

# TO HEAL A PEOPLE



A BOOK OF TRANSFORMATIVE  
SELF AND COMMUNAL HEALING

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To Heal a People: Volume 1

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# Chapter One:

## Born In Righteous Rage

“To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost always.”

—James Baldwin

It was September 17th, 1970, and two high-afroed women, sisters who could have easily been related to Angela Davis not just in complexion and stature but by being ‘women in the Black Power’ struggle, stood in a crowded Safeway line in the Northeast part of Denver. That part of town was considered the “Black” part, a highly relative assignment given that Blacks in Denver were only 12% of the population.

The two sisters were in the Safeway trying to cash a check. With a disdainful scowl, the white woman, who I imagine was wearing horn-rimmed glasses with cheap plastic beads on a string, too much blue cheek blush, and an old-fashioned, even for 1970, beehive hairdo, was making what should have been a very simple transaction a particularly difficult one. The circumstances that brought these two forces together had to have known that the outcome would be heated.

An argument ensued between the women over the validity of the check. Voices were raised, superlatives were used in abundance, and

accusations of racism were cast along with the promises of “getting your honkey azz whooped.” Police were called.

One of the sisters, the taller Angela Davis-looking identical twin, spotted a young Black boy in the store. Sensing the continued escalating of tensions, replete with all the signs of impending white violence, and knowing that the police had already been called, the sister told the young boy to please get her husband expeditiously. I imagined this little Black boy tearing off as fast as his little legs could carry him through the streets of Northeast Denver in search of the woman's husband. The woman's request and the boy not needing any clarification of who exactly her husband was would have seemed like a huge omission from this narrative, except that EVERYONE who was Black in the city knew who this woman's husband was and what he was capable of in situations just like this. Thus, no clarification was needed.

It was said that the husband arrived, less than fifteen minutes later, at the parking lot of Safeway, alone and just in time to observe three Denver police officers violently seeking to arrest his wife. This man recounts seeing nothing but red at this juncture, specifically at the sight of one of the officers pounding his baton into the 9-month two-day belly of his wife. At this point, one of the most violent clashes between DPD and this tall, dark-skinned radical political figure ensued. It was one of the most notable police battles that would result in his ultimate arrest and charges being filed against this violent Black prince for dismantling and thoroughly assaulting four of Denver's “finest.”

The woman, traumatized from the event and the baton blows to her belly, was rushed to Mercy Hospital, where she subsequently went into labor. Her husband, who had since been taken to jail, was in the

process of being bailed out by one of the most reputable Jewish attorneys in the city, Mr. Jeffries. Whether it was because of the presence of such a powerful attorney or the impending backlash that was awaiting the police for their use of force against a pregnant woman, the Black Prince was released immediately to rush to the hospital where his wife was in active labor with their child.

Upon arriving at the hospital, and while waiting for news of his wife's status, the prince asked his Deputy Minister to find a book of African names and to look up 'anger,' 'furious,' or 'rage.' Less than thirty minutes later, having combed through this book of names, the prince had found what he was looking for. It was a name for his child that would encapsulate all of the feelings of anger, frustration, doubt, and rage that must have been pulsating through his veins, knowing that, ultimately, fate would be the one to decide the health and well-being of his child who had just endured womb trauma at the hands of those who had been tasked with serving and protecting.

The child was born in the early morning of September 18th, 1970, to Marylou E. Watson and her husband, the local leader of the Denver Black Panther Party, Lauren R. Watson, without any further complications. Marylou planned to honor her husband by naming their firstborn boy child after him. She had originally told the nurses that the boy would be named Lauren Watson Jr. However, Lauren had different plans. While holding his son and checking his heartbeat, pulse and breathing, and any other signs of the beating the child and his mother had recently endured, he was satisfied that the child would live. He then shared with his wife that he wanted to name this child in honor of their African lineage. The child's name was to be both a summation and a rallying cry to his stance regarding the oppressive system that nearly snuffed the life out of his firstborn son before his life even began. Lauren declared in a hospital room full of

doctors, nurses, BPP members, and his wife that his child would be called Hasira, a Swahili name that he translated to Righteous Rage.

This book has been in the making all of my life. As the son of a prominent activist, I cannot remember a time when movement matters were not being spoken about, shown, argued over, or fought over. Since as far back as I can remember, my father would take me with him on his weekend strolls around our neighborhood in Denver, Colorado. It was an area of town called The Five Points. Everybody in the Black community knew about the Five Points. It was where five different streets intersected. If you were to Google Five Points, you would find it was called the Harlem of the West in the 30s.

A place where you may be able to go and hear Duke Ellington or any of the Jazz Greats as they traveled from out east to the West Coast. Growing up in Five Points, far from its Heyday as the Harlem of the West, it's still a vibrant place for Black Culture, history, and business in Denver, Colorado, and this is where my father spent the bulk of his time doing organizing work inside of the community.

It wasn't until I was much older that I understood the significance of growing up in a family of organizers. I would only later find out that the things that seemed normal to me and were normalized practices within my family were true specialties and oddities in the families outside of mine. For instance, all of our family gatherings always held a political motif. Whether it was Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Kwanzaa, the conversations were always political, sometimes heated, and always contentious in one shape or another. This made my schooling at the local Catholic School and my upbringing in the neighborhood particularly unique. Everyone knew who my father was; many loved him, some liked him, and others hated him.

My father was like the black licorice of the community: either you hated or loved him, but either way, you had an opinion about him. This had a particularly powerful impact on my personality in that I understood from a very early age that as much as you might want to be liked, the goal was to have and be your unique voice. No tool in the organizer's toolbox is as important, vital, or primary as one's voice. It is through one's voice that the community organizer creates the necessary tensions, points out the contradictions, creates hope, points out wrongdoings, and informs of insights. The voice is to the community organizer, what the pen is to the writer and what the sword is to the warrior. And so, from a very early age, I was taught and instructed on what it meant to be a community organizer. And there was no better or greater example of a community organizer to me than my father. To my father, there was only one quintessential community organizer: Malcolm X.

## Chapter Two: Unpacking My Healing Toolkit

We are living in a world in which everybody and everything is interdependent. It is not white, this world. It is not black either. The world's future depends on everybody in this room, and that future depends on to what extent and by what means we liberate ourselves from a vocabulary that now cannot bear the weight of reality.

- James Baldwin

As I share my story, grounding principles, and practices throughout the next chapters, I want to be clear about one thing: I did not have all the healing tools I have today already in my hands and at the ready as I was going through personal crisis and trials and tribulations. I lived those experiences in raw, messy, and emotional ways and had moments of fear, anxiety, and depression. I share this to say that I've found tools and frameworks at different points along my healing journey that have been truly transformational for me, both as an individual and in the collective healing work I lead as a leader in the movement To Heal a People.

We've created the Four Rings of Healing framework, described and detailed in Part Two of this book, as a manual for people seeking deeper freedom, joy, and abundance. The Four Rings framework shares all the building blocks of knowledge and information you need to create the mindset, healthy body, and spiritual alignment needed to manifest everything you truly desire.

