

# THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE AND THE AFROCENTRIC IDENTITY IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN SINCE THE 19TH CENTURY

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## Abstract

Historically, slavery as an institution has existed throughout both ancient and modern civilizations, while its peculiarities and nuances have varied in different societies. However, none has generated as much controversy as the trans-Atlantic slave trade due to the physical and psychological dehumanizing methods employed by the slave masters to subdue the minds of the enslaved. The relentless endurance of this atrocious trade during the centuries of its prevalence had debased and scarred the African identity not only on the continent but also in the diaspora. This paper will examine the complexities of the Atlantic slave trade and its impact on the Afrocentric personality since the 19th century. The crux of this paper, however, is to probe into how the residues of slavery have, over time, formed a continuum of mental incarceration among people of African descent in selected areas such as the United States of America, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba. In addition, the keynote of the study explores psychological concepts such as psychodynamics, epigenetics, and trans-generational trauma and the multidimensionality of its impacts on the Afrocentric consciousness engendered by centuries of dilapidating prejudicial practices meted against people of African extraction. This paper will interpret historical evidence using secondary sources.

## Keywords

*Afrocentric identity, trans-Atlantic slave trade, African diaspora, Black people, epigenetics, transgenerational trauma*

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## 1. Introduction

Since the epoch of the Atlantic slave trade, Black historical records have been interwoven with captivity, causing the discrimination and interrogation of Black humanity. As a result, some Black people, it seems, have learnt to unconsciously despise their Blackness, leading to the attempt to whiten their body, mind, and perhaps their soul. In the diaspora, people of African descent sometimes downplay the degree of Black ancestry they have in an attempt to identify as mulattoes (persons of mixed European and African descent). In some cases, mulattoes identify as Whites or pass as White depending on their skin tone and facial features in an effort to escape the discrimination that accompanies having Black ancestry. In the Americas, several countries have made calculated attempts to whiten their population by restricting the immigration of persons of African descent in the hopes that future generations will include people of lighter complexion who would easily deny their African heritage while appearing and identifying as Caucasian.

W. E. B. DuBois stated that “the problem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the problem of the colour line,” (DuBois 2007: 2), a statement that holds a grandiose truth to it, as the tensions of racial discrimination in Africa and the Americas took on a whole new dimension in that century. These were not just mere words impassionedly expressed, but the realities of the Black experience globally. The impact of the Atlantic slave trade has been crucial in shaping a flawed ontological perspective of the Afrocentric identity as sub-human or non-human. This paper will examine the intersectionality linking the slave trade with the overlapping by-products of Black racial discrimination. It will also explore the concept of Blackness and what it means to be Black in contemporary times. The core objective of this research is to examine the effects of the Atlantic slave trade on Black people in the United States of America, the Dominican Republic and Cuba since the 19<sup>th</sup> century after the trade had ended. It further examines the legacy of this human captivity on Black people, and assesses the patrimonial patterns of the trade which has had indelible implications on the political, economic, cultural and social architecture of Black people in contemporary times. It also connects the dots on how the footprints of the slave trade laid the frameworks for the justification of scientific race theories and discriminatory policies structured against Black people in the diaspora.

In an attempt to understand the past, this research employed historical research design in its analysis while using secondary sources to adequately uncover the past as well as discern modern patterns linking past experiences to the present. This study aims to emphasize the beauty, vibrancy, and Afrocentric essence of the Black spirit with the view that the appreciation of the permutations of Blackness is the antidote to the poison of racial discrimination in a global milieu that abhors dark skinned persons of African descent while denying the ingenuities of their various forms of intellectual utterances and cultural articulations.

