

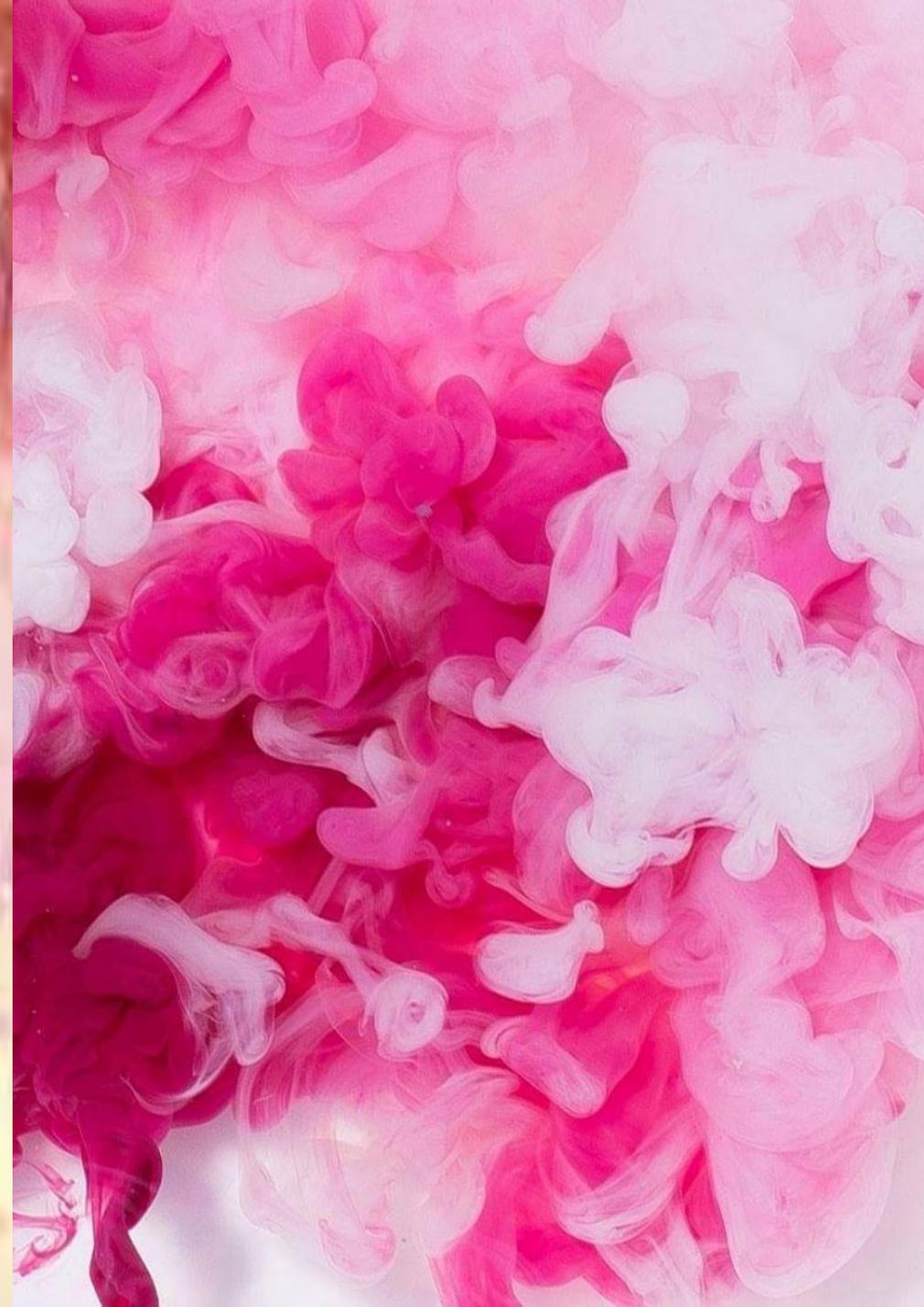
The Strong Black Woman

How a Myth Endangers the Physical
and Mental Health of Black Women

Marita Golden



*Guide on:
Excerpts, Themes &
Narrative*





We Where the Mask

“Twice as likely syndrome” that resulted in Blacks being twice as likely to develop a majority of the most lethal health conditions, from diabetes to obesity to stroke to heart attack (17). “I was a strong Black woman but clearly not strong enough (19).”