Shadow Work is one of the most powerful tools I've been fortunate enough to learn about and experience in my healing journey. My team and I trained and experienced processing in Shadow Work under some of the foremost thought leaders, including Cliff Barry, Vicki Woodward, and Judge Maddox. Shadow Work facilitation provided me with some of the greatest clarity and growth I could gift myself. The mindset shift has helped push me forward in publishing this book and imbibing our approach to Heal a People with Shadow Work.

Shadow Work is no one set of tools or practices but rather a way of seeing and moving energy grounded in the underlying methodologies of our ancestral medicine men and healers. Indeed, our people have relied on rituals that move energy and help us ground into what we need to survive and thrive for thousands of years. Today, several practitioners offer their flavor and approach to Shadow Work, borrowing from the ancestral wisdom of our people and packing it into products ranging from more clinical to ritual and spiritually based.

We have developed our flavor and approach, which we describe as Sankofa Shadow-Werk. In Sankofa Shadow-Werk, we are marrying the underlying tenants and teachings of energy types and moving energy using different afro-indigenous practices that I've experienced and used over the past five decades of being on a healing journey.

I will take a moment to explain the underlying concepts of "Sankofa" and "Shadow Werk" so you can understand what I am discussing. Then, I will continue to delve much deeper into my journey to make sense of my experiences and start creating my life from my power and purpose.

## Sankofa

"We should reach back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us to achieve our full potential as we move forward. Whatever we have lost, forgotten, forgone, or stripped of, can and must be reclaimed, revived, preserved, and perpetuated for all posterity. "



## SANKOFA

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Sankofa is a West African concept that translates to “go back and fetch it.” In a more contextualized meaning, it means to go back and remember your past, heal from the harm in your past and then bring your new understanding and transmuted self into the present to ensure your most powerful present and future.

One of the two symbols representing this concept is a bird with its feet facing forward with its head turned, looking back on its wings, and holding a precious egg in its beak. An egg plays a symbolic role in African/Indigenous myths surrounding the creation and celebrating the resurrection and awakening of nature. An egg became a symbol of life because it encloses nascent life to emerge from it. It embodies the idea of rebirth and rejuvenation in the life cycle, also reflected in its shape, with neither beginning nor end.

In the spirit of our ancestors, before we begin our work in the present, we must first “go back and fetch it.” We must go back and fetch it to situate and contextualize where we are in our journey properly. If we don’t know where we have journeyed from, we won’t be clear on where we are going. And you know what they say; if you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.

As a bodied collective, we seem to be on many roads. Some roads speak of the necessity of economic revolution, saying that without money and wealth, we are doomed. Some roads speak of a political revolution that will collectively galvanize the disenfranchised under animalistic (Donkey or Elephant) banners or some other third-party solution. Some roads even speak of a religious revolution where an all-knowing deity will magically and deliciously “save” us all from our lot and give us salvation hereafter.

In this book's pages, however, you will find that we offer a different path and vision for our path forward. It’s a road that doesn’t exclude

some of these other externalized paths but offers a different journey based on the wisdom and practice of those who came before us.

But before we offer these solutions, we must first “go back and fetch it” to center our diagnosis on the wisdom gleaned from our historical pattern of social illness.

You may be inclined to think this book is solely aimed at Black/Indigenous people and their healing. And while this assessment isn’t entirely incorrect, please understand that when setting out to give a treatise of our perspective on the critical path forward for the collective well-being of this society’s most marginalized and neglected populace, we also consciously targeted those who have been the unwitting purveyors and passive participants in the social disease of racism.

Please be clear; racism is a white disease. At its roots and inception, it is a disease that emerged from the collective consciousness of white-bodied individuals. We must not conflate the origin of the disease with its impact and internalization by the world's population of people of color. Again, the true source of racism rests with white-bodied individuals and the institutions they designed that have suffered from this disease for hundreds of years.

With this being true, we could never intend for this book - predicated on healing people - merely for those most highly impacted by racism. No. This book is also squarely aimed at those who are the embodied source of racism. We hope they can navigate themselves out of the wilderness and destructive path of continued white-embodied racism.

We again assert the integrity of a healing path made necessary by our historical and present-day circumstances and state. It is broad enough to hold and carry on its wings the various hues of humanity.

We will begin this path by returning to my journey and our journey together as a collective. Let us sojourn together and hold each other in the light as we do so, embracing each other's hands to steady our travels so we can embark on the blessed work of healing people.

### **The Healing Path Explained**

Now, before we sojourn to our living past, we must first explain what the intent of this sojourn is rooted in. We are not simply reciting and recounting a dead history to shame, blame, or guilt any group of people. Nor are we recounting our past for empty ego gratification that oversimplifies while obfuscating a necessary unity amongst ourselves and others. In one of its many wise parables, the ancient Chinese spiritual text, I Ching, warns us about embarking on such a pointless and dangerous endeavor when it talks about a young fox seeking to cross a river.

The fox becomes preoccupied with looking back to see where he came from and loses focus on where he is, causing his beautiful and balancing tail to fall into the water, and he suffers humiliation. For those of you steeped in spiritual culture, you know that water is a universal symbol for the mental acts of reflection, meditating in the past, emotionalism (raging storms, waves, or rushing water), etc.

The fox here is a common African/Indigenous symbol for the human intellect/rationale. Once this parable is historically and culturally contextualized, our ancestors are issuing a warning. They warn us not to embark on our Sankofa journeys preoccupied with looking backward while also imploring us not to become overly emotional about past events, lest we fall into the rush of emotions and fail at crossing the stream and completing our mission.

Regarding the 'healing path' itself, it's important to explain exactly what that means and why this concept, above all others, needs to be centered in our collective consciousness.

No reasonable and rational human being who has remotely looked at the history of Black/Indigenous people can even begin to fix their lips to deny the brutality, trauma, and ongoing (and lasting) impact these have had on generations of Black/Indigenous people. We will recount some of these later on in the book. Nor can anyone deny that there has never been a moment in our history where these traumas and impacts have been collectively addressed.

Just the opposite has occurred. Even as we pen this book, the brutal history of these people is being obfuscated and denied due to the fragility of the white-bodied psyche and its accompanying institutions. So not only is the brutality and past/present trauma being ignored but it's also being denied to the detriment of the whole, thus rendering the potential for addressing and healing the issue on a mass scale currently stalled and dormant.

Let's do some simple math, shall we? The institution of slavery in the United States/western hemisphere lasted from 1619 until 1865, equaling 246 years. The practice of Jim Crow, with its legacy of lynching, raping, and pillaging, lasted from 1877 to 1954, equaling 77 years. The war on drugs, the war on crime, redlining, stop and frisk, Black mass incarceration, the heroin epidemic of the '60s and '70s, and the crack epidemic in the '80s and 90's up to the dual pandemic of COVID-19 and the failure of Western institutions to ensure just and equitable health and social outcomes for its citizens – do you know what that equals? The sum equates to 400+ years of the humanitarian disaster that the world or its people has never experienced.

