

Reimagining Resistance: Rest as Reparations

By

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The Nap Ministry, “A Resting Place,” 2019. Site-specific installation at Ponce City Market, Atlanta, for Flux

Projects. Photo: @capturedbytabia

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction..... | 3 |
| Methodology | 5 |
| Research Design..... | 6 |
| Researching Instagram’s Social Media Platform..... | 8 |
| Autoethnography and Reflexive Writing..... | 10 |
| Review of Relevant Literature | 12 |
| Significance (Benefits)..... | 15 |
| Limitations (Challenges)..... | 16 |
| Findings..... | 18 |
| “The Nuanced Relationship between the Black Community and the Lack of Capability to Rest”..... | 19 |
| “Disparities Between Resources and Opportunity” | 21 |
| “Defining Rest and Reparations” | 24 |
| Rest | 24 |
| Reparations | 24 |
| “Gaps In Honest Teachings and Confrontations Regarding Prevalence of White Supremacy”..... | 26 |
| “Sleep Inequality” | 30 |
| Analysis..... | 30 |
| Conclusion & Recommendations | 34 |
| Bibliography | 38 |

Introduction

Growing up Black in America is an experience that I would not trade for the world. It is an experience that encompasses so much; so much that to say that it is dynamic would result in nothing short of an understatement. It is an experience filled with hardships and exhaustion, yet it is also one painted with strokes of resiliency and perseverance. In the words of poet and author James Baldwin (attributed to an interview in 1961), “To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all of the time.”

How do you compete with that rage? This is a question that I as a Black American have had to ask myself repeatedly. In order to begin to answer that question, repeatedly, I had to understand how this rage was being fueled. It was not just a matter of probing, but it was a matter of my working towards an objective of healing. To heal from my rage, I had to understand why it existed. I had to understand what story it was that white America was trying to force upon me. This required me to understand not just the story and narrative of my experiences as a Black person in this country, but also the experiences of those around me to thoughtfully consider how one might be able to utilize past experiences in Black America to better inform future ones.

This understanding and narrative shaping is called public narrative storytelling, a concept coined by Marshall Ganz in 2008. It was in my first semester at Goucher College in the Masters of Cultural Sustainability (MACS) program that I realized just how pertinent and powerful using a framework of public narrative storytelling and inquisition could be towards comprehending how to critically analyze, develop, and facilitate conversations that could be centered around both

individual and collective healing and repair. It was in Sue Eleuterio's Organizing Communities course that I first heard about public narrative storytelling, learning that it serves to teach individuals how to veer through the evaluative stages that exist between key points of self and community. It does this by considering one's relationship to leadership, strategy and action, and aggregative value and experiences, revelations sparked by Ganz.

The tool of public narrative led me to discover the transformation that lies within probing the challenges that one faces, the challenges that others face, the choices and values that we align with, and what actions we can choose each day to ensure we align in response to each of those components. It is in considering Ganz's concepts of the story of "self", the story of "now", and the story of "us" that I was able to make the connection between each of these things. This ebb and flow between these spatial components allowed me to be able to fully evaluate how my life experiences and purpose relate to those within and outside of my community (the Black community in America), and dream about how my community could go on to exist more freely. Ganz's framework of public narrative storytelling and inquisition ultimately brought me to consider the exhaustion and dynamicity that being Black in America imposes. This led me towards wanting to explore how and why Black American's can and should use rest as a tool of resistance and reparation in response to the hundreds of years—past and present—of harm that we have been subjected to daily in the United States of America at the hands of white supremacy, which is a term (white supremacy) that is defined by Chicana activist, community organizer, and educator, Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez as "a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by

white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege (Martinez, 1998, 1).”

The research question for this capstone is “How rest could serve as a mode of resistance and reparations for Black people in America?” This research question led me through many processes, which included autoethnography, a review of relevant literature, and the review and analysis of social media content as a means of political education. It is throughout this research I found that when offered and practiced, *rest* has the potential to offer an opportunity for healing. Initially, viewing rest as a term that solely meant “to sleep”, I was skeptical of such claims. However, after learning more about rest, how it can be defined, and what it can represent, by the completion of this project I was no longer a naysayer. I found that rest was not just a noun, but also a verb. Resting can be an action with the possibility to instill both individual and collective healing, offering Black Americans the option to simply be and to relinquish the confinements of imposed white supremacy and concern. Rest has the potential to support Black Americans in ridding ourselves of the embedded facets of exhaustion, further ridding us even if for moments of the conundrum of having to try and explain said burdens to others. Participating in intentional rest is more than sleeping, it is a birthright. It is my hope that throughout this research readers will be able to critically think about this same question and consider how rest may work to serve as a means of healing for them.

Methodology

Research Design

In selecting my methodology, I thought it wise to reflect and consider several things prior to deciding which method would be most appropriate for this type of research. In order to do that I had to deconstruct my thinking, examining what steps would be necessary for someone to be able to gain the information pertinent to answering the research question, “How rest could serve as a mode of resistance and reparations for Black people in America?” As I considered what the process might be in order to gather the information necessary in best answering this question, I reflected on how my work could align with the MACS programs’ foundational outcomes and mission. I reverted here because I wanted to be mindful and to ensure that my work was reflexive and representative of the very core guidance that I believe sanction ethicality.

I found it crucial as I was journeying into this work to uphold the importance of engaging in ways that allowed for researchers to model a sense of exploration while conducting research projects that honor innovation and possibility. Ways in which I believed this could be enacted was to ensure that content was produced to be reflected and discussed in ways that closely represent the individuals for whom this thesis was created for, which are Black academics and strategists interested in furthering community healing and bonds rooted in rest and repair for Black Americans. Keeping this in mind, I considered the mission of MACS and the field of Cultural Sustainability. In its essence, the mission of Cultural Sustainability at Goucher College, according to this institution’s *Program Mission & Learning Outcomes* “is to foster the capacity of students to work effectively in recognizing and supporting the cultural gifts of communities; to act in the world as leaders, writers, thinkers, teachers, activists, entrepreneurs, and members of organizations (Goucher College, 2021).” It is also to embody commitment and practice in being

“committed to a methodological orientation that insists on ethical practice, deep human inquiry and relationship building with people in communities, and ongoing assessment and reflection.”