Acknowledgement

(3) leading causes of death for African American women are heart attack, cancer, & stroke

3 x more likely to die of a heart attack as White women

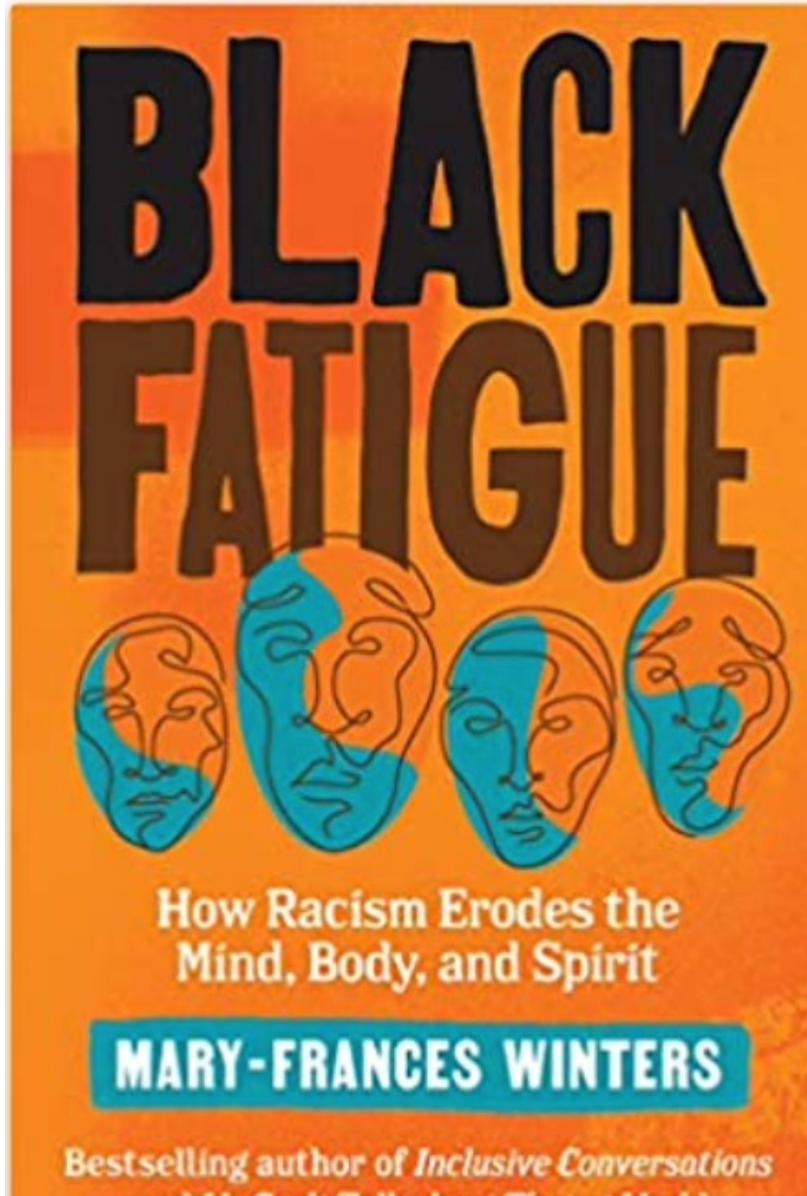
Regardless of age, class status = disproportionate rates of obesity, high blood pressure, life stressors, Diabetes

Don't get annual checkups,

(22).

The Determinants of Strong Black Woman Syndrome

- Scientific studies show a direct link between racial discrimination & chronic disease. The stress induced by coping with racism becomes biologically embedded & literally flows through the body like blood.
- The mortality rate for babies born to Black mothers with a master's or doctoral degree is far worse than the mortality rate for babies born to White mothers with less than an eighth-grade education.
- Black women are slightly less likely to have breast cancer, yet 40 percent more likely to die from it.
- Four out of five Black women are overweight or obese.
- One in four middle-aged Black women has diabetes.
- African-Americans are twice as likely to die from heart disease & stroke as Whites.
- The fastest growing segment of the population developing Alzheimer's & other dementia related illnesses are Black women.
- (35).



The Determinants of Strong Black Woman Syndrome Cont.