More importantly, we observe a noticeably feeble, if not absent, effort to correct this historical reckoning. There has been no sustained period or point where any recovery or restoration was afforded to the impacted population who endured these centuries-old afflictions. None. Nada. Zero. It has never occurred.

Our repair, respite, and healing have been denied and thus delayed. As a Black-Indigenous collective body, we have been languishing physically and mentally on dusty and denigrated gurneys in America's oldest and most neglected psychological hospital. Racism.

This being the case, we must therefore take it upon ourselves to heal ourselves. We can no longer afford to or expect that a savior is coming to rescue the Afro-indigenous populations of North America.

It is high time we reinstate the mental framework of our ancestors who walked off the plantations not looking for a 'helping hand,' a hand up, or a handout from those institutions and individuals whose very hands were still holding nooses, whips and chains.

Unfortunately, we have fallen prey to the liberal ideology that says we are owed restitution and reparations, therefore tying up our creative energy into a reality that will never come to pass. Seeking restitution and reparations is as mythical as a government check descending from high to wipe away all our ills and restore us to fullness. Our ancestors knew very well that nothing and no one was coming to save them. Therefore, they made all of the necessary preparations to wholly and completely sustain themselves in their newly fought-for and won freedom

So, when we talk about the need to center our collective healing and mental, physical, and spiritual restoration, this is not simply about some arcane exercise aimed at assuaging our bruised and battered

egos. No. Nor are we talking about merely getting some sessions on some therapist's couch, hugging trees, or purchasing a set of yoga sessions with some incense and a Badu head-wrap. No. What is needed is a total social and mental reformulation of our movement towards justice to not only include our healing but to center the need for us to create a new operational, cultural paradigm that acknowledges, promotes, and infuses all of our personal and collective choices with a healing and health directive. Any definitions or ideas of justice, reparations, equity, and freedom must be centered on the importance of our individual and collective mental, physical and spiritual healing. And make no mistake about it; our healing must come and be done ultimately and, most importantly, as a collective.

So now, with our aims, objectives, and paradigm clearly defined and stated, let us begin the process of Sankofa (going back, fetching it, and bringing what is needed forward into the present). It's time to buckle up, buttercup!

### **Shadow Work Explained**

"One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. The latter procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular." - Carl Jung

Having operated as a community organizer for over thirty years, I've had the privilege and opportunity to see almost every healing modality under the sun. From fasting to meditation, martial arts, yoga to sunbathing, and crystals, I've seen it all and then some. However, in my estimation, there is no more powerful tool that we, as a people, can use to engage in our personal and collective mental healing than Shadow Work. But before I explain why I believe this

and which methods I encourage you to use, let us explain what Shadow Work is.

Shadow work is engaging your unconscious mind to uncover the parts of yourself that you repress and hide from yourself and others. This can include ways to protect ourselves from repeating or reliving the trauma, including hiding parts of our personality that we subconsciously consider undesirable, unacceptable, or shameful.

Through this definition, you can readily see why this tool is so important to people subjected to generations of trauma and denied the time or resources to heal themselves from those horrific experiences.

We all have traits we're proud of and don't feel so confident about. Some of these traits may trigger or embarrass us, so we hide them from public view and deny even to ourselves that they exist. These parts make up your shadow self, which longs to be heard. However, it's not always easy to come to terms with our shadow selves. Most people repress their hidden parts to avoid confronting that darker side. In the end, even though the shadow still exists, it gets pushed back and forgotten.

But repressing your inner shadow has dangerous consequences. Often, the shadow manifests themselves as triggers — emotional reactions that bubble to the surface under the right (wrong) circumstances. It takes training, self-awareness, guidance, and courage to help one face their shadow self healthily.

This is exactly why Shadow Work exists. Shadow Work is designed to help you integrate and accept every part of yourself to live and thrive more clearly and authentically. From that clearer, authentic place,

you can more readily manifest what you want to create for yourself, your family, your community, and the world.

Let's explore even deeper this concept of shadows and Shadow Work.

### **What Is Your Inner Shadow?**

Your inner shadow is composed of parts of yourself that you subconsciously reject. Carl Jung, the famed Swiss psychiatrist, defined the shadow archetype as the dark and emotional side of your personality or psyche.

For example, say that you were often labeled and teased for being too sensitive as a child (like I was). Believing that you "are soft, a sissy or crybaby," you start retreating within, weighing every situation to see if you are being too sensitive or soft. Then one day, someone makes an innocuous comment at a family gathering: "why do you wear soft colors a lot?" — and you're furious.

Why? It wasn't the comment, the person, or even whether they said or did something wrong. It was the part of you that's emotionally invested in not being "too sensitive." Anything that threatens how you present yourself to the world (bringing your shadow self into the light) is seen as a threat to your identity — and, ultimately, your safety.

What makes up your shadow depends on what you subconsciously reject within yourself. We usually hear this come up as negative self-talk (we'll talk more about this in a later chapter). Often, these rejected parts of us are the result of childhood experiences.

Your shadow side can hurt your well-being when you ignore or reject it. This part of yourself craves to be understood and explored because it was ignored and possibly shamed throughout your life. Even if it was less dramatic, we don't feel mentally and emotionally at our best when our shadow is not integrated into our self, which is to say — when the shadow and self are far apart.

When you ignore it, your shadow will find ways to make you aware that it exists. This can lead to issues like:

- Self-loathing or poor self-esteem
- Self-deceit and deceiving others
- Anxiety and depression
- Offensive behavior toward others
- Struggling to have healthy relationships with others
- Self-sabotage
- Self-absorption
- An inflated ego

You may also start projecting things onto others when you reject your shadow. Projection happens when you see things in others that you subconsciously dislike within yourself (we will talk about specific exercises that can be used to heal our projections later on).

Those parts can make you uncomfortable. As a result, you can seek to judge or punish others who reflect those traits.

Your shadow isn't a flaw or a mistake — instead, it's a natural part of who you are. Shadow Work is, at its heart, about developing self-awareness and, ultimately, self-acceptance and compassion. Shadow work is often both therapy and a spiritual path, helping you see the different parts within yourself and manifest your highest

wants. Each of us has shadow parts, and the ones we are most ashamed, embarrassed, and traumatized by are the ones we are especially good at hiding — even from ourselves. If we acknowledge the shadows, they will no longer subconsciously control our thoughts, actions, and behaviors. But instead, we build up our self-perception based on ideals that are not true to who we are and our highest path. We continue to whole-heartedly create the desired impression of who we want to be and lose ourselves and our way. Shadow Work is about acknowledging the existence of shadows and then getting curious and exploring them. As you recognize and honor those parts of you and how they served you on your soul's path, you can shed the fear, shame, anger, anxiety, and emotional baggage dragging you down.

For those whose shadow is associated with trauma, this type of work helps you work through trauma to embrace the part of yourself that's been suppressed or shamed throughout your life.

By accepting your shadow parts, you can see how it has influenced your thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Once you know this, you can take control and empower yourself to live more deliberately and consciously. You can start to show up as your authentic self.

