

# THE HARM REPORT

Nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds woke the world on May 25, 2020. On that day, Darnella Frazier, a then 17-year old girl from Minneapolis, filmed the police officer Derek Chauvin with his knee on George Floyd's neck. The murder of Mr. Floyd led to protests in over 2,000 cities and towns across the United States, and 60 countries around the globe. It is estimated that between 15-26 million people participated in these demonstrations.<sup>(1)</sup>

May 31 through June 1, 2021 marked the 100 year anniversary of the Black Wall Street Massacre, when a white mob descended on Tulsa's Black Greenwood neighborhood killing hundreds of people, destroying many successful businesses, and leaving thousands homeless. Property damage amounted to more than \$1.5 million in real estate and \$750,000 in personal property, or losses equivalent to about \$32.65 million in today's currency.<sup>(2)</sup>

Since Africans were first brought to this continent against their will by the Spanish in 1526,<sup>(3)</sup> government and socially sanctioned atrocities against African descendants have continued. Historic trauma and ongoing systemic racism has a toll, not just on the psyche of African Americans, but on their physical health as well.

It is well established that experiences of trauma and adversity can "get under the skin" and increase risk for a whole host of negative social,<sup>(4-9)</sup> psychiatric,<sup>(10-12)</sup> and medical health problems.<sup>(5,13-18)</sup>

## Can the impact of trauma be transmitted transgenerationally?

The concept of generational trauma was first introduced in 1967 by Vivian Rakoff, a Canadian psychiatrist who recorded markedly elevated rates of psychological distress among children of Holocaust survivors<sup>(19,20)</sup>. Since that initial publication, multiple investigators have reported elevated rates of psychological distress in the children<sup>(21,22)</sup> and grandchildren<sup>(23-25)</sup> of Holocaust survivors. There have also been a number of epidemiological studies which suggest parental exposure to trauma and stress, inadequate nutrition, and toxicants can impact the health of descendants across several generations.<sup>(26-28)</sup>

## Report Organization

This report is organized into seven sections: 1) The first section provides a brief overview of the historical trauma experienced by African Americans; 2) The second section discusses key structures in American society that perpetuate cycles of disadvantage and ongoing experiences of adversity and trauma for African descendants; 3) The third section discusses data that links adversity and trauma to a whole host of medical health problems; 4) The fourth section provides an introduction to the field of epigenetics and the concept of transgenerational epigenetic inheritance; 5) The fifth section reviews state-of-the art research on transgenerational epigenetic inheritance; 6) The sixth section discusses factors that can mitigate the effects of historical and personal trauma and promote resilience and recovery; and 7) the seventh section delineates policy, practice, and research recommendations to address systemic racism in America.



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