These core values are integral to my research and exploration efforts, employing mindfulness and ethical ethnographic practices to make meaningful contributions within intersecting communities central to my work and for future academic use. In considering this, the type of research style that I believed would be best to conduct was a combination of autoethnography reflexive writing.

Autoethnography is a method of research where the researcher writes about and analyzes their personal experiences with a cultural subject and/or matter and explains to readers any epiphanies and reflections that they experienced throughout the process of their research. More specifically, according to Ellis and Bochner in their article, *Autoethnography: An Overview*, “When researchers do *autoethnography*, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity.” (Ellis & Bochner 2010, 1).” Autoethnographers can use personal experience to support their research and build empathy with their readers through sharing their cultural stories and perspectives with them.

Reflexive Writing is a research method that represents the progress and journey that researchers participate in as they conduct their research. According to the article *Reflexivity in Qualitative Research: A Journey of Learning*, this type of research changes every researcher in many ways. As a researcher journeys through fieldwork and self-reflection, they develop the potential to “share the changes brought about to ourselves” through the sharing of their experiences

(Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, & Caricativo, 2017, 426).” This type of research has the potential to provide context and layering to the story of those who are the subject of research through the eyes of the researcher.

Both autoethnography and reflexive writing offer readers and researchers a personal viewpoint that may contribute to relationship and community building by these empathic, contextual layers, but they also each come with critique. Both methodologies have the potential to take away from other participants in a research project due to the personal reflections possibly eliciting emotional responses that may overbear the research and become the focal point of a project. They also allow for bias since these methodology’s are generally used in projects that are conducted out of personal motivation. As mentioned in *Reflexivity in Qualitative Research: A Journey of Learning*, “Personal motivation for doing a project, knowledge of the topics discussed, emotional responses to an interview, and ways in which the interviewer may have been changed by the process of interviewing. Even though the researcher's experience isn't the main focus, personal reflection adds context and layers to the story being told about participants (Ellis 2004, 1).” This statement demonstrates how this methodology can be a benefit to research by allowing for passion to fuel a project, yet how it can also be a hinderance, by allowing the researchers personal motivation and emotional responses to potentially led to bias.

Researching Instagram’s Social Media Platform

Investigating Instagram, which is a free social media application platform that allows users to view, post, and comment on visual content that is uploaded by other users, was a useful tool in considering what critical paradigms exist on the subject matter of rest as a form of reparations for

Black people in America. I chose this social media platform because it offers practical and accessible ways for non-traditional and non-institutionalized voices to broker their opinions and experiences in conversations that otherwise may not be as accessible to them. It can serve as a conduit for multiple intergenerational and subcultures throughout unifying and varying communities to more easily participate in a communal platform and redistribute power to those typically ostracized in more traditional spaces that are typically centered around white communities and their feelings.

Another reason to investigate Instagram was to ensure input of others without having to solicit individuals, particularly Black ones, so as to not impose additional emotional labor onto a Black individual with a proposition to interview them for a project for which they would not be compensated. This was important to me. Considering the current state of the United States in regard to the pandemic of COVID-19, as well as the ongoing racial inequity pandemic that is inflicted upon Black people in this country, it felt that this was most appropriate in order to honor previously mentioned values of rest. To interview Black individuals had the potential to lead towards a sense of hypocrisy; or at least that is what surfaced within me at even the mere thought of doing such a thing. The avoidance of this was influential in “practicing what I preached”, regardless of the potential sacrifice at hand which was the limitation of a smaller research sample. I viewed this intentional decision to not participate in interviewing others as a deliberate demonstration of how practicing rest on an individual scale can have the potential to contribute towards promoting rest and sustainability for others.

As I investigated this social media source, I was able to engage with an extensive pedigree of testimony from individuals ranging from ordinary Black citizens living in America, to rest practitioners such as Nap Bishop of The Nap Ministry, Tricia Hersey, to journalists such as New York Times, Sandra E. Garcia. This scale of individuals attests to the importance of rest via their commitment and expression of their words provided through internet platforms and the social media of Instagram.

Autoethnography and Reflexive Writing

To provide additional testimony and voice regarding how the effects of rest and/or the lack thereof can affect Black people, potentially supporting repair and reparations when engaged in and/or imposing detriment when not, I decided to use myself as a subject. Autoethnography is a methodology that includes self-inquiry and subject matter excavation (Ellis 2004, 1). Using autoethnography allowed me to center my lived experience in this work by discussing my perspectives and directly engaging in the activity under study. I believe that Black people can benefit, heal, and find repair through deep self-care and by disengaging in the racist activities that cause us to be tired and this had to be modeled authentically to ethically complete this research. Therefore, it felt inappropriate to not perform this work without the principle of deep and intentional rest at the forefront of this research, justifying using self as a testimony to the benefits of engaging in rest as a means of resistance.

Reflexive writing provided this research with the opportunity to further expand upon critical and analytical thought at the hands of myself. A task that while valuable proved to be difficult, putting me in-between the liminal space that blurred the boundaries between enacting resistance

by delving into rest, resisting any urge to engage in the writing and/or completion of this project (due to exhaustion) or writing and further amplifying my own voice and testimony for the sake of documentation and attestation. It was here that I reminded myself that rest offers more than participation in the systems that exhaust us (Black people in America) ever could. I told myself that it was okay to engage in my birthright of rest and to reconsider what the word means to me, and both how and why restoration and reparations could be signified in the allowance and exploration of it (rest).

One of the most difficult things that I have ever had to do was to write this paper. Writing this paper during the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic was exhausting. Writing this paper during the middle of a pandemic of racism was difficult. To think about the fact of why I am here in this academy, in this program, in this space was exhausting. The thought of this challenge that laid within the liminal space is also exactly what has thus far gotten me through it; it is what keeps me here. I enacted rest through self-inquiry, asking myself how does one find energy? The energy to be you or simply the energy to complete the things that everything in your mind convinces you is nothing but mundane, repetitive, and in the grand scheme of exhaustion completely irrelevant and unimportant? I answered this question, responding to myself that you find it in the inspiration; you find it in rest; you find it by giving yourself the permission to participate in each of these things by reimagining what it could be like to disengage from each of these things. We give ourselves the permission to rest, by any means necessary. Thus, that is what I did. I rested. Some days this looked like disengaging from responsibilities such as writing this Capstone project, recognizing that while important, it also at times felt like a burden to contribute towards completing. Other days engaging in rest looked like taking a nap mid-day nap

or participating in task that felt restorative, such as taking a walk around my neighborhood of Bolton Hill in Baltimore, MD, or spending time with my loved ones. Regardless of what less looked like for me each day, it brought me a feeling of restoration and each day before I engaged in a restful activity, I asked myself the aforementioned question, how do I find energy? This question each time led me towards the answer of rest.

