



CONNECT

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African Americans and the Arts

By: **Cedalia Ellis**

Black History has long been interwoven with a rich and impactful legacy in the arts, and as we celebrate the 2024 Black History Month, the theme "African Americans and the Arts" invites us to delve even deeper into this storied connection. From the soulful melodies of blues and jazz to the groundbreaking works of visual artists, Black creatives have left an indelible mark, shaping and reshaping the cultural landscape. This theme prompts reflection on the profound impact of African Americans in various artistic realms, acknowledging their resilience, innovation, and transformative power within the broader narrative of history. As we explore "African Americans and the Arts" in 2024, we illuminate the diverse contributions that have not only enriched Black culture but have also played a vital role in shaping the artistic heritage of the entire world.

DIVERSITY EQUITY & ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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Navigating Historical Trauma:

Unraveling the Impact on African Americans' Mental Health

By: Cedralia Ellis

Historical trauma casts a long and haunting shadow on the collective psyche of African Americans, leaving an indelible mark on mental health and well-being. Rooted in centuries of systemic oppression, slavery, and institutional racism, the trauma endured by the African American community has far-reaching implications. This article explores the profound impact of historical trauma on mental health and offers insights for social workers navigating the complexities of supporting African American clients.

Understanding Historical Trauma:

Historical trauma refers to the deep and lasting emotional wounds that are passed down through generations as a result of significant and harmful events in a community's history. These events often involve severe injustices, like slavery or discrimination.

So how did we get here?

The institution of slavery inflicted deep wounds on African American communities, leaving a legacy of generational trauma. The psychological effects of dehumanization, forced separation, and systemic violence continue to persist through generations. The history of segregation and the continuation of racial discrimination is haunting. It continues the cycle of inequality by reinforcing harmful stereotypes, resulting in the psychological toll on African Americans living under constant threat and prejudice. The disproportionate rate of incarceration of African Americans, disrupting families and communities, and the ongoing experiences of institutional racism in education, healthcare, and employment all amplify the burden of historical trauma and heightened stress levels and mental health challenges within the African American community.

All of these societal and systematic challenges have lasting and enduring consequences on the mental health of many if not all, African Americans.

Mental Health implications:

Historical trauma can strain interpersonal relationships, affecting trust and connection. Understanding and addressing these challenges is crucial for mental health professionals working with African American clients. When a group has experienced past injustices, like slavery or discrimination, it can create a legacy of pain and mistrust that lingers through generations. Individuals may carry the emotional weight of their community's historical trauma, affecting how they form connections with others.

The cumulative effects of historical trauma can impact one's sense of identity and self-worth. Enduring effects of past injustices can create a complex interplay between personal identity and the collective trauma experienced by a community. Individuals may grapple with feelings of inadequacy, internalizing societal biases that have been perpetuated over time. The historical trauma becomes woven into the fabric of identity, impacting self-esteem by fostering a sense of worthlessness or undesirability. Overcoming this impact requires a journey of self-discovery and acknowledgment, embracing the resilience and strength inherent in cultural identity, and fostering a positive self-image that transcends the weight of historical injustices. Recognizing and affirming the resilience of African American in the face of systemic adversity is important.

Continued

Historical trauma exerts a notable influence on mental health stigma within the African American community. The enduring legacy of slavery, systemic discrimination, and societal marginalization has contributed to a complex interplay of factors that stigmatize mental health discussions. The historical context of resilience and strength in the face of adversity can sometimes create an expectation that individuals should endure challenges silently. Consequently, seeking mental health support may be viewed as a sign of weakness rather than an essential aspect of well-being. The deep-rooted mistrust stemming from historical injustices further intensifies the stigma, making it difficult for individuals to openly discuss and address mental health concerns. Breaking down these barriers involves fostering culturally sensitive conversations, increasing awareness of mental health issues, and emphasizing the importance of seeking support as an empowering and courageous act, counteracting the historical stigma surrounding mental health in the African American community.