- *Psyches harmed by Power of Narrative. Stories told About Us that have Saved & Harmed Us & Sometimes Sabotaged Us. The Strong Black Woman. The Angry Black Woman. The Black Woman who says yes to everyone but herself. The Black Woman who believes Jesus & Only Jesus is the Answer to Every Problem, Who Rejects the Idea that therapists, doctors, self-care are also apart of Jesus's plan. The Superwoman. The Invincible Superwomen. We have to be strong. We have good reason to be angry. We say yes over & over to our families because the world so often tells them no (22-23).*

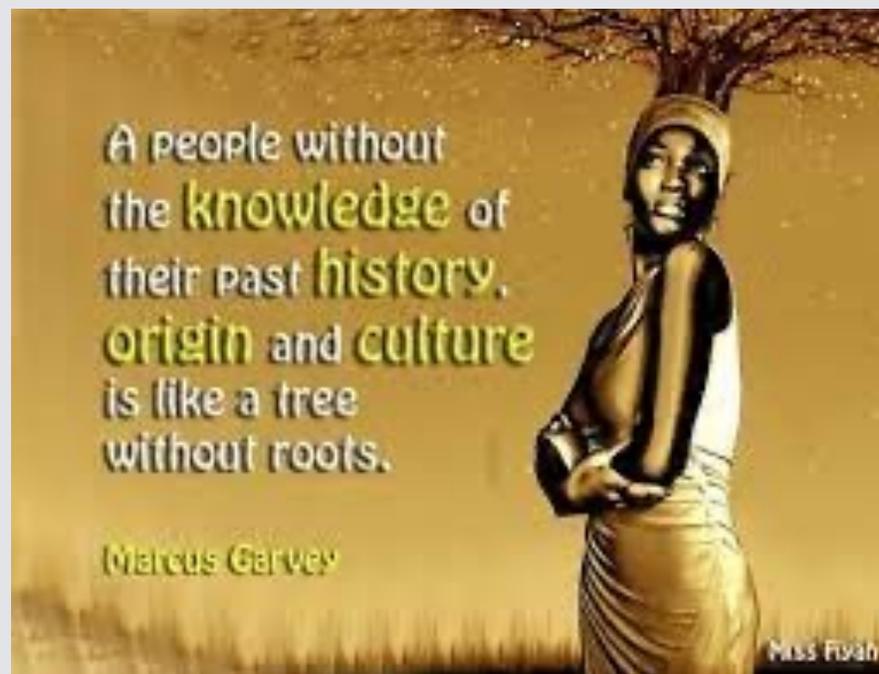
NEWLY REVISED AND UPDATED EDITION

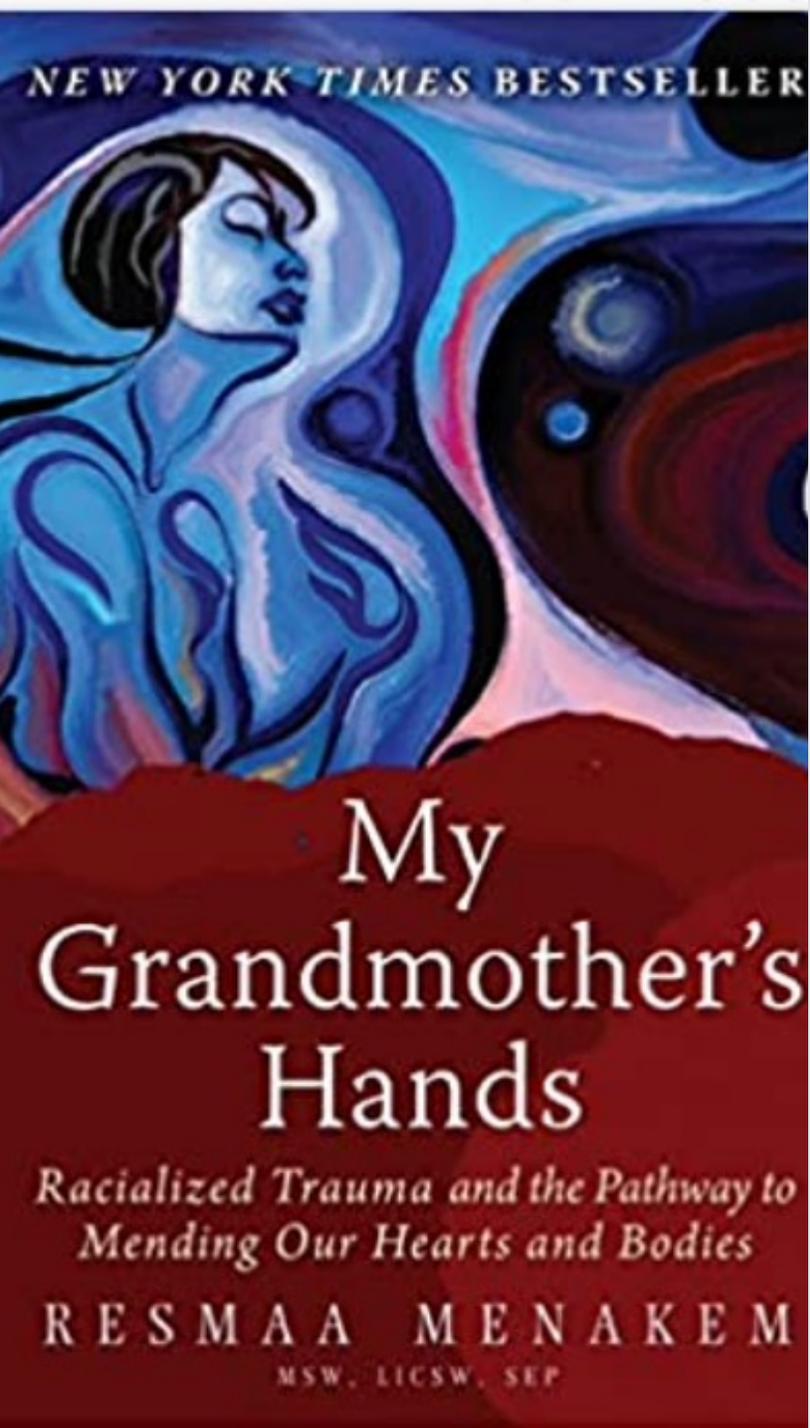
POST TRAUMATIC SLAVE SYNDROME

AMERICA'S LEGACY OF ENDURING INJURY & HEALING

DR. JOY DEGRUY

Foreword by Kendall Robinson, New York Times Bestselling Author





Healing as a means of Breakthrough