Review of Relevant Literature

Using the methodology processes that guided my research led me towards several important texts such as Mary-Frances Winters, *Black Fatigue: How Racism Erodes the Mind, Body, and Spirit*, Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, two of Adrienne Maree Brown's titles, *Emergent Strategy* and *Pleasure Activism*, and both Angela Davis', *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* and *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*. Although I found inspiration and information pertinent to my research from a multitude of resources, these were the books that guided and served as a central component of my research. Through these texts I was able to delve into what the rest and reparations has looked like in years past and present and examine how we can use those disclosures to investigate how rest and restoration, absent of the burden of racial injustices in subsequent decades can manifest and go on to exist and/or take place in the future.

These books prompted critical thinking and resolution, resulting in self and community building cultivation that can serve to fight against racial injustice. In past experiences and throughout these books, we are told of experiences of activism tactics ranging from largely quiet displays of resistance to those that have provoked activists to take to physically shouting, screaming, and

marching in the streets, but had not been told of many stories or examples that were centered around the care and decompressing that is necessary after participating in such extraneous activities. This absence allowed me to use that as an entry point in considering what could be and exploring what other methods of resistance could be less taxing and restore power; this act of resistance was rest.

In the years when Black Americans were outwardly subjected to the harsh and racist systemic, segregating, and discriminatory Jim Crow laws, it was persistent protest and civil disobedience that garnered change. And in the year of 2020, it is that same persistence and truth-telling that created movement, but engagement in those things also created exhaustion. Exhaustion in which we do not always have to participate in. In Angela Davis', *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*, Davis states that racial injustice movements, especially newer ones as time goes on, are created due to Black Americans not being given full citizenship and equity following past movements. She argued, "Had slavery been abolished in 1863, through the Emancipation Proclamation, or in 1865 through the Thirteenth Amendment, Black people would have enjoyed full and equal citizenship and it would not have been necessary to create a new movement (Davis 2015, 115)". This realization of our continued imposed and deeply embedded stressors can serve as a call and catalyst to try something new, to try what has been withheld from us, enacting in rest.

In Adrienne Maree Brown's, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, Brown explores modes of protest and activism. She discusses how protest and activism can exist and be displayed simply by existing and being; by resting and allowing Black and Brown bodies to take up space,

stating that these things alone are an act of resistance. Brown argues that pleasure is an act of protest and urges readers to begin to invest in self in order to fully invest in others. She believes that a large part of creating advancement and being an activist is by leading those who feel broken closer towards fullness, by creating buy-in towards feeling good! She shares that it is through relationship building with self, that we build trust and relations with others that can achieve Black liberation. For instance, she states that “Liberated relationships are one of the ways we actually create abundant justice, the understanding that there is enough attention, care, resource, and connection for all of us to access belonging, to be in our dignity, and to be safe in community.” (Brown 2019, 115) Brown’s ideas surrounding existence and rest as resistance are largely newer concepts for many and demonstrates that recreation and imagination that can exist in protest and activism.

Another text that demonstrates newness and innovation is Brown’s book *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, a text that supports how powerful just being and showing can be when you consider overcoming the impositions of your oppressors. As she says, “Do you already know that your existence—who and how you are—is in and of itself a contribution to the people and place around you? Not because you do some particular thing, but simply the miracle of your life. And that the people around you, and the place(s), have contributions as well? Do you understand that your quality of life and your survival are tied to how authentic and generous the connections are between you and the people and place you live with and in?” (Brown 2019, 115). In this quote Brown shares with readers how Black existence is an act of contribution to the fostering of community and relationship building through existing, which is a method of

resistance due to being able to exist despite systems such as white supremacy working to destroy you.

These works offer examples of how rest and/or lack thereof can look and/or either contribute towards healing or further exhaustion. Each of the texts provide deep historical context that offer readers insight into past racial injustice movements and resistance in order to compare and contrast what has existed versus what currently does and could be. As I continued to consider what rest as resistance looks like, I cannot help but to notice these intersecting subjects exist and take shape in many ways.

Significance (Benefits)

The significance of this research is in honoring the written words of those within the Black community in America who have been subjected to and/or noticed others who are being deprived of rest via the historic and ongoing battles enforced on us through experiences with white supremacy. While the presence of exercising varying forms of rest has been hijacked from many Black people in the United States, over the course of centuries, said hijackings have just as historically been unacknowledged and/or legitimized in spaces of higher learning, governmental agency, or institutions of the like. Despite many Black people having felt and provided testimony to the experiences of such subjections, much of this has been ignored in the previously mentioned spaces until recent years. I believe that this is due to continued efforts to amplify the voices of those in nontraditional spaces that refuse to have their stories silenced in all spaces and institutions.

Racism is a visceral experience attested to by many Black people. Many of us being able to relate to similar demonstrations as described by author Ta-Nehisi Coates as a systemic tool that “dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, and breaks teeth” (Coates 2015, 10). This is how he describes the horrors of racism in his book titled *Between the World and Me*. It is also in this same text that he warns his readers that “You must never look away from this (racism). You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body” (Coates 2015, 10). Research such as mine highlights those disparities and expands upon existing readings that often separate systemic racism from conversations centered around fatigue and rest disparities. My research further conjoins rest and racism and encourages readers to consider ways of harnessing rest as a means of intentional repair.