What can we do as social workers or professionals in the helping profession?

As social workers and professionals in the helping profession, addressing historical trauma requires a multi-faceted and culturally sensitive approach. Firstly, it is crucial to continually educate ourselves on the historical context of trauma specific to the communities we serve, understanding the nuanced impact on individuals and families.

Employing trauma-informed care principles is essential, creating safe and non-judgmental spaces that acknowledge the historical context of pain and healing. Collaborating with community organizations and leaders helps build trust, facilitating a holistic approach to addressing historical trauma. Integrate culturally tailored interventions into therapeutic practices, recognizing the resilience and strength embedded in cultural identities. Advocacy for systemic change is vital; social workers can actively work towards dismantling institutional barriers and addressing disparities in education, healthcare, and employment. By empowering individuals to navigate and heal from historical trauma, social workers play a pivotal role in fostering resilience and supporting the well-being of those affected.





EVANSVILLE'S BLACK HISTORY



GEORGE WASHINGTON BUCKNER

- Born into slavery near Greensburg, Kentucky and was freed at the age of ten
- Received a doctorate degree at the Indiana Eclectic Medical College
- practiced medicine in Indianapolis then moved to Evansville, Indiana to open his own clinic



SALLIE WYATT STEWART

- American educator and a social services organizer for the black community in Evansville, Indiana
- Best known for her leadership in local, state, and national black women's clubs.



CALBERT CHEANEY

- Three-Time All-American basketball player and coach.
- Director of player development for the Indiana Hoosiers men's basketball of the Big Ten



DELISA CHINN-TYLER

- Retired American Softball Outfielder
- Appeared in an iconic scene in the 1992 movie A League of Their Own as a bystander who throws back an overthrown ball from Bosse Field's first base bullpen



WALTER LEE MCCARTY

- American basketball coach and former professional NBA player.
- He played at William Henry Harrison High School, and as a senior in 1992 led his team to the Evansville II sectional championship and was named to the Indiana All Star Team.



DRU SMITH

- American professional NBA basketball player.
- Smith attended FJ Reitz High School in Evansville, Indiana.
- He played college basketball for the Evansville Purple Aces and the Missouri Tigers.



A JOURNEY *THROUGH* AFRICAN AMERICAN INFLUENCES ON THE ARTS

The rich tapestry of American culture is woven with threads of diverse influences, and Black history stands as a testament to the profound impact of African Americans on various facets of society. In this exploration, we delve into the dynamic and transformative history of African American contributions to the arts, recognizing their enduring legacy and the profound ways in which they have shaped the cultural landscape.

ROOTS IN MUSIC:

The rhythmic heartbeat of African American influence on the arts begins with music, echoing through time from the days of slavery to the present. From gospel to jazz, blues to hip-hop, African American musicians have birthed genres that resonate globally. Figures like Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and Aretha Franklin have not only defined musical eras but have also paved the way for a myriad of contemporary artists.

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE:

The early 20th century witnessed the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural and artistic movement that celebrated the vibrancy of Black culture. Poets like Langston Hughes, writers like Zora Neale Hurston, and artists like Aaron Douglas produced groundbreaking works that challenged societal norms and inspired generations.

DANCE & CHOREOGRAPHY





AMIRI BARAKA (CENTER) AND YUSEF IMAN (SECOND FROM LEFT) WITH MUSICIANS AND ACTORS OF THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT, SPIRIT HOUSE, NEWARK, NEW JERSEY, 1966. FAIR USE IMAGE, COURTESY HOWARD UNIVERSITY DIGITAL COLLECTIONS (MSS_5584)

African American influence extends seamlessly into the realm of dance. From the exuberant energy of tap dance to the innovative moves of breakdancing, the dance floor has been a canvas for self-expression and cultural celebration. Figures like Alvin Ailey and Katherine Dunham have left an indelible mark on the world of dance.

