans. Slavery ended, but the ideas and beliefs about Black people were still very present. Blacks were subhuman and the natural, subservient race, so things needed to stay that way even if slavery was no longer legal. This urge to keep the ‘status quo’ ushered in a new era of oppression that was no better than slavery called The Black Codes (DeGruy, 2017).

Black Codes were laws created by southern lawmakers that made it almost impossible for the Black community to move up in society. According to Frederick Douglass, Black Codes merely replaced slavery with "some other name" (Proceedings of the Colored Peoples Convention, 1865). Black Codes severely limited the economic rights and social mobility of African Americans. The laws maintained a racist social system by restricting African Americans' ability to speak freely, travel, and conduct business, denying them the chance to rent or buy land, and criminalizing loitering and joblessness (History.com, 2010). Some historians reported

incidents where four Black men were standing outside a business just having a conversation, they could be arrested for loitering (National Geographic, 2022). In the minds of the majority, the natural nature of the Black man was to work, so he always needed to be working. Criminalizing such menial things as loitering and joblessness also gave the powers that be the opportunity to put Black people back into perpetual slavery due to a loophole in the Emancipation Proclamation. The Emancipation Proclamation abolished slavery but still allowed for the practice of slavery as a punishment for a crime. Allowing slavery to still exist within the criminal justice system marks the beginning of a long, complicated, and traumatizing relationship between law enforcement and the Black community.

Debt was also another way that Black Codes moved around the outlawing of slavery. Black Codes made it legal for Blacks only to hold jobs as farmers or servants (their jobs during slavery) unless they paid an annual \$10 to \$100 tax (Nittle, 2020). At this time, \$10 to \$100 was a lot of money, especially for the Black community, who had to sign annual labor contracts to ensure they received the lowest pay possible. Because they were getting paid the bare minimum, they often had to take out loans to support their families, but the loans would be approved with high-interest rates, making it almost impossible to pay them off. Once indebted, Black people were given the option to go into indentured servitude to pay off their debt, but they rarely earned their freedom back. Black people would even be sold off into perpetual indentured servitude on auction blocks, which was no different from those used to buy and sell enslaved people before the war.

Asylums

Despite the Black community's hardships after slavery and the calls to end Black Codes from opposing political figures due to their blatant disrespect for abolishing slavery, the mental health system still did not provide adequate care for African Americans. There was a rise in Black mentally ill patients during this era, but they were primarily housed in areas like poorhouses and jails. T.O. Powell, a superintendent of the Georgia Lunatic Asylum, believed that the rise of insanity amongst Blacks was attributed to their three decades of freedom (Jackson, 2008). Again, the belief commonly held about Black people at this time was that they were subhuman and the 'natural slave.' They were a race of people that needed to be controlled and directed by a superior, more intelligent race (Caucasians). Powell believed that because Blacks no longer had anyone keeping them in order, the freedom caused little control over appetites and passions, leading to excesses and vices (Jackson, 2008). Powell's hypothesis is another example of how the attitudes and beliefs about Black people were very slow to change after the Civil War.

Prejudice and racism continued to permeate throughout the treatment in the asylums. Blacks and Whites could not be housed together because it undermined the mental health of Whites (Jackson, 2008). Segregated mental health facilities were popular in both Northern and Southern asylums. The southern states of North Carolina (1875) and Virginia (1885) were the first two states to open colored asylums. However, when these asylums were opened, it was done without much consideration for the family members of the patients. These asylums were far from the Black community, making it very difficult for family members and loved ones to visit (Jackson, 2008). The primary treatment for African American patients was hard physical labor within the asylums. It was common for the patients to have jobs during this era, but the Black patients would hold the more strenuous and physical employment.

Reconstruction marked an era that strived for new beginnings and hopes for the African American community, but instead, they were met with empty promises and more systematic oppression. It was a time of criminalization and harshness that led to even more misdiagnosis and disregard for the Black community's current circumstances. The mental health system failed the Black community during slavery. It continued to fail them during reconstruction, leaving more space for the traumas faced by the Black community to grow, fester, and continue to the next generation.

Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement (1890-1964)

Outrage in the North over the Black Codes enabled growing support for the Presidential Reconstruction Act that got rid of Black Codes and gave Black people a voice in government for the first time in American history. African Americans won elections in the southern states and even the U.S Congress. However, this was very short-lived because in less than a decade, resistant forces—including the Ku Klux Klan—would reverse the changes written by Radical Reconstruction in a violent backlash that restored White supremacy in the South. This new era would be known as Jim Crow.