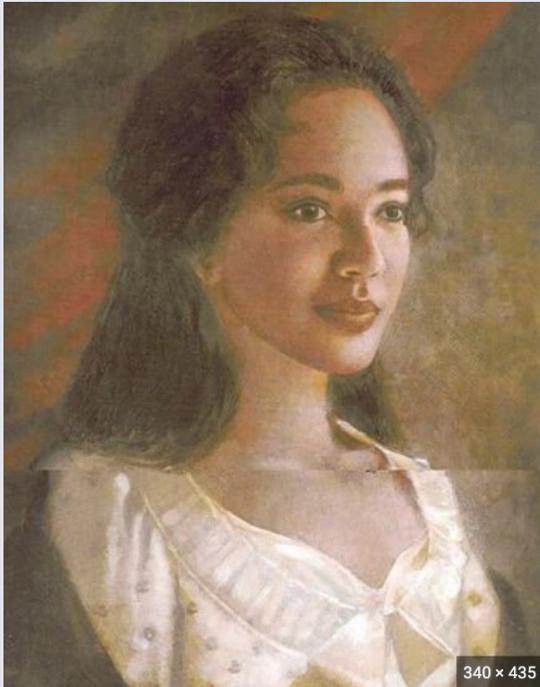
- Our ancestors' historical trauma flows through our bodies and is engrained in our DNA
- Breaking generational curses is a way to not pass that trauma on to our offspring
- Solution-focused lens and Collective Responsibility approach



Oral History

- *Our bodies, souls and spirits are a map, a testimony to the ravages of our enslavement, the cruel legacy of legal segregation & lack of access to wealth, good employment, stable housing, & good healthcare (22).*

Black Woman are Heroines



Sally Hemings



Madam C.J. Walker



Sojourner Truth



Harriet Tubman

Power of Personal Narratives

Affirmative Action

When writing your story there is the narrative you know and the one that you surrender to (Golden, 2021).

Enlightenment



After the passage of the Affordable Care Act, access to healthcare among Black Americans increased dramatically.