VISUAL ARTS & ACTIVISM

The visual arts have served as powerful tools for African Americans to communicate their narratives and challenge systemic injustices. The work of artists like Jacob Lawrence, Kara Walker, and Jean-Michel Basquiat has not only captivated audiences but also ignited conversations about identity, race, and social justice.

LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS:

African American literature is a profound exploration of the Black experience, covering a wide range of genres and themes. From the groundbreaking works of James Baldwin to the contemporary brilliance of Ta-Nehisi Coates, Black authors have woven narratives that transcend time and resonate with universal truths.

FILM & CINEMA

In the world of cinema, African American filmmakers have broken barriers, telling stories that had long been overlooked. From Sidney Poitier's pioneering roles in the 1960s to the visionary work of directors like Spike Lee, Ava DuVernay, and Jordan Peele, the film industry has been forever transformed.

CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES:

Today, African American artists continue to shape the artistic landscape. Beyoncé, Kendrick Lamar, Ava DuVernay, and countless others not only entertain but also use their platforms to advocate for social change, fostering a new era of cultural expression and awareness.

As we celebrate Black History, it is essential to recognize and honor the enduring contributions of African Americans to the arts. Their creativity, resilience, and commitment to self-expression have not only enriched American culture but have also influenced global artistic movements. By acknowledging this history, we ensure that the legacies of these trailblazing artists remain a source of inspiration for generations to come. The story of African American influences on the arts is one of triumph, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to the power of creativity.

2024

Upcoming Community Black History Events

12
FEB

5:00 PM

USI Screening of “Is That Black Enough for You”
Wright Administration 1 at the University of Southern Indiana.

13
FEB

6:00 PM

Taste of Film: *The Princess and the Frog*
Carter Hall D (located in University Center West) at the University of Southwestern Indiana.

18
FEB

6:00 PM

Black History Month Unity Choir Concert
Uplifting performance of The Black History Month Unity Choir concert, under the direction of Rev. James Hamler.

2024

Upcoming Community Black History Events

20
FEB

12:15 PM

Black Wax Museum

The Ivy Tech Black student groups are hosting a live wax museum that features storytelling of influential people throughout Black history.

21
FEB

5:00 PM

Soul Food Cooking Class

UC 2217-2218 (located in University Center East) at the University of Southern Indiana campus.

24
FEB

9:00 AM

African American Museum Day

The museum partners with Wesselman Woods for free access to all trails, the five-acre nature playscape, the treehouse and the bird sanctuary. Members of the museum will be on hand to provide information about the museum, the eclipse and Black history.



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Haitian Center Evansville

The Haitian Center of Evansville offers resources to Evansville's growing population to "help them achieve independence, increase overall wellbeing, and enhance future community development," according to its Mission Statement.

Located downtown Evansville, the Haitian Center provides a myriad of services in furtherance of integrating the local Haitian population while helping to maintain their cultural identity, including:

- ESL Classes: w/Vincennes University
- Resource Referrals: Personalized
- Employment Assistance: Employment services to help clients gain job skills – referrals, resume workshops, and more.
- Interpretation Services: Provided at appointments, as needed.
- Computer Literacy: Their classroom hosts workshops on a regular basis to help the clients learn basic computer skills.
- Immigration Assistance: Regular immigration workshops to teach the clients about the immigration process and next steps toward citizenship.

Funded by United Way of Southwestern Indiana, the Haitian Center also accepts in-kind donations of food, gently used clothing, school supplies, and baby supplies.

Donations

Monetary donations are also accepted, with all donations noted as "Haitian Center of Evansville" going directly to the center.

Operation hours: Tues 10am-4pm, Wed 10am-4pm, Thurs 10am-pm.



REFERENCES

Foster, H. (2014, March 21). *The Black Arts Movement (1965-1975)*. BlackPast.org. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/black-arts-movement-1965-1975/>