Limitations (Challenges)

As noted in an NIH article, *A Pandemic on a Pandemic: Racism and COVID-19 in Blacks*, “Racism and COVID-19 represent a pandemic on a pandemic for Blacks. The pandemics find themselves synergized to the detriment of Blacks and their health. The complexity of the combination of these pandemics are evident when examining the interplay between racist policing practices and health (Laurencin and Walker 2020, 1).” In this article researchers explain the difficulty that the duality of having to simultaneously operate through the pandemic of racism as well as the pandemic of COVID-19 imposes upon Black people in America. In this article they explore how racism is “Bad for Your Health” and how for Black people in America the interplay of the two can ultimately contribute to a lack of ability, energy, or the access needed to engage in genuine self-care and rest. This is important to mention because being mindful of this

juxtaposition is the same act of mindfulness that led me towards my justification in not interviewing individuals throughout this project and instead led me towards partaking in auto-reflexive writing, a review of relevant literature, and evaluation of the relevant literature.

This type of critical thinking and reflection was very difficult, and it was challenging for those exact reasons. To have to delve so deeply into the same heaviness in order to contribute towards some of the same systems which are oppressing me was exhausting. This was an onerous act. The heaviness of this work, having to absorb and analyze racist and harmful words, studies, and truths, whether they were delivered via self-reflection or by way of the testimonial of others (throughout traditional books, social media platform Instagram, or anything else), was exigent. Furthermore, engaging in these types of thoughts and readings daily in order to complete this work was grueling. Having to move forward regardless of the weight of this tumultuous research was just as strenuous and I could not help but to notice the satire that existed in operating past capacity to engage with the institution of higher learning despite needing to engage in rest instead. To be expected to produce and meet expectations at the height of multiple pandemics in order to credential and prove mastery in the sustaining of cultures was ironic. While this work is important, throughout the length of this project, I could not ignore that it was also more than depleting. This sense of energetic depletion is not an experience that is foreign to many Black people. As essayist and activist James Baldwin noted in his 1963 essay titled, “A Talk to Teachers”, “The paradox of education is precisely this – that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated (Baldwin 1963, 1).”

Additional limitations to this research include the lack of interviews conducted. By not interviewing other individuals, this research lacks oral testimony outside of my own that can attest to and/or dispute the claim that rest can serve as a viable means of reparation for Black people in America, and therefore cannot be considered generalizable to the larger Black community. By using self as participant, I recognize that my lived experience could bias the researched and preconceived notions surrounding the claims of structural disadvantages and racism disproportionately affecting Black individuals and as a result robbing them of rest and restoration. I acknowledge that I not only have a limited scope in research, but also possess a subjective viewpoint. This data is not conducted with the intention to generalize, but with the objective to bring light to the need for further research and deep investigation of systems in which this country operates in and how they may or may not contribute to a larger issue of Black fatigue and racially driven inequities.

Findings

Prior to exploring the act of rest and what it could look like, it is crucial to ask ourselves “Why?” Why do people need rest? Why are people called to potentially put their voices, bodies, and well-being in harm’s way? Why are people willing to risk their lives daily? The explicit and commonly shared answer being because people are unfortunately told that they have to in order to live. In the following section, I draw on my research to offer some perspectives on the why.

“The Nuanced Relationship between the Black Community and the Lack of Capability to Rest”

Author, poet, and civil rights activist, Maya Angelou once said that “Your ancestors took the lash, the branding iron, humiliations and oppression because one day they believed you would come along to flesh out the dream (Reynolds & Angelou 2009, 24).” It is with this quote that we are shown a couple of things:

1. What atrocities Black Americans have been handed by way of White America, and
2. What the Black ancestors used to get through those atrocities which was hope of freedom and the possibility to dream.

This Angelou quote shows that there is something greater out there for Black communities; that there is something better out there than what has historically been offered to us—we are told in so many words that within the ancestor’s dreams lay the fortitude to dream even further about the possibility and opportunity to rest. The opportunity to just be.

From the beginning of our time in the United States of America, Black Americans have been robbed of the act to simply exist as they are. We have been robbed of our birthright and the necessity to rest. History will show that traditionally Black Americans and African peoples in the United States have been notoriously forced into servitude in both our current existence and even in our original introduction into this country. Black Americans have been completely stripped of the autonomy to opt into quite literally being here. For centuries slavery was legal across the United States until the 13th Amendment was written into the United States Constitution (on December 6, 1865). During the Reconstruction Era (from 1865 to 1877) the 14th amendment granted Black Americans citizenship and the 15th amendment granted Black Americans the right

to vote. Despite each of these amendments being enacted, both were heavily ignored and neither enforced or upheld by state institutions and/or sanctions. I mention these moments in history to draw attention to ways in which Black people in America have historically been robbed of the possibility to rest. White sanctions have for centuries restricted Black people in ways that would more easily allow them to garner vast capabilities of advancement or economic success.

Discrimination was repackaged and systemically continue in contemporary years, preventing deepened Black rest and restoration from the years of legalized slavery into the present. Whether it has been Black people being subjected to the lash, branding iron, humiliation, or the general oppression that Angelou spoke of—Blacks have not been afforded many spaces or opportunities to easily be and “to flesh out the dream” (Reynolds & Angelou 2009, 24). The impact and presence of slavery, white supremacy, and racism are still largely in existence in our society today and the effect of slavery runs high in a multitude of modified and modernized guises that fuel contemporary America, which are shown in examples such as the prison industrial complex that disproportionately affects Black individuals, the Black wage gap, and the racial rest gap (Quarshie, Yancey-Bragg, Godlasky, Sergeant & Bravo, 2020).

In each one of these examples, there is blood, sweat, and tears of the African diaspora in the soil and foundation of the United States of America. Through these examples research suggests that the lineage of the Black African American people’s time in the United States has been overshadowed by intentional systemic exploitation and unrelenting victimization for centuries and that this subjectiveness continues to prevent Black people from engaging in rest.