Doctors say access to healthcare is the number one determinant of health.

Black women have the largest voter turnout rates.

Black women represent the fastest growing segment of women-owned businesses.

Black women in the corporate world report higher rates of interest in holding leadership positions than white women.

Civil suits by Black female workers formed the basis for federal sexual harassment law.

The activism of a Black woman, Tarana Burke, inspired the #MeTooMovement

(36).



*Relationships that are not
serving you*

Over & over I was drawn to, and invited into my life, the same emotionally distant, withholding men. Men who were drawn to me because of my accomplishments while simultaneously hating me for them. Men who were in need of repair and who fulfilled my need to fix things & people (30).





The Strong Black Woman Syndrome

- Definition: which requires that Black women perpetually present an image of control & strength, is a response to a combination of daily stressors & systemic racist assaults.
- Silences the healthy and necessary expression of pain & vulnerability
- The myth that Black women don't have the privilege to experience such thoughts, feelings, emotions, wants and needs, likes and dislikes
- We wear it like a badge of honor
- Resiliency Protective Factor that can become a determinant if we are not careful



Group Discussion

- *Remember a time when the Strong Black Woman Syndrome has transitioned from a resiliency protective factor to a determinant in your life? **Think academic, professional, familial, and community settings.***
- *How can we as Black Women use Sisterhood as a resiliency protective factor in this settings to form our own Underground Railroad and pathway to liberation? **Think coalition building.***

Social Determinants of Health

We are impacted disproportionately by poor housing, lack of high-paying employment options, poor education, food apartheid, polluted environments, and an absence of medical facilities in our communities or insufficient medical coverage. Decades of both an overinvestment by federal & state & local governments, in policies that enforced & encouraged racial & economic segregation, & an absence of investment in Black people, has created environments where too many Black people do not thrive. And finally, medical & psychological studies have shown that permanent race-related stress is a more powerful factor than other occasional life stressors (divorce, job loss, death of a loved one) in creating poor health. The stress of coping with racism becomes a toxin that infiltrates the body, creating an incubator for other diseases (39).

Harmful Myth

The Strong Black Woman is myth & fact. It is internalized so deeply that even little black girls are treated like, & assumed to be, miniature Strong Black Women. It is a myth because its endurance rests on our need to assert control in the midst of the chaotic storm of racism, individual & systemic. It is myth because it rests on the foundation of tears we don't shed, pain we deny. It is myth because it is so deeply embedded in the collective unconscious of Black women that it is assumed & goes largely unchallenged (38).

- **Normalization of Racism & Oppression**
- **Black women do not have the privilege to access mental, physical, spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physiological health and wellness resources**

Predictors of Health Outcomes

Dr. Georgia Willie-Carnegie, a partner in Capital Cardiology Consultants, one of the country's oldest Black cardiology practices, told me the cruel math of living in America as a Black person of any economic class means that, while heart disease is the number one killer of all Americans, African Americans are especially vulnerable. "Hypertension & high blood pressure lead, to stroke, kidney failure, (renal disease), & heart disease," she told me." I have to remind women to listen to their bodies, We're so busy helping others we show up in the emergency room or the doctor's office at the last minute, often when treatment is least effective."

➤ *And the very belief we are certain will save us is killing us*

(40).

Protective Factors

Sisterhood

Radical Self-care as a means of Self-preservation

Power of Personal Narratives

Culture as a strength and not a deficit

Resiliency

Strong Black Woman Syndrome as a tool to strategically navigate systemic and institutional racism and oppression



Group Discussion

- How can we as Black women dispel myths related to Strong Black Woman Syndrome that is to our determinant and leading to health disparities? **Think Education as the pathway to Liberation and increasing knowledge base and awareness of evidenced-informed practice that relates to our lived and shared experiences as Black women.**
- How can we as Black women enhance our quality of life while navigating a world that is not created with us in mind? **Representation matters**

Resources

- [The Strong Black Woman: How a Myth Endangers the Physical and Mental Health of Black Women \(African American Studies\)](#)
- [Black Fatigue: How Racism Erodes the Mind, Body, and Spirit](#)
- [Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing](#)
- [Reclamation: Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson, and a Descendant's Search for Her Family's Lasting Legacy](#)
- [My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies](#)