

Why focus on black men healing as way to empower the community?

Written by Guest commentary, Samuel Simmons, Jr., ADC and Minister James Muhammad
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Whether right or wrong, when discussing the ills and disparities within the African American community, many things are discussed, such as violence, drugs, poverty, and emotional, physical, spiritual health. However, there are two that come to the forefront, especially in the urban community: racism and the Black men's role.

Let's start with one that many have difficulty with, no matter Black, white or brown and that is the issue of racism. One group wants to focus on what many believe is America's original sin, chattel slavery and they believe that pervasive structural racism still exists. Historians agree that chattel slavery's destruction of family relationships to this day undermines African American's ability to form healthy relationships and families. (Joy Degruy 2005) Another group wants to believe that racism isn't that big of a problem and besides we have a Black president.

The unrelenting issues pertaining to Black men's emotional attachment, emotional regulation, and self-concept difficulties give cause for mainstream society and causal observers to ask, "What's wrong with them? Why is it that nearly 1 in 3 Black men will spend time behind bars during his lifetime? Why is it that Black men die six years earlier than white men? Why are Black men so angry? Why are Black males, young and old, committing suicide at an unprecedented alarming rate? It's not difficult to understand why, when one considers the holocaust of chattel slavery and it's enduring injury that's gone untreated up to today. The issue of power and who holds it remains everybody's hot button. Life expectancy is one of the best indicators of power and suicide and one of the best indicators of powerlessness.

Over the last thirty plus years many of the brightest in and outside the community have addressed these questions. But, there are many Black men who feel that the various systems around them have since failed and/or excluded them. Consequently, these men are mis-educated/undereducated, have poor emotional regulation, possess little or no work experience, are female-dependent, and have little or no healthy involvement in the productive activities that foster real self-esteem and hope for a future. Invariably, these men come from a multigenerational experience of trauma, violence, powerlessness and poverty in their domestic, community, and social settings. Even those African American men, who appear to be succeeding in the mainstream, are trying to survive in a nation where they're viewed as angry, aggressive and dangerous brutes.

When the Black man suffers, everybody in the family and community suffers tenfold. It's been said that men are responsible to cultivate hope. The presupposition is that he, himself, has hope; for how can he cultivate that which he does not have? And how can he heal from pain that he refuses to acknowledge because he believes to do so is unmanly? Unwittingly and helplessly, Black men pass their pain on to the women and children in their lives and the cycle of slavery's devastating pain continues and it's profits soars. And yet, there are those who still ask, "Why the focus on Black men healing?"

African American men are not responsible for America's original sin and the pervasive structural racism built upon its foundation, but we better take the responsibility for our HEALING from its devastating impact upon us as Black men, so we can be healthy crusaders with our women in rebuilding our families, vital communities and capable children. Without healing from individual and intergenerational trauma it's hard to fully experience a relationship that reflects respect for

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all the people in the relationship --including the children-- and move forward like Sankofa towards becoming a safe and healthy part of the community.

On June 25th, 2009 a conference entitled "Community Empowerment Through Black Men Healing" will be held at Sabathani Community Center, 310 East 38th Street, Minneapolis, from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm to address the question, "Why focus on Black men healing as way to empower the community?" The mission of this conference is to bring together professionals, community leaders, black, white, brown men and women, anyone who is interested in an alternative way of thinking about community building by addressing black male pain. Yes, Black men should be held accountable by Black men, but our mantra must be Compassionate Accountability & Straight-up Healing i.e. C.A.S.H., so we can enrich our own lives and empower our communities.

For more information about the conference or authors go to www.healingbrothers.com .