However, in the spirit of Ubuntu (I am because we are), we must address another aspect of Shadow Work that holds the key to our collective healing, Sankofa Shadow-Werk. We have coined the term Sankofa Shadow Werk here to describe the collective shadow work process and practices specifically aimed at releasing and healing trauma from and associated with the Maafa-the great disaster (more on the Maafa later).

We will discuss Sankofa Shadow-Werk in full detail in Chapter 7 (Working Your Shadows) and provide some tools and ideas for

integrating it into your daily and cyclical practices. Suffice it to say that while the shadow parts exist within us as individuals, as described above, we also hold 'collective shadows' as communities of people with shared sources of trauma, violence, and oppression. This is why it is so critical that we engage in Sankofa Shadow-Werk as a community of people seeking to heal and thrive.

## Chapter Three:

### The Collective Shadow of the Maafa

"Activism and our efforts for collective power become like a substitute for turning inward because turning inward is way too scary and messy. Dealing with our addictions, insecurities, and unresolved conflicts is way harder than making people aware of the dangers of climate change or fighting against racist policies. But when we don't turn inward to deal with our stuff, we build up this false idea about power and ultimately build movements with wounded warriors. Our real power comes from the courage to deal with our fractured relationships, the vulnerability to acknowledge our hurt feelings and the awareness to know when our ego shows up." - The Four Pivots

#### Deconstructing the Shadow of Racism

My father dropped my brother and me off at my grandmother's house every spring and summer to perform our perfunctory yard work duties. Soon after we arrived, my grandmother would equip us with the necessary equipment for our yearly ritual of uprooting the dandelions in her yard. I remember being perplexed by this exercise because I was quite fond of these attractive yellow flowers that littered her yard. Why did we have to uproot such beautiful flowers if having a yard was to enjoy its ecstatic beauty?

One day, I asked my grandmother this exact question, and she explained to me the corrosive behavior of the dandelion flower. The

dandelion is a weed that, if left unrestrained, will kill all of the grass in the yard as it proliferates seemingly unceasingly. In the spring, a yard that goes untrimmed by dandelions will be a dirt field of small yellow flowers in due time.

And so my grandmother instructed us exactly on how these flowers must be systematically destroyed. To truly rid your yard of these pernicious flowers, you had to pick them from the roots, not the flowers. The flowers were then used as a guide for us to identify where the weeds were. The weeds had to be traced to their roots beneath the soil and dug up from the bottom. If you made the mistake of simply plucking the flowers instead of getting down to their roots, you were sure to see your yard densely populated with weeds again, despite your initial labors.

It may seem counterintuitive to pursue the deconstruction of race and racism in a book dedicated to the mental and social health model that hangs its hat on the axiom "Inside-Out" as a means of liberating ourselves. However, we must often identify the toxic yellow flowers in our yards to initiate deconstruction exercises. By identifying and showing the clear and abundant evidence of these external yellowed social patterns of illness, we thoroughly expose the external manifestations of a collective illness so that we can trace their paths inwards and begin the arduous work of uprooting them.

No, we are not interested in plucking the pernicious flowers from their stems and causing the illusion of eradication. We are interested in giving the largest numbers of our communities clear paths to identifying and then uprooting negative patterns and systems of thoughts and behaviors that have continued to perpetuate the systems of oppression.

It is abundantly clear to anyone who follows the self-help, human development genre that 98% of the books, lectures, and success systems, along with the Gurus, Prophets, and experts, who create these products, completely ignore the issues of race and class. In fact, not only do they ignore them, but many also perpetuate these biased systems because they have failed to engage in the necessary work of uprooting the most pervasive and impactful mental illness of the past 450 years.

We can only assume that many ignore the topics of race/class because they fear it will offend their targeted audience of mostly middle and upper-class, white-bodied folks. And the "experts" themselves have no understanding or reference points for the history, culture, and lived experiences of people outside the mostly middle and upper-class white-bodied folks with which they surround themselves. Not only is this most regrettable and reprehensible, but also an ultimate act of intellectual cowardice and mediocrity underlying the conscious or unconscious choice to ignore race/class.

This unfortunate trend leaves the entire self-help/human development genre, its tools, and "success systems" without any true credibility regarding the actual efficacy of these tools in real-world circumstances. These gross detachments that are endemic within the genre have created a proliferation of disturbing and incomplete ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and practices that not only render the genre inept to the masses but also leave them impotent when it comes to healing the deepest darkest wound known to humans today; the white superiority complex better known as racism.

In addition, there is, of course, a far more frightening yet plausible reason why the topic of race and class never gets addressed by the so-called leaders in thought science, and that is because they, the Gurus/Teachers, themselves are benefitting by being mentally

blinded and socially insulated, and are choosing to feign ignorance or lack of awareness of the daily impact that race has on their existence. This is, of course, not by accident. This simulated amnesiac response is part and parcel of the pernicious programming that emanates from the toxic seed of racism. As the saying goes, "it's very difficult, if not impossible, to get a man to see a problem they are profiting from."

Either way, we will be taking a deep dive to discover and then restructure our psyches so that we can function at our highest levels physically, mentally, and spiritually and, once and for all, rid ourselves of these fatal diseases.

### **Whiteness as Shadow**

The plantation system was based on a perpetual mindfuck that operated through overlapping and interlocking systems of oppression. That Maafa (The Great Disaster) affected the last 14-plus generations.

Even now, these harmful and hierarchical ideas are still embedded within the systems in which we live. Ridding ourselves of the effects of what Dr. Joy DeGruy labels Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) in her book is a constant struggle. The institution and experience of slavery cast a very long and pernicious shadow. However, the repair begins within – like all healing does – and is felt and experienced in the Soul, articulated in the Mind, and expressed through the Body. That's what is meant by healing from the inside out. We must first heal our souls for our bodies and minds to heal!

To understand the Maafa and its accompanying shadows, we have to examine its major contributing factors, of which there are several. However, I will only discuss a major slavery shadow still with us

today. Although this shadow has continued to morph and contort into various forms, it has not lost its integrity. I'm discussing the myth, notion, and shadow of 'whiteness' as a "race."

Race is a euro-invented, short-hand term that describes and categorizes people into various social groups based on characteristics like skin color, physical features, and genetic heredity. In contrast, not a valid biological concept, race is a real social construction that gives or denies benefits and privileges. American society developed the notion of race early in its formation to justify its new economic system of capitalism, which depended on the institution of forced labor and enslavement of African peoples. To more accurately understand how race and its counterpart, racism, are woven into the very fabric of American society, we must explore the history of the creation of this shadow of race, white privilege, and anti-blackness. (National Museum of African American History and Culture n.d.)

### **Preparing for the Maafa: The Invention of Race**

The concept of "race," as we understand it today, evolved alongside the formation of the United States and was deeply connected with the evolution of two other terms, "white" and "slave." The words "race," "white," and "slave" were all used by Europeans in the 1500s, and they brought these words with them to North America. However, the words did not have the meanings that they have today. Instead, the needs of the developing American society would transform those words' meanings into new ideas.

