

Reflections from the Director

The Hamilton Hill Arts Center



April 3, 2017



One's Arts Center is One's
Ise

I look to the future of the Arts Center as I study the mission and I am humbled by the wisdom of our founders. My degree in Afrocentric psychology was in many ways a journey to develop a support system, to fashion a tool that I didn't have. One that took into consideration my desire to heal from and to thrive despite a system determined to erase me. I know that for my grandparents and those that worked with them, the Arts Center was the same.

The Yoruba have a story about a young man named Oyeepolu. Oyeepolu came from a great lineage, but his mother and father died when he was young leaving him all alone.

He grew up without knowing the rites and traditions of his ancestors and as a man he could not find a wife or a place to call his own. He went to an elder priest to consult the spirits and was told to go to the graves of his ancestors to pay his respects and ask for guidance. After he followed the advice he was able find all of the good things in life.

Many have compared Oyeepolu to the descendants of the survivors of the slave trade. Disconnected by the traumas of slavery, from the cultural traditions of our ancestors, we struggle to secure a future for ourselves. It is our cultural traditions that teach us who we are, that determine how we understand and interact

with the world. As minorities living in the midst of a culture dominated by stories of the success, the history and the greatness of our conquerors and enslavers; living in a culture in which we are unrepresented, we are taught to devalue ourselves, to interact with the world as those who have lost.

Our mission here at the Hamilton Hill Arts Center is "to promote the knowledge, preservation and continued development of African and African Diasporic Art and Culture". To ensure the knowledge and preservation of the cultural traditions of our ancestors, to provide the strength, pride and sustenance that comes with hearing the stories of our successes, of knowing the beauty and wisdom of those that came before us, we teach those traditions here at the Arts Center. And in our community events, we bond and unify through our celebration of who we were, who we are and who we can be.

The second half of our mission is to promote the continued development, to nurture creativity in the minds and hearts of those we touch. Creativity is the ability to create something that did not exist before, to manifest, to invoke, to give voice, to a feeling, a moment, a potential.

When faced with the need and the opportunity to create something for the black community that would sustain and revitalize, the founders of this organization reached for Culture and Art and created The Hamilton Hill Arts Center. We know, not everyone will become the next Alvin Alley or Jacob Lawrence, but each person will learn to look at the world from a different perspective. Each person will learn to create solutions to problems that once, did not exist. Each person will find a voice to express their experience and represent themselves.

Combating Historical Trauma

Historical Trauma is passed down genetically and environmentally. Isese (eeshayshay) is a Yoruba word that speaks of culture and tradition. It is said one's mother is one's isese and one's father is one's isese.

Those things that have an impact on a person, positive or negative, are recorded in our DNA and passed down to our children. When our children experience components of those same events in their environment that record is reinforced. For example, if your mother, and her mother and her mother before her, enjoyed dancing, you are likely to experience positive results when dancing. Conversely, if your mother and her mother experienced the trauma of being chased and attacked by dogs, the likelihood that you will go into fight or flight

mode the first time you see a dog increases.

This mechanism is meant to protect and strengthen us. Sometimes however it does the opposite. Those suffering from historical trauma are more susceptible to among other symptoms, PTSD, addiction, irritability, depression, cognitive impairment, heart disease, diabetes ... The traumas of slavery experienced for generations are reinforced through stressors brought on by systematic oppression as expressed through poverty, violence, police brutality, micro-aggressions experienced at school, at work and in the home, and so on.

Community Centers such as ours have been found to be invaluable in the treatment of and the inoculation from historical trauma. Participation in the arts combats depression and teaches positive coping mechanisms. Community participation in cultural events provides security and stability that recodes the body to respond with the strength of having lived in a safe environment.

Here at the Arts center we provide the Isese that makes Oyeepolu thrive.