## 2. The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Incapacitation of Black Humanity

The Atlantic slave trade, also known as the triangular trade, was a trade in human beings from Africa that emerged as a result of the need for cheap labour used in the newly established European colonies in the Americas. The ‘acclaimed’ discovery of the Americas in 1492 by Christopher Columbus was a momentous event in history, transforming the cultural, economic, political, and demographic landscape of three distinct and separate continents. These three groups of people, separated by continental geographical space but linked by the Atlantic Ocean, formed a connection, and with this encounter, destinies were disrupted and identities were formed. As these three worlds collided, cultures, foods, and people interacted, leading to a unique blend of cultural diffusion for all involved. The outcome of this pivotal interaction is known as the Columbian Exchange. The intercourse of these three continents, namely: Africa, Europe, and America, set in motion centuries of exploitation and debasement of not just the Native Americans but primarily that of the Africans by European settlers.

The simulated discovery of the New World was, by all means, a period that yielded unprecedented gains for the Old World. The New World held tremendous prospects, particularly in terms of its vast geographical space. Eric Williams posits that, according to Adam Smith, the prosperity of a new colony depends largely on one important economic factor, which is plenty of land (Williams, 1944:4). Africa, as mentioned above, supplied the human labour for the South Atlantic system. Defined by the historian Philip Curtin, Uya explains that the South Atlantic System refers to the system of large-scale plantation agriculture, which, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was firmly established in the New World. Curtin states thus, “a complex economic organism centered on the production in the Americas of tropical commodities for consumption in Europe, and grown by the labour of Africans” (Uya, 2005: 62).

According to Basil Davidson, the first slaves stolen from Africa were taken from the coastal area of what is now Mauritania in 1441 by a Portuguese sea captain called Anthony Gonsalves. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the slave trade took off in earnest, and European powers sailed to the coasts of Western and Central Africa to buy slaves who were exchanged for valueless commodities such as mirrors, rum, hats, guns, gun powder, metals, cowrie shells, manila, and textiles. African middlemen from the interior captured these enslaved persons and then forced them to embark on long marches to the coastal towns, where they would be sold at slave markets. Barracoons or slave forts were built at the coast, where these slaves were stored in what could be described as a form of ‘human storage facility’.

Many died in the forests while making the long marches, as well as in the forts. After transactions were carried out, the White man and his purchase would set sail for the Americas in the most dreadful voyage of the triangular trade called the Middle Passage. Here, slaves were stacked as goods in very cramped spaces. Alex Haley in his book *‘Roots’*, gives an outstanding literary reconstruction of the experience of his ancestor Kunta Kinte, he thus states, “naked, chained, shackled, he awoke on his back between two other men in a pitch darkness full of steamy heat and sicken-



ing stink and a nightmarish bedlam of shrieking, weeping, praying and vomiting” (Haley, 1976: 144).

The slaves were chained to one another and allowed on deck only for a few minutes per day for fresh air and exercise, but when the weather was bad, they were denied these few minutes of relief. To add to their woes, the food they were given was often spoiled. Additionally, the water was stagnant, and their quarters were filthy due to the large number of people in such small spaces, which were originally designed for cargo. In addition to this deplorable state, the effluvium was often unbearable due to excrement, urine, vomit, blood, and other fluids that commonly emanate from the human body. This came to characterize the hellish cubicle, which was now their abode for weeks or even months. The devastation of being uprooted from their homeland and forever separated from kith, including the psychological depredation of being at sea en route to an unknown land, was indeed a traumatizing and torturous experience that could never be fully understood except among those who experienced it.

Life in the Middle Passage was horrendous, with females being molested as they made the treacherous transoceanic journey, which lasted between 6 and 8 weeks or more, depending on the weather conditions and destination of the voyage. Though many scholars argue back and forth on the actual estimation of the number of slaves taken from Africa, the consensus establishes that between 12.5 million and 15 million Africans were taken out of the continent. It is, however certain that millions of Africans were deracinated in a trade that lasted for more than four centuries.

On arrival in their new homeland, slaves would often work from dusk to dawn in large plantations from a very early age until their limbs could no longer withstand the toils and travails of plantation life. In addition to these hazards, there was the unfair expectation bestowed on them to adopt a new identity, which definitively caused protracted harm to the psyche of the enslaved. The labour of the enslaved was exploited to the maximum from birth to death, while the status of slavery was passed from generation to generation, mostly without compensation. The change from slavery to freedom was to have an ineffaceable impression on the minds of not just the enslaved but the enslaver and their descendants in the centuries following the trade.