The word "white" held a different meaning, too, and transformed over time. Before the mid-1600s, there was no evidence that the English considered themselves "white people." This concept did not occur until 1613, when the English society first encountered and

contrasted themselves against the East Indians through their colonial pursuits. Even then, there wasn't a large body of people who considered themselves "white" as we know the term today. From about the 1550s to 1600, "white" was exclusively used to describe elite English women because the whiteness of their skin signaled that they were persons of a high social class who did not go outside to labor. However, the term white did not refer to elite English men because the idea that men did not leave their homes to work could signal that they were lazy, sick, or unproductive. Initially, the racial identity of "white" referred only to Anglo-Saxon people and has changed due to time and geography. As the concept of being white evolved, the number of people considered white grew as people wanted to push back against the increasing numbers of people of color due to emancipation and immigration. Activist Paul Kivel says, "whiteness is a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white."

European colonists' use of the word "white" to refer to people who looked like themselves grew to become entangled with the word "race" and "slave" in the American colonies in the mid-1660s. These elites created "races" of "savage" Indians, "sub-human" Africans, and "white" men. The social inventions succeeded in uniting the white colonists, dispossessing and marginalizing native people, and permanently enslaving most African-descended people for generations. Tragically, American culture, from the very beginning, developed around the ideas of race and racism.

### The Plantation Paradigm

It wasn't until 2019 that I made my first visit to an actual plantation death camp. New Orleans is my favorite city (I try to visit it at least once or twice a year). Two years ago, my wife visited a neighboring plantation, and so I figured that since I was writing this book and continued to visit New Orleans, I would finally break down and take a plantation-death camp tour.

We started early that day, leaving New Orleans in the morning at around 6 am in our rent-a-car. During the drive to the plantation, I kept hoping that I would not have a repeat experience like the one I had while visiting a slave dungeon in Cape Coast several years earlier, where I got in an altercation with a group of white males over what I perceived as their lack of respect for the historic site. I remember the movie *Sankofa*, where the main character fell into a trance and relived a past life experience on a plantation death camp in Jamaica, hoping I wouldn't also suffer an intense psychological flashback like that.

I'm an empath and susceptible to the environments I place myself in. So yeah, all this was on my mind as we took the two-hour drive into the Louisiana hinterlands. One thing you should clearly understand about Louisiana that I found out very quickly during this trip is this: there is a New Orleans that is all parties, touristy, drinky, music, fun, artsy, and hang-over, and then there's the real southern backroad bet-not-make-a-wrong-turn-at-the-wrong-time-less-you-be-running-for-your-damn-life Louisiana, which is all the rest of the state outside of New Orleans.

We pulled into the plantation death camp parking lot about 15 minutes before our tour began. The plantation was called the Laura Plantation. The name alone is creepy, given that the old white death

camp owner named it after his daughter. It would be like Hitler naming one of the Nazi death camps after his beloved wife. The Eva Anna Paula Hitler Work Camp. See what I mean? Just creepy. It underscores the psychological dissonance the white kidnappees, owners and overseers experienced and that their prodigy experience when seeking to address this period even today. But I digress.

When Laura Plantation opened up to the public in 1994, it became the first historical attraction in Louisiana to include stories of enslaved Africans as part of the tour. As the leading interpreter of the experience of enslaved people in Louisiana, and following years of extensive research in the United States and France, in February 2017, Laura Plantation opened a permanent exhibit dedicated to telling the authentic story of the slave community of this Créole farm.

The Laura plantation death camp is quite fascinating. We learned that the amazing architecture and gravitas of the main house were not only built by kidnapped Africans but also designed by one kidnapped African in particular who was "leased" out to this owner-kidnapper to design and build this home.

Constructed in 1804-1805, the main "big house" at Laura Plantation is shaded by the low branches of large oak trees so that it is almost hidden from the road. The big house has a raised brick basement story and a briquette-entre-poteaux (brick between posts) on the upper floor. (Wikipedia 2022). Much of the house was prefabricated, as its wooden beams were pre-cut off-site and arrived ready to be installed. (Wikipedia 2022). It is one of only thirty substantial Créole-raised houses in the state.

The floor plan consists of two rows of five rooms that open directly into each other without any hallways. The interior of the "big house" is furnished with original antiques. Some pieces were donated to the

plantation by families of the original owners. The current owners have left some areas inside the home unrestored to give visitors a sense of history and show the house's wall construction methods.

In truth, this kidnapped West African architect laid this place out! And yet, in 2020, when you researched the plantation, you found that there was very little, if any, mention of him at all. Wikipedia states of Duparc, the owner-kidnapper: "Duparc built his plantation house during 1804 and 1805." knowing goddamn well that Duparc didn't do a damn thang to actually "build his plantation." Later on in this chapter, we will discuss how the racist white psyche lies to itself and to others about itself, its deeds, its motivations, and, yes, its history. But please forgive me again; I digress.

After touring the plantation, we walked through the "gift shop" area (what plantation-death camp tour would be complete without a gift shop where you can purchase you and your family a sweet memento of your tour? What's the name of the gift shop at Auschwitz? Don't worry; I'll wait. Insert heavy eye-roll here). The tour was good, mainly because it was led by a southern, gay, white college student who was not in for the rah-rah of Dixieland and didn't seek to sanitize or sugarcoat the gravity of the situation or white-wash its true history.

I'm unsure why two things stuck out to me during the tour, even as I write them here. First, the slave quarters were about three miles away from the kitchen. So three times a day, men, women, and children had to walk three miles to get their food and three miles back to their quarters to consume it. Do the math. That's 18 fucking miles a day that they had to walk to feed themselves on top of working from sunup-till-sundown seven days a week. The second was the slave quarters themselves.

The slave quarters cabin is set up like a duplex where one set of kidnapped Africans occupied two very small rooms on one side, and another set of tortured Africans occupied two very small rooms on the other. Well, come to find out that the average occupancy on each side of this duplex was 18 people! Per side! Again, do the math. That's thirty-six kidnapped humans sleeping in an area roughly the size of a modern small living room!

When I was told this, that's when all the pictures I had seen of the captives standing in front of their plantation quarters made sense to me. I had previously thought they had gathered all the enslaved people on a plantation to come together and stand in front of their quarters to take the photo. Come to find out, and all those people lived in the small dwelling they were standing in front of! Trust me when I say this, till this day, we still don't have a very good understanding of how inhumane these death camps were. (See photo.)



I thought the most accurate account of the brutality and vicious violence exhibited in these death camps was a scene in 12-Years an enslaved person where force-fed the kidnapped Africans to eat by violently knocking out their front teeth with a hammer so that they could pour gruel down their throats for sustenance. It is one of the best depictions of the inhumanity exhibited by white kidnappers. Righteous Rage.

The ride back from the tour was quiet. I was deeply touched with a sense of responsibility on my part to use my life to further the quest for freedom for my people, especially knowing that there are some prison cells in this country right now that are eerily similar in both scope and sequence to this level of violence and depravity.

My tour of the plantation left me with even more determination to unpack the unhealed trauma that rested within me and for those who suffered its most immediate and deepest impacts.

