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When I was a young woman in California, my husband and I belonged to a church that conducted encounter groups. Our group consisted of four couples, with Pastor Whitman mediating the encounters. We met weekly for an hour or more.

The first session was devoted to personality inventories, which we filled out for the pastor to forward to a computer at Stanford University that analyzed them. Every other week each participant received a one-paragraph paper gently suggesting an issue that needed attention. The following week we discussed how we processed the previous week's information.

Often the notices evoked stunned silence when we first skimmed them. Before long someone would say, "That's not me! The computer made a mistake!" The spouse would retort, "Oh, yes, that's you," and someone else might chime in, "I've noticed that you tend to be . . . [rigid . . . authoritarian . . . secretive . . .]." By the second week we had more or less digested the missives.

One time my message read, "You suppress all emotions except rage . . . ask God to help you accept the full range of your feelings: fear, jealousy, love . . ."

I was devastated. I'd left Germany to live in France, then emigrated to California, where I married, gave birth to two children, and brought my brother to join us when he was fourteen—Helmut, the baby to whom I was caregiver at less than ten years of age. All that without love? All that, driven by rage?

I knew feelings within were still raw at the memory of my parents taking me out of school at fourteen to "help out" at home. For decades I was unable to forgive what I saw as their transgression. However, under guild regulations, my father the master baker had the right to "apprentice" me even though I never set foot in his bakehouse.

Today I wish that long-ago list of suppressed emotions had included guilt and grief. Back then, these emotions went unrecognized by psychologists as stumbling blocks on the way to emotional and mental health while today, a good deal more is known about their characteristics. In fact, the Five Stages of Grief can be accessed on YouTube; so are videos on how to manage obsessive guilt.

It took me a long time to figure out what was going on inside: Intertwined with rage were grief and guilt. Grief over a stolen childhood, a mentally ill mother, an emotionally absent father. Guilt over Mother's early death—I felt guilty for the relief I felt when she died and I understood, life with her was over and done. It left behind a flood of rage—rage over my mismanaged existence, rage over the siblings left in my care, rage at being unable to keep alive my three younger brothers.

Thus I empathize with Ta-Nehisi Coates as he bares his soul in “Between the World and Me,” a book-length essay addressed to his teen son. The writer examines the rage any Black man may feel who has grown up in American society and tasted the bitterness of mass incarceration, police brutality, redlining, and all the rest—not to mention the contemplation of enslaved great-grandparents and other family members that’s enough to make your blood boil: The tortures, rapes and murders; the exploitation and dehumanization of their bodies until the day they died. Entwined in that rage is grief. Grief over stolen lives and stolen potential. Grief over the ongoing social and cultural injustices Black people live with despite the hopes of the civil-rights era and the election of Barak Obama; rage at the powers that be who refuse to set things right.

And guilt, the guilt over being helpless to prevent the police killing of a fellow student about to graduate from Howard University and get married. Prince, the son of a physician, was the “patron saint of the twice as good,” a young man devoted to his Christian faith, which Coates is unable to emulate. He does understand Prince’s impulse to seek safety as he attempts to escape an encounter that was stacked against him from the start.

The need to keep ourselves safe is inherent in the human experience, and so, much of Coates’s rage is evoked at the thought that the Black body is so often condemned to lack of safety. As he imagines himself unable to prevent his son from being subjected to a fate akin to Prince’s, should the boy be thrust into a situation like the one that killed the fellow student, the writer is enraged and aggrieved all over again.

It’s a hard thing to read “Between the World and Me” for someone who cannot demark herself as “of color.” I struggled with the reading, though I’ve read the book several times over; it’s an essay stripped down to the essentials. I agree that the concept of race is a social construct; I know quite well that we all share a common ancestor, *homo sapiens,* who long ago migrated out of Africa, yet I feel targeted as part of those “who have painted themselves white,” who “believe themselves to be white” or “deem themselves white.” In America, you are categorized whether you agree with the grouping or not.

Joy DeGruy in “Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome” explains that people who have been the victims of years, decades, and centuries of oppression “must heal from injuries received first-hand as well as those passed down through the ages.” This also goes for the perpetrators of the crimes and their psychic wounds. DeGruy admits that “the lengths people will go *not* to confront their history never ceases to amaze me” [italics DeGruy’s].

And then she speaks of the “ever-present anger.” She asks, and attempts to answer through examples and anecdotes, “Why is it that anger is such a large part of the experience of most African Americans? Are we an inherently violent people?”

“We often live with overwhelming rage” when driven. by unresolved grief, Edith Eger explains as she details the prisons we build within, one of which is “The Prison of Unresolved Grief.” To free ourselves of rage, Eger writes in one of her “12 Lessons to Save Your Life,” we first must process the grief within.

“I’m a prisoner and a victim when I minimize or deny my pain—and I’m a prisoner and a victim when I hold on to regret,” writes Eger. Acknowledging the pain of grieving is a first step; the problem is, it forces us to recognize that we are powerless: something has already happened, and we can’t change a thing.

I imagine it evokes profound grief in African Americans to contemplate their ancestors’ dehumanized lives. I imagine it evokes overwhelming rage. Rage is eloquent in Coates’s book-length essay to his son. He observes that despite the rage and pain it evokes, African Americans must learn about their past, become aware of those gone before, and find a way to live with that painful awareness.

One pervasive symptom of post-traumatic slave syndrome, notes DeGruy, is “our adoption of the slave master’s value system.” It’s common for people who are held captive long-term to identify with their tormentors; through centuries of chattel slavery, African Americans have become socialized to the belief that all things white were superior and all things black inferior. Kinky hair was “bad.”

DeGruy cites the film “Birth of a Nation” with its derogatory use of “Mulatto” to describe a man of mixed heritage. Mulatto derives from the Latin word for mule—and a mule is the sterile offspring of a horse and an ass, she reminds us. The film was one long justification for the murderous activities of the Ku Klux.

Many of us have yet to heal from injuries past and present, DeGruy reminds her coevals. With this she echoes Coates’s conclusion that African Americans must look to their own physical, emotional, and mental health, for it’s impossible to change “those who have painted themselves white”—they themselves must undertake the changes that heal.