The era of Jim Crow gave rise to the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), who were encouraged and seen as local heroes that restored balance and normalcy in the south (DeGruy, 2017). During this time, lynching rose to an all-time high. Blacks of all ages and genders were lynched for anything, including looking at or speaking to a White person wrong, whistling at a White woman, false accusations, or simply being a successful Black person. Lynchings during these times were also viewed as important community events. Schools allowed early dismissal for the kids; people would leave work early or take off and gather at the lynchings like it was a community celebration. Pictures of Black bodies hanging from trees and bridges, or being burnt to a crisp with a large group of White people gathered around smiling, were put on postcards that said, "I went to a Negro barbeque." One of the most gruesome facts about lynchings is that the body parts such as ears, fingers, or toes of the burnt corpses of Black people would be cut off and sold as souvenirs (Stevenson, 2017).

The terrorizing of the Black community did not stop with lynching. White Supremacists also resorted to bombings and massacres. One of the most well-documented, but not often talked about, massacre is the Tulsa, Oklahoma Massacre of 1921. According to the Tulsa Historical Society (2022), Tulsa was home to one of the most affluent and successful Black communities in the early 20th century. It was full of entrepreneurs and wealth for the Black community. Still, because of an accusation that a Black man assaulted a White woman, the White citizens in this area took it upon themselves to seek justice which resulted in the bombing and killing of an entire community. The businesses were destroyed and never recovered, and hundreds of Black people lost their lives. This type of violence was common anywhere the African American community found success. Bombings were the most frequent and violent in Birmingham, Alabama, nicknamed "Bombingham." Many Blacks ran to the north or the west to escape the violence of the south, but once again, they were met with more empty promises (Stevenson, 2017).

Segregation Stress Syndrome

Thompson-Miller (2012) investigated the collective long-lasting psychological effects of racial violence during Jim Crow. The research project documented the experiences of nearly 100 elderly African Americans who lived through the Jim Crow south. They shared that they dealt with daily anxiety, fear, humiliation, shame, and stress. From the collective stories, the symptoms of segregation stress syndrome are explored for the chronic, enduring, harrowing experiences and responses to the time of Jim Crow. Segregation stress syndrome is not based on an individual but on the collective experience. It aims to help explain the experience of living with racism and discrimination coupled with knowing the stigma of race influences your experiences and has consequences. The symptoms of segregation stress syndrome are similar to PTSD documented in psychiatric literature. Still, it differs because the traumatic experience was not a one-time occurrence but sustained over time in the African American community.

The racial violence that occurred during Jim Crow was a form of systematic chronic stress, which has a detrimental impact on a person's psychological well-being (Thompson-Miller, 2012). During this time, the Black community had to live in fear of lynchings, church bombings, sexual assault, and much more, and the knowledge that they were despised and hated because of their skin color describes as insidious trauma (Wasco, 2003). Insidious trauma is devaluing an individual's social status because of a characteristic of their identity. It can start as early as birth and may persist throughout a lifetime (Wasco, 2003). The trauma faced by the African American community was constant and continuous. Mothers lived in perpetual fear for their sons; bodies would hang from trees on regular walks to school, and the fear of rape persisted for many women and young girls. Amir and Sol (1999) stated, "being exposed to one type of traumatic event was associated with increased psychological distress, but being exposed to multiple types of traumatic events was associated with lowering of distress" (1999, p. 139). This phenomenon might help explain the ability of the African American community to endure traumatizing events but still be able to function.

Faced with constant brutalization and living in fear for one's life, the Black community again rallied together and mobilized to fight for their freedom. Led by figures like Martin Luther King Jr., Ida B. Wells, Malcolm X, and many more, the Black community took to the streets in protest and used their voices to demand change. They forced government officials to make an immediate change and were not deterred by the violent backlash they were met with from law enforcement. The Black community stood up and told the world that their lives mattered. Their bravery, strength, resourcefulness, audacity, and courage should have been celebrated, but instead, it was pathologized by the mental health profession and the media.