### **Breakdown of the Plantation Paradigm**

To understand the plantation paradigm as a working model, you must take this moment to return with me to the Antebellum South. Imagine we are on one of the many sprawling cotton plantations, and this plantation has three groups of people, each occupying a different position of power. There were the owners, the overseers, and the enslaved. The latter two were under the complete domination and control of the owner (these three positions of power are still prevalent today on the modern corporate plantation).

It's important to understand the plantation as a physical entity and part and parcel of a system that practiced institutional slavery. To think of plantations as mere entities within themselves without

understanding the vast networks needed and utilized to support not just that plantation but the whole system of slavery is to completely misunderstand both the vastness and complexity of the institution of slavery facilitated by the plantations.

Plantations were to slavery what the Nazi death camps were to Hitler's Germany (except more pervasive, lasted hundreds of years longer, and exacted a much higher death count). Nazi death camps were the Germanic expression of a particular brand of white supremacy and part and parcel of a vast Germanic dominance over the Jews. So it was with plantations that they signaled and solidified violent white supremacist dominance over the people of color of what would become North America.

Plantations were death camps where forced labor was extracted from Black bodies and poor white bodies to serve the interests of a white supremacist state. The fact that we don't already have a deep understanding of the role of plantations and slavery is mostly because America has yet to come to terms, either psychologically or financially, with the debt that the practice of this institution served. The vague language best exemplifies this still used to discuss it (when and if it ever gets discussed). What a difference it would make in the psyche of Americans if we were to use CLEAR LANGUAGE in how we talk about slavery.

For example:

Slaves = Hostages

Slave Owners = Human Traffickers

Slave Catchers = Police

Plantations = Death Camps (the way they are described when Jews were subjected to similar conditions)

Black Mistresses = Rape Victims (think Sally Jennings, etc. )

Discipline = Torture

Overseers = Torturers

Trading = Kidnapping

Profit = Theft

Maafa/Middle Passage = Genocide

So, for example, instead of how we currently talk about slavery when we say, "Slave families lived on plantations owned by white slave owners who hired overseers to maintain discipline," you would have this:

"Black families were held hostage in death camps by white human traffickers who employed economically enslaved white maniacs to torture and killed them." Sounds different, right?

Let's try it again.

"The US Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, which obligated white Americans to return slaves to their master's plantations."

Becomes,

"Congress passed the Escaping Black Families Act which obligated whites to return terrified and tortured Black Families to the death camps of their kidnappers."

And again,

“The prominent enslaver never publicly recognized the offspring of him and one of his slave romances but allowed them to serve in his house.”

Is really,

“The rich human trafficker raped his female hostages and then held their children, hostages, at the death camp he owned.”

Keep going?

“We abolished slavery way back in 1865! There’s no need to be still talking about it now.”

Is really,

“Even though it has been only two human lifetimes back when it was fully legal to kidnap, torture, rape, and murder Black people, there’s no reason to be still upset about it.”

It is a reflexive white supremacist shadow impulse to minimize the harm inflicted and hide its severity in the shadows behind the spin of ambiguous language. It doesn’t allow for real accountability, compassion, or reparations. History books, and our accompanying language about slavery, essentially paint slavery as an “alternative social structure” not shared by the north. “Yes, perhaps it was a bit ugly and unjust, but it was valid in its intent.”

Sanitized terms and images of *Gone with the Wind* romanticize even these horrific atrocities and those behind them. Because American society continues to hide its racialized past in its shadows instead of coming to terms with and acknowledging the full enormity of our actions, not only can it never be accountable to those harmed, but it

also makes our pain and anger seem illegitimate, arbitrary, and without cause and validity. Words matter.

So for the sake of clarity, let us have a deeper look at the plantation death camps through the proper lens.

As mentioned previously, plantations were made up of several groups of people, each different occupying positions of hierarchy and power:

- Indigenous people knew the land well, whose ancestors had been on the land since time immemorial, and who were now captives of white colonial powers.
- Africans were transported in the worst inhumane manner possible and brought to the plantations, where they made up the bulk of the physical labor force and were the strongholds on the bottom rung in the plantations’ hierarchy.
- Poor white indentured servants on this Plantation, although they made up the minority of the labor force, did not enjoy the freedoms of ownership that the higher-class whites did, nor were they burned by the racial inferiority stigma as was the case for the Africans and First Nation indigenous captives. They were mostly overseers of the owner’s properties (which included the enslaved people).
- Middle- and Upper-Class white non-slave-holding people also benefitted from this system by essentially leasing slaves from the owners for all kinds of services, including domestic housework, wet nursing, construction, and more seditious acts, like rape.
- Then there was the white, wealthy ownership class, the 1%. It’s clear to everyone on the plantation, including the 1%, that the levels of oppression, exploitation, and violence experienced by those living on the plantation, daily vary in degrees depending upon which group you belong to. What is

not debatable is that all of these experiences, other than the ones being had by the 1%, are bad.

Now, imagine this:

It has been rumored that a group of unsatisfied enslaved people has occasionally met in cotton fields. Those said to attend these meetings are members of the various oppressed groups on the plantation. They have recognized that although some enjoy some freedom, all are exploited and oppressed daily. These meetings are, therefore, multicultural, dynamic, multi-class, multi-gendered, and multi-racial. These meetings may discuss divergent tactics and strategies but are always focused on attaining freedom.

If we were to listen in to this meeting taking place on this hot summer evening in the South fields of South Carolina, on a sprawling Plantation owned by a white, wealthy slave owner, we would likely hear a lively discussion among the various participants trying to decide what the ultimate, best strategy would be, for those not only in this group but for the other groups that have been rumored to be meeting on neighboring plantations as well.

This discussion is centered around two ideas of what freedom could look like. Some are advocating for running the North Underground Railroad and continuing to send resources back to four other family members and friends who are still held in the south. Another group is advocating for the total dismantling of the slave system altogether. What seems to come out of these lively discussions is a consensus that it should be neither one nor the other but both. While these plans unfold, a group of people led by a woman will continue to move captured folks secretly. Some will stay South and continue to

ferment rebellion in the hearts, minds, souls, and spirits of those who are the majority of those who will remain in the south, and it is this two-pronged strategy that becomes enlightened in the hearts of the oppressed and indeed unifies them. It is clearly understood by all involved in this movement that there will be a need and a necessity for the different movement members to play different roles. However, these roles are all aimed at the achievement of freedom. It is understood that there will have to be some caucus that remains inside the house and closer to the Master of the House, listening for any bits of information, clues, and insights that may fall out of the lips of the slave owners. This information will then be reported to the collective and analyzed for how it can best be used strategically and tactically for the benefit. There's another group on the plantation who understand that they will be in the fields under the hot sun being subjected to the brutal Heat.

We are all clear that we have our lanes that are still part and parcel of our superhighway to Freedom.

Hopefully, by the above illustration, you can see the similarities between then and now of the power dynamics and the strategic need to embark collectively on a pathway to freedom from oppression. However, our ancestors have already paved the way for success. I often say that Harriet Tubman and her movement were the premiers and ultimate examples for us today in creating an organization. Please make no mistake; that is exactly what it was. Hundreds of members from African captives and indigenous/first nation and white allies worked together in different capacities to achieve freedom from the most oppressive conditions known to humankind.