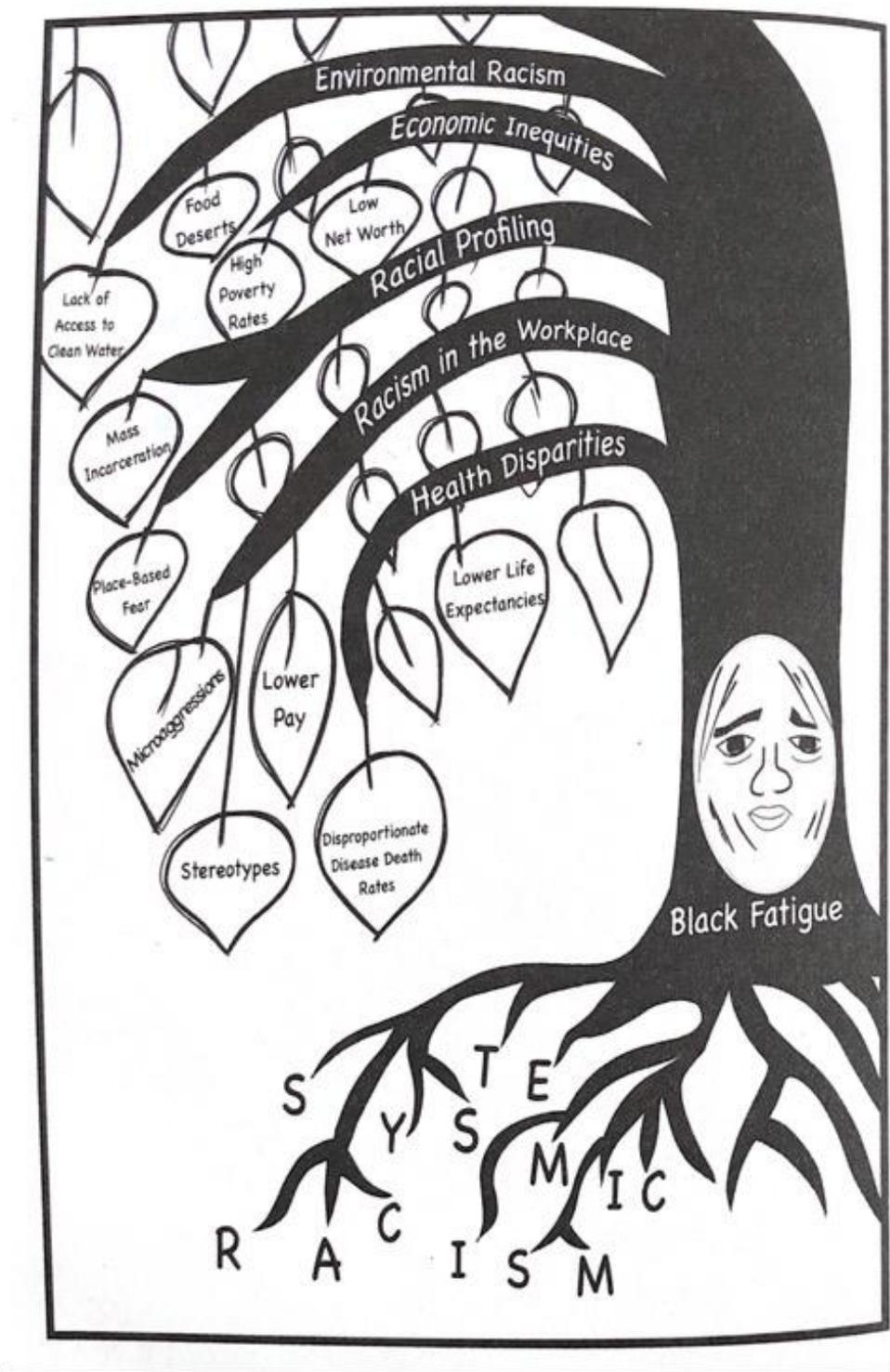
“Disparities Between Resources and Opportunity”

There is a very popular quote that exists within the Black African American community. While the creator of the quote is not known, part of the folklore within the Black community rumors that the quote’s origin can be dated back to eras of legalized slavery—the quote goes as follows: “Black people have to be twice as good to receive half as much”. This is a quote that is widely shared in an attempt to inform individuals of how disparities disproportionately display themselves for Black people in America (in comparison to the White race). One could argue that this quote was written to warn of the inequitable differences that cause Black Americans to have to overwork themselves and abstain from rest. Said disparities are felt in an array of areas ranging from employment to housing to education and generally, in nearly any area that incorporates some sense of qualification needed to represent success or recognition of accomplishment.

Research such as *Communities in Action: Pathways to Health Equity* demonstrates that in the United States there are high rates of racial and ethnic disparities across the following topics: wealth and investment opportunity, health care, chronic poverty, housing, education, incarceration, police brutality, and even in the impacts of climate change and natural disasters (Baciu A, Negussie Y, Geller A, et al., 3). These topics are a result of the same oppressions and embedded racism against Black people discussed in the finding above titled, “*The Historical Nuanced Relationship between the Black Community and the Possibility to Rest*”. Black people in America are consistently subjected to harmful discriminatory projections that result in an overwhelming lack of inheritance and opportunity, producing a leading trend and causation towards the prevention of Black advancement in these areas and the possibility to engage in the

simple acts of rest and restoration which are two proven modalities towards a healthy lifestyle and balanced life.

These disparities are further explained and conveyed via the systemic racism tree diagram shown below. This is a diagram included in Mary-Frances Winters *Black Fatigue: How Racism Erodes the Mind, Body, and Spirit*. In this chart readers can see 5 different branches that are weighing down the tree trunk labelled “Black Fatigue”. The wilting branches are labelled 1. Environmental Racism, 2. Economic Inequalities, 3. Racial Profiling, 4. Racism in the Workplace, and 5. Health Disparities. Each tree branch then leads viewers to individually labelled leaves explaining the micro makeups belonging to each category, representative of more specific actions and experiences to which Black individuals in America are subjected.



Mary-Frances, Winters *Black Fatigue: How Racism Erodes the Mind, Body, and Spirit*, pg. 3

“Defining Rest and Reparations”

Rest

The word “rest” is often a word that gets chalked up to being the equivalent to sleep. Regardless of this comparison, the word is much more expansive than that. It can also be defined in these additional ways, ranging broadly from the freedom of activity or labor, more specifically to being defined as a bodily state absent of functional and metabolic activity. These definitions are indicative of actions and practices beyond sleep. Currently in many Cultural Sustainability spaces, such as organizations like the Nap Ministry, the word “rest” is being defined with intention and activism at the forefront. Tricia Hersey, who is the founder and self-proclaimed Nap Bishop of the organization, encourages Black people to recognize that rest is “healing” and that it is essentially everything that capitalism and white supremacy is not. In her definition, Hersey defines rest as resistance and provokes readers to analytically consider how engaging in rest for Black people is a protest in and of itself that helps people to deprogram from brainwashing and from the toxic grind culture. Hersey reminds Black people that in order to measuredly do this, we must be consistent and willing to deconstruct nearly everything that we have previously been told in life about productivity and taking on feelings of projected guilt and shame about a birthright and bodily requirement. She goes on to define rest as a meticulous love practice that leads to social change and serves as a foundation towards disruption of white supremacy.