Protest Psychosis

During the Civil Rights Movement, America saw schizophrenia go from a disease that mainly affected middle-class White women to primarily affecting Black males. From 1930-to 1950, schizophrenia was a disease marked by American culture in a mainstream way through media and magazine articles that encouraged identification with specific groups of people (unhappy middle-class housewives) while rendering other groups invisible (Metzel, 2009). The definition and view of schizophrenia began to change in the 1960s when the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual II (DSM- II) was written, and racial tensions were high. During this time, mental health professionals researched White versions of schizophrenia and Black versions of the disease. Growing numbers of research articles from the 1960s and 1970s reported that Black forms of the illness were more hostile and aggressive than were White ones (Metzel, 2009). Civil

Rights Activism began to be labeled as pathology. Mainstream White newspapers described schizophrenia as a condition of angry Black masculinity. They warned of crazed Black schizophrenic killers on the loose while the FBI added “Negro Mental Patient to 10 most Wanted List” (Metzel, 2009). Advertisements for schizophrenia medication began to run ads with African symbols and pictures of Black men waving their fists in the air with the words “Assaultive and Belligerent” written across the top of the page. Schizophrenia went from a disease of docility to one of rage and aggression, making this the first time that aggression was used in the definition of schizophrenia (Metzel, 2009).

Walter Bromberg and Frank Simon (1968) wrote an article describing schizophrenia as a “protest psychosis.” They described this protest psychosis as a disease whereby Black men developed “hostile and aggressive feelings” and “delusional anti-whiteness” after listening to the words of Malcolm X, joining the Black Muslims, or aligning with groups that preached militant resistance to White society (Metzel, 2009). According to them, the rhetoric of the Black Power Movement drove negro men to insanity, and they required psychiatric treatment because their symptoms threatened not only their sanity but the social order of White America. Even though they suggested and advocated for negro men to get psychiatric help, they believed that the treatment should not come from White practitioners because the White health professional would evoke hostility in the negro man, therefore, putting the White man in danger, so negroes should only be treated by other negro professionals (Bomberg and Simon, 1968). The beliefs of Bromberg and Simon spread throughout the field, and it became a widespread consensus in several different articles that negroes developed delusions, grandiosity, magical thinking, and dangerous, aggressive feelings when they participated in civil rights sit-ins (Metzel, 2009). Blacks with schizophrenia rated higher than Whites on a set of hostility variables due to delusional thoughts that their civil rights were being compromised. It is important to note that these beliefs and published articles based all their conclusions on personal prejudices and skewed data results (Metzel, 2009).

These widespread false narratives led to the rise in diagnosing schizophrenia amongst the Black community—common misdiagnoses of Black men resulted in a spike in the Black populations of psychiatric hospitals. The results of these times are still felt today in the Black community. Black men are more often misdiagnosed with schizophrenia than any mood disorder (Metzel, 2009). So here we are again, at the end of another era in Black history, and the mental health field has still failed to provide African Americans with adequate and competent mental health treatment. The lack of competent mental health services provided to the African American community led to another era of time without fully processing the horrors and trauma they endured during the years of Jim Crow.

The Present (1964-2022)

After the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, precisely 100 years after slavery, the era of Jim Crow ended. Many believe the African American community entered a period that was the first era of freedom for Black people. Even though this era is synonymous with progression and reduced acts of blatant racism such as lynching, bombings, and segregation, it is still a time full of oppression and systematic racism. After the Civil Rights movement, the African American community went through the Black Power Movement to take on issues of systematic oppression that were still present after Jim Crow. During this time, many Black leaders were

assassinated. Fred Hampton, leader of the Black Panthers, was murdered in his bed by the FBI, which was not proven until recently, contributing more to the Black community's mistrust of the government (Roos, 2021).

In addition, the government passed the Fair Housing Act and Affirmative Action to compensate for the years of discrimination. The Fair Housing Act was passed to protect minorities from discrimination based on race when buying and renting properties. However, this led to many Blacks moving into the cities and urban areas (History.com, 2021 & Britannica, 2022). Whites moved away to the suburbs taking the jobs and money with them, resulting in concentrated populations of minorities in low socioeconomic communities in the inner cities. Over the years, these inner-city communities have been subjected to extreme poverty, contributing to the rise of drugs and the crack epidemic of the 1980s. This epidemic would lead to the war on drugs and mass incarceration that targeted the Black community and disproportionately incarcerated Black people at a higher rate than their White counterparts, which led to many years of police brutality toward the Black community and the killing of several unarmed Black people at the hands of the police (Britannica, 2020). With the advancement of technology, more of these incidents are being recorded and brought to society's attention, resulting in a new movement, Black Lives Matter. Through all of the systematic oppression, racism, and red tape, the stories of Barack Obama (the first Black President) and Kamala Harris (the first Black and woman vice president) were still able to happen. After years of brutalization, dehumanization, and constant efforts from the majority to keep the African American community at a subhuman level, two people of African American descent were still able to rise to the country's two highest positions, which is the ultimate testament to the resilience of the Black community. Even though African Americans have learned to deal with and succeed through struggle, how have generations of unhealed trauma-affected Black mental health today?