It is required of us that we re-establish the Underground Railroad. We must do so with updated strategies, tactics, and understandings

gleaned from two-hundred years of history. The formula for Freedom has been laid out for us, so, as a community organizer, I always approach or seek to approach the community in the same way that the great ancestress, Harriet Tubman, and her Underground compatriots approached the community. By first understanding that we must be organized, then employing all means at our disposal to attain our freedom and employing all willing to aid and abet our drive for freedom. After that, we must ensure that we don't waste time seeking to persuade, control or convince those who do not wish to be free, and allow them to go on their way.

Lastly, those of us who have reached a certain level of understanding of the way North must continue to reach back both in body, resources, and thought to provide a pathway for those also seeking their freedom. To that end, I would like to think that this book is one such pathway... a map, if you will, of how my brothers and sisters and allies can organize themselves and advocate for their brothers and sisters who are all suffering at various levels of oppression within this plantation system.

We are clear that our strategies and tactics must be updated, that new technology must be employed, that lessons learned from the past must be analyzed for their usefulness, and that which is useful should be employed while that which is outdated or outmoded should be discarded.

However, all indications, especially economic and social, point to the reality that we as a collective are still simply living on a modernized plantation replete with whipping chambers inside our schools, workplaces, and prisons. Many of our brothers and sisters are employed at slave wages, replete with divisive and racialized

structures perpetuated in the social spheres that make up society to continue to harbor or seed fear and ignorance inside the populist.

My contemporaries in the spheres of academia have already laid out the data in the statistics that all point to the oppressive and holocaustic numbers along with the very clear pipeline to imprisonment that these statistics and data indicate. Meaning, for those who have eyes, let them see; for those who have ears, let them hear; for those who choose to be deaf, dumb, and blind to the harsh realities of the everyday educational and economic experience of the multitude of Afro-Indigenous, First Nation and poor working-class white people in this country, they can either be moved or get moved on: They can either work with us or get worked on by us - the choice is theirs.

**Building Out the Liberatory Paradigm**

"If you already think you're free, no escape is possible."

I would argue that one of the biggest impediments to organizing and agitating for our freedom is the erroneous idea that we were freed by Lincoln, MLK, JFK, or Obama at some point in the past. We must draw a direct line from our capture and transport to chattel slavery plantation death camps to today's modern plantations.

This erasure, of course, perpetuates slavery on a population that has already endured 400-plus years. The Plantation Paradigm is my attempt to show you the insidious, invisible chains that continue to bind us as a people. I will create a Then Vs. Now comparative analysis using the great Neely Fuller's United Compensatory Codes framework that encapsulates various areas of human activity. I use it not only to show the pervasiveness of plantation living and its total

impact on the lives of the captured but also to lay out the systemic nature of the plantation system itself, exposing it and then drawing a direct line to today in hopes that it awakens within the reader the painful yet profound understanding that the plantation system never ceased to operate, it merely shifted and changed form. We are still in a system of slavery, and the tools of abolitionism must be updated and refined once and for all to destroy plantations.

### **Healing and Liberation Through Return (Sankofa)**

In 2000, I went on a trip to Ghana with my ex-wife. This trip was arranged by the Ausar Auset Society (AAS), an African Centered group I joined at Howard University. I moved back to Denver and started my family, having had my first two children (Maaja and Aingku). I was excited about this trip because I had been an avid student of Africa since I was a child. My father spoke of it often; he said it was our original birthplace and sought to instill in me a sense of pride about who we are as a people. I continued my love of all things African by studying as much as possible about the continent and its people. In my late teens and early twenties, something magical happened; an African revival inside the Black popular culture was heavily fueled by hip hop, which was my genre of choice.

Public Enemy, Poor Righteous Teachers, KRS-One, Black Sheep, and my favorite, X-Clan!!! I loved X-Clan in particular because they, more than any other rap group of the time, personified pride in being from Africa to the extent of actually calling themselves not African Americans but AFRICANS! I remember they went to Africa to film the video in one of their videos. There's a scene in that video where they are riding through the plains on the back of a truck, and Brother J, the lead rapper of the group, is bouncing his head to the beat and

seems to be in a deep trance and connection, to the point where you could tell that he was "in the spirit" as they say. Combining these three forces captured my attention and devotion: Hip Hop Music, Africa, and Spirituality.

However, while X-Clan captured my heart during the trip to Ghana, another group that captured my ears was Method Man and Redman's Blackout Album. I played their album incessantly during my first trip to the motherland. Even now, I cannot tell you exactly what it was about this album that made it a fitting soundtrack for my return to Africa. Perhaps it was gritty creativity combined with rap skills par excellence. Or perhaps, it was the 'fuck you, we are who we are, whether you like it or not' persona that resonated with me at the time. Whatever it was, it just sounded fucking good! Real fucking good. Like some of the best shit I had ever placed in my ears, I rocked it during my trip to Africa.

Hip Hop Music, Africa, and Spirituality. I had so many experiences during that first trip that, even now, 20 years later, I find it difficult to translate them into words—only those who have returned to the motherland and felt the connection could understand what I mean. I will seek to share some of those experiences throughout this book. However, one experience stands out to me regarding what this journey means. And I'm not speaking about my journey back to the motherland. I'm talking about the 'what' and 'why' of the experience of being a descendant of captured and enslaved people and the 400-plus-year fight we've endured for total freedom, liberation, and emancipation.

It was the second week of my trip to Ghana, and we had been to three African countries, spending a significant amount of time in the last two; Benin and now Ghana. We were excited because we were heading to what was considered one of the trip's pinnacles: the slave

dungeons of Elmina and Cape Coast. Again, it is extremely challenging to convey to you, the reader, the gravity and anticipation of this part of the journey. Even as I'm typing this on my computer, I am swaying back and forth, trying to formulate just how to translate this experience so that it captures its depth and meaning.

Please allow me a moment to provide some context to set the stage for the experience we had as a group and the personal encounter I had that would get me banned from the Cape Coast dungeons.

When we prepared to visit these dungeons (many call them castles, but we refer to them in the terms that our ancestors would have seen them – death camp dungeons), we were given the deeper significance of these structures by the leader of our AAS group. We were made to understand that Ghana was the slave trading capital of the world! Africa has 53 slave dungeons, with Ghana holding 39 of those! This means that Ghana was ground zero, the center of our holocaust, the wall street of its day in the trading of Black flesh. It is estimated that 3 out of every 4 Black people in the diaspora passed through one of those 39 dungeons in Ghana. This means that as a descendant of those Africans today, your ancestors likely stood on those very shores as they were preparing to endure a fate this world has never seen before or since.

And here we were, preparing to return to the scene of humanity's ultimate and most heinous crimes; Elmina (coming from the Portuguese name for "Mines") and Cape Coast, the two largest dungeons in Ghana. So now, you can begin to understand both the excitement and gravity of what our group was preparing for the next day. I never experienced something that angered and excited me in equal measure. Something that created vitriolic anger and deep empathy and reverence. I dare to say that there are very few places

on this planet that have elicited these types of emotions from me. The dungeons being one, the plantations of Louisiana being the other.