Reparations

Traditionally reparations is a term associated with monetary restitution made to those who have been wronged by another. More recently however the term has been one that has been remastered in efforts to reflect other forms and modes of repair. The March 4 Black Lives (M4BL) Reparation Now Toolkit references a more recent definition of reparations as defined by The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA). It defines reparations as “A process of repairing, healing and restoring a people injured because of their group identity and in violation of their fundamental human rights by governments, corporations, institutions and families. Those groups that have been injured have the right to obtain from the government, corporation, institution or family responsible for the injuries that which they need to repair and heal themselves. In addition to being a demand for justice, it is a principle of international human rights law (N'COBRA 2021, 25).” This definition gives space and possibility for people to legitimize and define for themselves varying forms of reparations as it hones in on the idea of repair being at the root of the word. The toolkit, names five conditional components that must be included in order to be recognized as full reparations. Those five are named by the United Nations (UN) and include:

1. Cessation, Assurances and Guarantees of Non-Repetition,
2. Restitution and Repatriation,
3. Compensation,
4. Satisfaction, and
5. Rehabilitation.

These five components being incorporated allow for space and implementation of Marshall Ganz' public narration and represents within them his Story of Self, Story of Us, and Story of Now. In cessation and assurance, there is a call for evaluation of now; in restitution and

repatriation there is representation of “us” as it calls for recognition of humanity in its gauge, and rehabilitation as it calls to an action indicative of presence and current existence in order to foster something “more” in the future and to avoid continued harm.

In these definitions, it is demonstrated how rest can be offered as a means of reparations for Black people in America if grounded in the action to restore those who have been harmed, offer compensation and repair by practical and named needs/identified methods, and by enacting the unrooting of the toxic and tumultuous systems, institutions and practices initially and subsequently inflicting harm upon individuals. This is a claim supported by the testimony of American choreographer, cultural curator, and creative (that focuses on toxic productivity and sleep/rest deprivation in Black people), Niv Acosta in a 2019 interview conducted by Sarah Burke. Burke asked how the idea of bridging the sleep gap and tying that to slavery and reparations came about. Acosta said “We need to be asking for economic reparations, but we also need to be asking for energetic reparations, and that means abolishing structures that benefit off of our lack of sleep. We're looking at an economy, a moment, where Black folks, indigenous folks, Brown folks, migrant folks, are dealing with a sleeplessness, a restlessness that is connected to productivity, capitalism, a production-based society.”

“Gaps In Honest Teachings and Confrontations Regarding Prevalence of White Supremacy”

Something that has been notably absent as I engaged in the literature review and analysis was the mention of full and truthful conversations that address the harms of white supremacy and how it

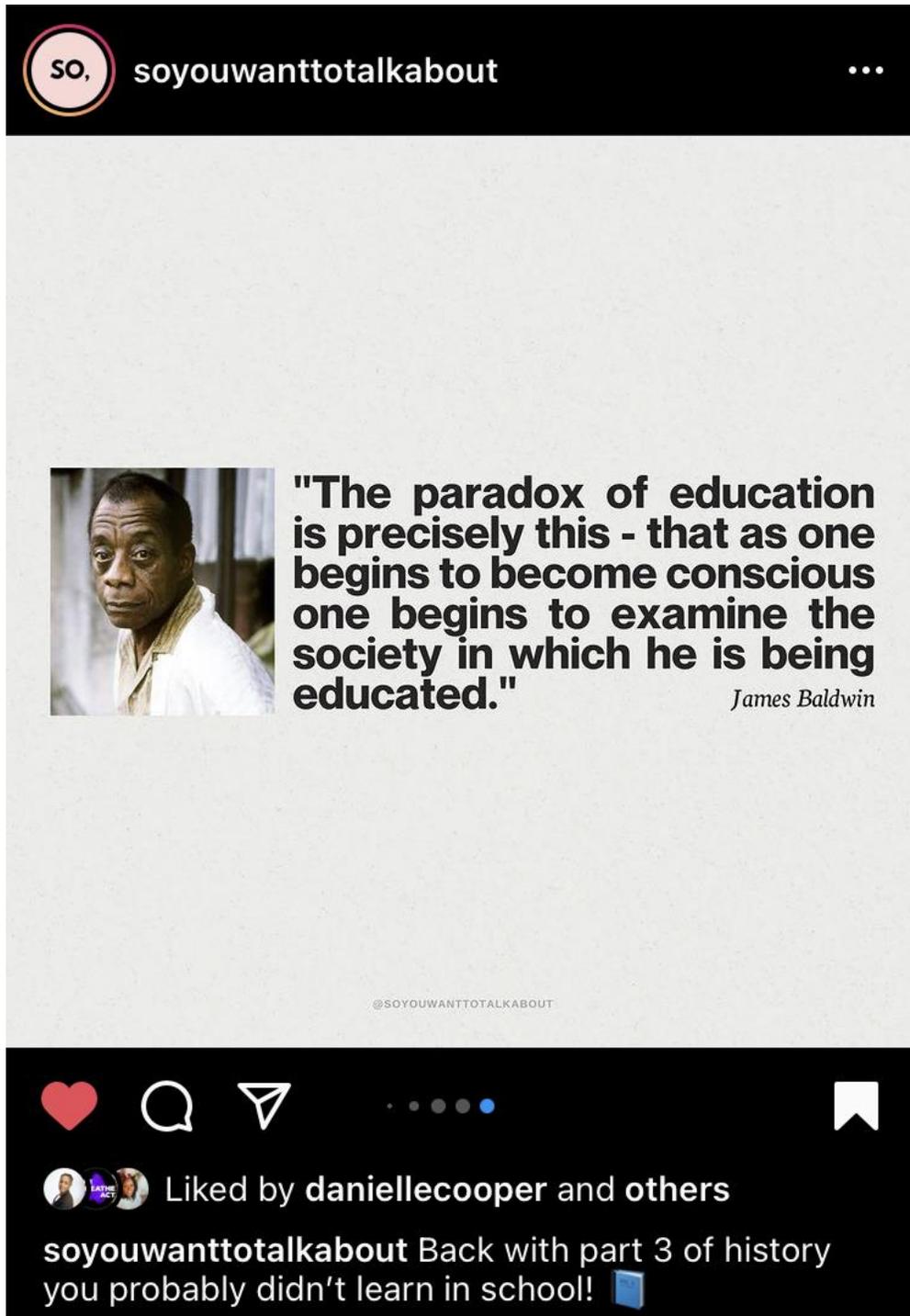
drastically imposes trauma and fatigue onto Black people. There were a few demonstrations of varying nature that worked to combat this unfortunate lack of truth telling.