Historic trauma disrupts adaptive social and cultural patterns. It transforms them into maladaptive ones that cause severe breakdowns in social functions that may last for many years, decades, or even generations (White Hat, 2001). Black people are 20% more likely to report severe psychological distress but less likely to seek help (Umeh, 2019). Today suicide rates in African American children aged 5 to 11 years have increased steadily since the 1980s and are now double those of their Caucasian counterparts (Phillips, 2020). Black men made up 80% of attempted suicides among African Americans in 2015, and these numbers are on the rise (Gara, Minsky, Silverstein, Miskimen, & Strakowski, 2019). Even though there is a clear need for mental health services in the Black community, there are still a lot of barriers keeping them from accessing these services.

Barriers

Financial barriers faced by the Black community are a significant obstacle keeping them from accessing more services, whether from a lack of insurance coverage or affordable options (Marx, 2019). The African American community also still has a lot of stigmas and cultural beliefs surrounding mental health that prevents them from accessing the much-needed resources (Marx, 2019). A still prevalent view from slavery in the Black community is the "we can pray it away." Religion still plays a significant role in the coping strategies of the African American community, so often Jesus is the answer (Nguyen, 2020), and sometimes people do not think the two (Jesus and mental health services) can co-exist. The Black community has also internalized

this idea that "we are strong, and we don't get mental illness" and "we thrive in the struggle." These are staples in the Black narrative that have seemed to grow more cemented after years of their pleas for justice and equality have gone unanswered and ignored.

As for the mental health field, there are still some improvements that can and need to be made to finally give the African American community the services they have not gotten for generations. First, awareness must be brought to the lack of diversity within the mental health field. Many Black people prefer to talk to someone that looks like them and understands their experience, but, in 2014, only 2% of the American Psychological Association (APA) members identified as Black (Bryant, 2022). The lack of representation can make it hard for those from the African American community to seek help to find the support they need when they need it. This lack of diversity also contributes to poor competency among non-Black clinicians. Not all clinicians are trained to be aware or curious about how culture, race, and ethnicity impact a person's mental and emotional well-being (Bryant, 2022). Frequently, Black Americans explain the nuances of things connected to their race when it comes to non-Black clinicians. Constant explaining can sometimes lead to negative therapeutic experiences and discontinuation of services. Second, let's acknowledge "Whiteness" as a foundation of mental health care (Bryant, 2022). Most of the psychological training that therapists receive is based on the experiences of White people's norms, values, and beliefs which can influence the competency of non-Black Therapists (Bryant, 2022). In addition, the DSM-5 does not account for cultural factors that influence symptomatology and diagnoses that speak to cultural issues such as racial discrimination or acculturation. These are just a few of the many things that can be done to improve the relationship between the mental health field and the African American community.

Conclusion

From the conception of modern-day America, the market for Black lives catapulted the United States to the economic powerhouse it is today. This review aimed to explore the history and examine the historical roots of racial disparities and the treatment of the African American community in the mental health system. In the current exploration of Black mental health, we learn that the attitudes and treatment of the Black community (social and medical) directly result from slavery. The Black Market remains a primary yet underserved source of economic power because the ideas of racism and superiority still permeate throughout the fiber of modern American society due to the lack of accountability and refusal, to be honest about past atrocities. Because of this, very few resources have been put into the Black community to help heal emotional scars and generational trauma. The pioneers of the mental health field often ignored the brutal experiences of the African American community throughout history and even today, which has resulted in generations of unhealed trauma, misdiagnosis, and mistreatment. After reviewing, highlighting, and acknowledging the authentic and honest history of the Black community, there is hope that the process of atonement can begin and serve as one of the first steps in providing culturally competent services to the African American community. It's time to discuss tangible ways to put these conversations into meaningful action.

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University of New Mexico. Albuquerque, New Mexico