On the morning of our visit, my whole being was charged with the energy I had never experienced. As we loaded onto the buses from our hotel, I looked at our group of almost 80, and I could feel the range of emotions permeating each of us. Gone was the lively excitement that had accompanied us through the villages and marketplaces of Ghana, Togo, and Benin. That energy was now replaced with a foreboding excitement akin to what it must feel like for a child to go through their rites of passage, knowing that after this experience, they will never be the same. To be filled with the excitement of crossing over into adulthood but scared shitless about what this unknown experience would entail.

I remember pulling up to the front of the dungeon and immediately struck by how brilliantly white it was. I mean glowing white. This was odd because, in a country filled with the dust of the earth, this building monstrosity stuck out both because of its size, color, and, probably most strikingly, its symbolism. We were parked in front of the great white, pale horse.

We all filed out of our buses and gazed upon this architectural oddity as if we were gazing at an evil spaceship that had created devastating destruction for our kin. Cameras clicked, eyes glazed over, and the buzzing of the locals, as they began to gather around us seeking to sell us their wares and trinkets, grew louder. Admittedly, this caused a bit of consternation with some in the group, including myself. Here we were, returning to the sacred scene of the crime, and here were our brothers and sisters, haggling with us to purchase their crafts. While we had been bombarded with this dynamic throughout our trip, it felt dirty, insensitive, and uncaring, but we pushed through.

We all gathered at the front gate of the dungeon to meet our guide. A local man who the Ghanaian tourist board had trained to usher visitors through the "castles" recited the building's dates, times, events, and oddities. Then he gave us the scripted rundown of do's and don'ts and what to expect on the hour-plus-long tour. We stood in silence. No one asked a question. No one made a sound. We were ready, or not, to return.

As we began the tour, I was immediately struck by the lack of humility and sacredness on behalf of the other groups touring the dungeons. This would soon cause a confrontation that I would never be allowed to forget. In the meantime, we were guided down into the dungeons of the "castle." Two things immediately struck me; how low the ceilings were and how dark, cramped, and winding the space was. To be such a huge structure, the dungeons were purposely designed to be cramped to cram as much of the impending "cargo" as possible into that space. The other two oddities still haunt my memory even today: the dark, dark smell of the dungeon and the scratches in the walls of some of the cells. Our guides told us that these scratches were made by Africans who were suffocating and, in their desperation, were seeking to claw their way to freedom. It was at the moment of hearing that information that it all became painfully real; the suffering and accompanying desperation our ancestors encountered in this space. So desperate were they for freedom that they would dig with their bare fingers into the walls, losing fingernails and tearing their flesh against an unforgiving wall in vain attempts at freedom. Yes, it was real.

By the time we finally emerged from the basement of the dungeons, I was a changed man, and, at that moment, I was no longer myself. I was ENRAGED. I was so fucking angry that I was ready to personally lead the war to avenge the murderous endeavor that had left bones,

flesh, and blood of men, women, and children on the floors and walls that I had just witnessed with my own eyes. I was angry, and I was ready for war. And now I had my chance.

As we emerged from the dungeons to start touring the open space of the "castle" floor – the place that boasted the cannons used to fend off the other European traders who would come looking to capture this economic jewel from its current owners – another tour of white people came parading past us without a care in the world. It was as if they were touring Disneyland and had no emotional connection or concern for the space they were again occupying. At this point, I spotted two younger men in the group who were laughing, giggling, and whispering to each other as they rounded up the last of their group in the back. I saw red. Seriously. I cannot explain what happened at that moment because it had never happened before or since, but I completely understand the saying: "I saw red," regarding the experience of acute anger.

At that moment, only three things existed in the world: those two jovial white men who seemed to be mocking my ancestors' massacre and me. What happened next had to be later relayed to me by others in the group because I don't have a clear recollection. However, what I faintly recall, was traveling about 30 yards in about three steps and grabbing one of them by the scruff of his neck and demanding of him, "what do you find funny?!"

I remember his friend looking up at his compatriot with complete surprise and horror while seeming to mouth the words, "what the fuck, dude?" His friend, who was now off the ground, was writhing, seeking to turn and look at what had snatched him up, and to escape from my grasp simultaneously. He began shouting his response to my rhetorical question: "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, we weren't laughing."

Which was a lie. They had been laughing, playing, and joyful moments before being suspended in the air.

Other group members turned around and realized what was happening, but none of them moved to either of their aides. I released the one from my grip, and as he returned to the ground, I quickly pushed his friend harder than I'd ever pushed anything, sending him sailing and crashing into the other group members. At this time, a group of women from my group surrounded and embraced me with hugs and chants of "Hasira, Hasira, it's ok, it's ok, it's ok, brother, it's ok."

It was their embrace that brought me back to myself. Tears fell my face like two waterfalls had been unleashed, but I didn't feel like I was crying. Their embrace contained within them so much love, care, and concern. It was like no other embrace I had ever had. I imagine my mother had given me a similar embrace once I was finally born, following my delivery after she was beaten by Denver police officers just hours earlier.

These women and the Ghanaian tour guide ushered me out of the dungeons and back into the courtyard outside. Everyone was silent. I don't recall anything about the day after that except that I was aware I had lost myself. The spirit of righteous rage had possessed me, and members of my group looked at me with deep appreciation and understanding of what I had just experienced. No one was angry or embarrassed by my actions. I remember people approaching me saying, "man, you were GONE!" I was gone.

This experience changed me and changed my perspective of our Maafa experience. It was no longer merely an intellectual understanding of what we were forced to endure as a people. Our experience had, for me, in those moments become "real."

The helpful Ghanaian tour guide was concerned about ensuring the whites felt safe enough to continue their tour. The whites seemed utterly amazed that their safety could no longer be automatically assumed regardless of their behavior. These would go into my assessment and analysis of my personal experience and our collective Maafa experience. However, for the sake of time and space, I would like to primarily focus on what I have gleaned as the ultimate lesson for Black people regarding our 400-plus-year journey of oppression (the Maafa). And I would like you, the reader, to indulge me in exploring this perspective.

### **The Door of No Return: The Case for Healing Justice**

I want us to talk about the door of no return not just as a physical space but as a metaphysical reality that many of us, even those who have visited and passed back through the door of no return, have yet to RETURN to who we were before experiencing the trauma of the Maafa.

We landed in Accra with two very small children on a hot day. My daughter Maaja was three then, and my son Aingku was one. There to receive us at the airport were Japhyre and Mwenda, two African American expatriates who had befriended us during our visit just 6 months earlier. That's how long it had taken us to finally make the leap and return to live in Africa. Of course, on our visit, we were already toying with the very real possibility that we would do this. However, meeting another African-American couple almost our age who had three small children and had been living there in Ghana for 3 years already gave us the extra incentive and vision we needed to let us know that it was indeed possible for us. And so we did it!