One way in which artists Niv Acosta and Fannie Sosa (who is a colleague and creative partner to Acosta), chose to engage in the facilitation of those honest conversations, centered around toxic productivity and sleep/rest deprivation in Black people was by creating and enacting a performative art exhibit. They named this exhibit the “Polycastination Station” and this became a live exhibit where Black people could gather and participate in taking a collective Black Power Nap. They created this exhibit to provoke storytelling and performances reflective of their reality in being both Black and tired. Included below is a demonstration of their performance installation. This installation not only worked as a catalyst for difficult and nuanced conversation, but it also served a practical way for the individuals involved to demonstrate and model how to enact and live out their values in real time.



“Program,” Black Power Naps by Niv Acosta and Fannie Sosa

Another source that I came across that worked to address this gap was an Instagram page titled “soyouwanttotalkabout”. This Instagram profile consisted of a self-described page that works to “dissect progressive politics and social issues in graphic slideshow form (soyouwanttotalk, 2021). Their method is to ensure that important historical and contextual information, which is frequently absent from conversations regarding systemic patterns, gets uplifted. See below for a demonstration of their post coupled with an accompanying caption that reads “Back with part 3 of history you probably didn’t learn in school.” This type of social media content both addresses and works to resolve the lack of accessibility and overbearing avoidance that riddles many institutionalized spaces. Addressing this gap of truth telling directly combats realities such as the current lack of federal permission to discuss critical race theory in the public school and education system and/or any federally funded programmatic institutions. The banning of such conversations feeds into continued systemic avoidance of our country’s past and current relationship with race and discrimination, directly prohibits our nation from making amends to Black people in America. This ultimately denies the potential for both individualistic and collective Black rest and reparation.



The image shows an Instagram post from the account @soyouwanttotalkabout. The post features a quote by James Baldwin: "The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated." The quote is displayed in bold black text next to a small portrait of James Baldwin. The Instagram interface includes a profile picture with the letters 'so,' and the account name 'soyouwanttotalkabout' at the top. At the bottom, there are icons for likes, comments, shares, and a bookmark. A notification indicates the post was liked by 'daniellecooper and others'. The caption reads: 'soyouwanttotalkabout Back with part 3 of history you probably didn't learn in school! 📖'.

so, soyouwanttotalkabout

 **"The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated."** *James Baldwin*

@SOYOUWANTTALKABOUT

Liked by daniellecooper and others

soyouwanttotalkabout Back with part 3 of history you probably didn't learn in school! 📖

(soyouwanttotalkabout, 2021)

“Sleep Inequality”

Black feminist scholar, Janine Francois’ states in her article, *Reparations for Black People Should Include Rest*, “[Just as] sleep deprivation was used as a means to control slaves, the modern-day “sleep gap” weighs down many Black people today (Francois 2019, 1).” Francois reminds readers that sleep inequality is something that has plagued the Black community in the United States for centuries. She discloses this as she draws comparison between sleep deprivation and systemic modes of torture. Over the years, research on this sleep gap has been something that has also been studied by other scholars. There have been several studies conducted on the topic (Brueggemann 2014, Glover 2020), and each of them lean towards similar logical findings, as Francois notes, that “Black Americans experience significantly less slow-wave sleep—the kind required for actual, rejuvenating rest—than white Americans (Francois 2019, 1).” These studies scientifically demonstrate that the lack of sleep and rest in Black demographics is a deprivation that fosters disparities. According to studies such as *Objectively Measured Sleep Characteristics among Early-Middle-Aged Adults*, conducted by CARDIA, research suggests that these sleep disparities also contribute to racial oppression and structural inequality which in turn prevents Black people from sustaining themselves in similar ways to their white peers.

Analysis

As I engaged in this work, there were a couple of things that immediately became clear to me the more that I sought out information; whether that information was coming from myself, coming

from traditional reading resources, or coming from testimony of individuals and/or organizations that represented themselves via social media's Instagram. One of the themes that I noticed was that Black people in America were tired. This was a crucial theme as I considered how acts of intentional rest could work as a means of absolving some of this exhaustion and possibly allow for Black people to engage in other areas of their lives with less burden and implication. I was tired; tired of playing into systems that exhaust me and having to contribute to my own unraveling and weariness by merely existing in a system in which I am told that I have to navigate in order to survive. This is a perplexing feeling and experience. However, as I dug deeper by reading and analyzing more text and resources, I found that this was not an experience unique to me, which strangely brought me a sense of solace and validation. Reading text such as Coates, *Between the World and Me*, and immediately seeing my experiences legitimized in his, felt like a sense of solidarity. To know that others beyond me are having discussions centered around the quandary of systemic racism, for Black people and led by Black people felt great. To know that others understood how it feels to move through feelings of having to both reject and participate in capitalist and inequitable practices rooted in white supremacy allowed me to feel seen and I imagine that it provides much of the same relief and fostering of collective relationship for others. Reading the sentence "I had thought that I must mirror the outside world, create a carbon copy of white claims to civilization. It was beginning to occur to me to question the logic of the claim itself (Coates 2015, 50)" was imperative in creating the space to allow myself to feel validated and empowered to question and relinquish participation in the systems that continue to feel exhausting. I know this to be true for other community members as well.

Another assessment and theme was that while there exist many articles and texts regarding the context of what Black people in the United States have historically been subjected to, there was an absence of recognition of the current disparities that are still being faced. There seems to currently exist many issues with governmental, higher learning, and even lower grade public school learning spaces fully acknowledging the severity of the disparities that Black people in America continue to face. This is an issue as the absolving and lack of information being disseminated contributes to confusion and invalidation of recognition of harmful and discriminatory experiences, which in turn contributes further to the lack of rest that Black people are able to experience and/or delve easily into.

