

# Brief Survey of African American Literature

## By Carl Garrison

Hello everyone, and thanks so much for spending some retreat time with us today. Today we are going to briefly look at a highly selective list of African American authors that relate expressions of African American experiences historically and currently, and follow a thread of how aspects of African American experiences involve a level of resiliency that is divinely inspired.

We will briefly offer summaries of the following four books and reflect on a few questions as well share personal responses. These books are arranged in a personal order that helps the historical flow of an African American experience build on each other.

\*\*“Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome” by Dr. Joy Degruy:

In PTSS, Dr. Degruy adapts our understanding of classic Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in which severe mental health conditions are caused by experiencing a traumatic event or series of events, and proposes that African Americans today deal with a similar but particular kind of historical and intergenerational trauma that stems from legacies of enslavement. These legacies have repercussions and are expressed by ongoing affirmations of white supremacy, violence and other forms of organized racism and oppression that negatively impact lives and outcomes.

The levels of cognitive dissonance justifying the “othering” and negative treatment of people from the enslaved to George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, have contributed to PTSS, particularly when dominant cultural and social voices under value the harm of social histories with denial, defensiveness and or guilt. Adaptive behaviors during enslavement that were meant for survival were passed down generationally in African Americans, even if threats were minimized, resulting in internalized hatred, fear and anger, self destructive impulses.

Healing can come in the form of historical acknowledgment, forgiveness of others and self and an understanding of the level of resiliency that has been there all along gifted by a gracious God.

- 1) What role do you feel our national and collective histories play in our present attitudes, outlooks, mindsets, aspirations, spiritually, racially, and socially?  
Examples?
- 2) What is racially learned behavior, and from your perspective how have you seen a difference in the perceived expectations of African Americans and what was expected from White people?

\*\*“Democracy in Black” by Eddie Glaude Jr.

In Democracy in Black, Dr. Glaude suggests that main problems afflicting America’s political and social culture and of the kind of Democracy we aspire to, is the views of race and the ideological investments we place in it through historical misremembering and a lack of

wholesale of reimagining, and rethinking of what could be. The heart of Dr. Glaude's argument is what he calls the "value gap", which is the belief that the lives of Black people are less valued than those of white people, historically and currently, and that belief organizes all of our political, social, economic arrangements.

- 1) Looking at the current political and social cultural environments, racial reckonings in protests, as well as economic, and health disparities, how do you feel that Eddie Glaude Jr.'s term the "value gap" applies?

\*\*In "White Rage" Dr. Carol Anderson chronicles the history of America's racial divide from enslavement to election of Barack Obama, and seen specifically through white backlash responses as well as white social & political grievance.

- 1) Looking at every crucial racial turning point such as emancipation, reconstruction, the freedmen's bureau, civil rights legislation, and the election of Barack Obama, what do you see has been the racial backlash to such turning points, Examples?
- 2) Given the history of racial and social backlash, what do you expect socially and culturally from the BLM and other movements protesting police brutality and inequality from this summer?

\*\*Brittany Cooper's "Eloquent Rage" is the perfect conclusion to this survey of current African American authors, as she looks at the racial history of Dr. Degruy's "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome", the "Value Gap" in Eddie Glaude Jr.'s "Democracy in Black", and the white backlash, rage and grievance responses in Carol Anderson's "White Rage", to insist on a point of Black Feminist Agency as an actual source of resilience and personal power. In Eloquent Rage Brittany Cooper reflects on the histories of racial and sexual power structures and intersects and imposes on them an agency of emotion that deconstructs and disrupts traditional oppressive forces such as white and black patriarchy, practiced by both men and women and members of the LGBTQ community, racism, as well as traditional white feminism. Drawing on her personal narratives, and educational experiences and activism, she expresses how agency of black feminism can be productive and constructive aspects of resilience for men and women.

- 1) How do you feel that black women were embraced or not embraced by white feminism?
- 2) In a chapter of the book called "White girls tears", Dr. Cooper reflects on how complicity can exist between white women and patriarchy, what do you feel about this reflection?