Black Fatigue runs deep and when ignorance is paired with power. As writer Cameron Glover states in his Healthline article titled *We Need to Talk About Sleep Deprivation in Black Communities*, “Sleep equity is so tied to social justice because, without rest, we wouldn’t be able to do anything: organize, rally, write, work, love, or celebrate our victories. Without rest, we can’t hope to resist or dismantle — or even on a smaller scale, be able to feel the pleasure that’s rightfully ours as people in this world (Glover 2020, 1).” This was a common theme in this research, and the repetition of this theme paved the way towards growth for me, transforming me from a skeptic in believing that Black people in America have no option but to participate in the same systems that oppress us, towards believing that something such as rest could combat those same systems and we could use something that was a birthright to resist against oppression. This empowered me to recognize that by taking care of myself and practicing intentional deepened rest I could contribute towards my community’s healing and ultimate restoration. If I am well rested, I can show my community (the Black community) how to participate in the same

practices by beginning with the question “What does rest mean to me and how can I achieve it?” This is the same question that I continue to ask myself throughout the length of this project that ultimately led me towards feeling less fatigued and restless.

Lastly, this research and the revealed findings led me towards reflecting deeply upon what Cultural Sustainability means to me and why it is important? This question was prompted because there were many readings that invited those who were reading them to question the education systems and learning pedagogies in which that engage. As a result of reading those articles, I decided to do just that. What resulted was the realization that cultural sustainability means to me the furthering and development of various cultures and beliefs. This is a definition that has been shaped over the course of my involvement in the MACS program. A value and mission of the MACS program is to participate in “Researching, demonstrating, and applying knowledge of cultural practices and contemporary issues pertaining to cultural sustainability which contribute to human and ecological well-being”, and this research prompted me to ultimately do just that by providing me with the appropriate instruments necessary in order to successfully reach the educational outcomes and objects that I created for myself as a measure of progress and advancement in my learning. Those outcomes were to 1) Design a reflexive research project from start to finish that includes identifying questions and analysis writing and to 2) Demonstrate a grounding in academic analysis by writing a thesis that is worthy of publication. In setting out to achieve these outcomes I knew that if I remained in alignment, I would be able to produce a body of work that can further contribute to Black futures and restoration for individuals as well as those in the larger (Black) communities.

Conclusion & Recommendations

When I initially began this research, I had an idea of where exhaustion could land Black people in this country. However, what I did not have was any thoughts or considerations on the reimagining of where we as Black people in America could advance to if we reclaimed our time and no longer allowed ourselves to get lost in the impositions of white supremacy. What if we instead gave ourselves the permission to rest and to acknowledge that our participation in “doing nothing” is both healing and valid? It was not until engaging in this research that I was able to fully understand that by asking these questions to myself, rest could serve as a mode of reparations and repair to Black people in America.

This research has shifted my thinking and pushed me from operating in a place of passivity and reaction towards Black fatigue, to now operating by way of an approach that feels empowering, proactive, and rooted in intentional rest and restoration that can offer the prioritization of self, health, and wellness. This new and contemporary way of thinking was induced by way of Francois', *Reparations for Black People Should Include Rest* VICE article, where she posed the following set of questions to readers, asking them 1) “How can the radical Black imagination rebel against a system that so thoroughly seeks to destroy us?” and 2) “What would a future look like where we are liberated, reparations are paid, and we can finally rest?” These two questions led me to consider not just my disposition on the subject, but also prompted me to reflect yet again on the aforementioned teachings that I bore witness to in Professor Eleuterio's course

where I learned of Ganz's public narrative framework. I saw this question set representative of not just how rest and/or the lack thereof affects me, but also as a call to address how rest or the absence of rest potentially affects Black individuals around me.

The merging of Francois' questions to readers, in conjunction with Ganz' public narrative framework – the story of self, story of us, and story of now prompted me to consider how this work could further exist. By evaluating what “is” versus what could be and what is needed in order for Black people in America to further disengage from oppressive structural systems and instead employ rest, I expanded my thoughts. Following this revelation, I then created a small question set myself, intended to expand upon Francois' original two questions (referenced above). I have named this brief question set the “Rest Analysis”. My rest analysis consists of 4 questions that Black people can ask themselves in an attempt to analytically assess how they are and/or are not engaging intentionally with deep reparative rest. The questions are written in a format that is ideally comprehensive for many. They are also written with brevity in mind, in order to prompt critical thinking but in ways that offer low demand and time commitments for participants. The questions are written as follows:

1. Am I getting enough rest?
2. What could deepened and intentional rest do for me?
3. What does rest look like to me? How would I ideally engage in rest?
4. What is needed in order for me to obtain (self-defined) quality rest?

It is my hope that in answering these questions two main objectives would be met for individuals. Ideally, by answering these questions, participants would be able to reconsider what

and how their relationship with rest exists. By answering this set of questions to oneself, individuals would shift their thoughts towards partaking in rest more intentionally, thoughtfully, and with their wellness needs at the forefront of said engagements.

Furthermore, it is my recommendation that not only do Black individuals engage with this tool (the Rest Analysis), but that following their answering they subsequently go on to enhance their answers by practicing the actionable forms of rest that are revealed as a result of their self-probing and reflection. In their evaluation of the results and in practicing their self-defined rest, participants will be able to review and determine what was and/or was not effective.

Another recommendation that I believe would be beneficial to the deepening of rest and reparations for Black people would be for Black people in America to continue to hold conversations on this very topic; an action that could serve to foster a sense of community for Black people with shared experiences and/or educate those who may not. It is my hypothesis that engaging in these conversations will give more life to a topic that is in need of a larger platform. It will also normalize the conversation and prompt Black people in America to reconsider how and why they engage in these harmful acts of restorative robbery. I believe that as Black people continue having these conversations, our communities will be more sustainable.

So, I now ask myself again at the completion of this research, how does one find energy? The energy to be you or simply the energy to engage in the tasks and systems that cause you exhaustion? How do you find the energy to advance? You find it in allowing yourself the

permission to rest and disengage with the systems that cause you fatigue, by any means necessary.

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