### **3. Racialization and the Debasement of the Black Personality in the United States of America**

As a result of the Atlantic slave trade in West and Central Africa and the prevalence of the Trans-Saharan trade in Eastern Africa, slavery began to take on a semblance that was determined largely by race. The selling of Black Africans for centuries across these two regions of the continent began a trajectory of racism that supported the debasement of the identity of people of African descent. The United States of America has a long history of racism which stemmed from centuries of brutality carried out on Foundational African Americans during and even after the Slave system had ended. The legacies and aftermaths of this institution lingers in plain

sight to this day and this reality informed this evaluation and selection of the United States as a study area. James Baldwin ascertains that “this is what racism means, to be denied one’s humanity” (Bell, 2002: 50). Enslaved, colonized, or discriminated against, groups placed in such disadvantaged scenarios by historical antecedents and imperial misadventures are very likely to lose their history and the cultural vibrancy attached to it. However, in order to rationalize why Black slavery was so brutal and immensely inhumane, it can only be best understood by analyzing the brutality of this heinous institution.

On the continent, Africans were traded for inanimate objects that held no real value. Because they were exchanged for these worthless items, they were often disregarded as human beings. Being bought in exchange for valueless commodities led their captors to regard them as mere cargo or property, without recognizing their inherent humanity. The dehumanization of the African identity during the Atlantic slave trade began on the mother continent as they made the long marches walking hundreds of miles, naked and barefoot. Countless died in the interior and in the forts, both in Africa and the Americas. Those who were either sick, dead, or dying during the Middle Passage were thrown into the Atlantic Ocean, allowing sharks to gnaw and devour them. Sometimes, with some mishaps at sea, enslaved persons still alive would be thrown off board by the hundreds in a bid to make the ship lighter and to allow the captains and their sponsors to claim insurance since they were regarded as goods.

The harrowing case of the Zong on November 29, 1781, where 132 out of 470 slaves still alive were thrown overboard, exposed the agonizing facts that enslaved persons were mere commodities (Walvin, 2019). It is believed that sharks became acquainted with the smell of human flesh from slave ships and so would often follow these ships for when the routine overthrow of the enslaved took place. Davidson and Castillo assert that about 10 percent of all Africans shipped to North America did not survive the Middle Passage (Davidson et al, 2000: 45). According to Langston Hughes, for each five slaves that arrived safely in the Americas, one slave died on the way (Hughes 1983, 12). Walter Rodney estimates the number of casualties to be within the range of 15 to 20 percent (Rodney, 2009: 110).

The condition of the enslaved was as pitiful in the Americas as it was in the Middle Passage. A graphic description was illustrated by the Jesuit Alonso de Sandoval as he describes a cargo of slaves on arrival in the port of Cartagena in New Granada, where enslaved persons lay dead on the floor, naked, with flies in their mouths in conditions no better than animals (Hayes et al, 2000: 115). At this point, the African was considered a mere beast of burden to be exploited entirely for profit. This is best described in this Portuguese saying, which states, ‘trabalho e para o cachorro e o preto,’ which is interpreted to mean “manual labour is for the dog and the Black” (Bender, 1978: 14). Ade states what James Baldwin asserts, “In order to buy and sell men like cattle, one had to pretend they were cattle” (Ade, 1996: 237).

In slave markets where auctions took place, Africans were paraded naked as would be buyers and onlookers examined the conditions of their bodies. The first

slaves that entered what is now the United States of America arrived on August 20, 1619, aboard a Dutch ship in the Southern state of Jamestown, Virginia. It dropped a cargo of twenty Africans, who were traded to the settlers in exchange for fresh provisions. These Africans were the first to land in the English Americas (Hughes, 1983: 10). As the centuries pushed forward, slavery in the United States became associated with race. Two hundred years later, in 1819, the South Carolina courts held that a Negro was a slave or subject to becoming a slave and that a slave was ipso facto a Negro. The Mississippi Supreme Court states that in the eyes of the law, “a Negro is *prima facie* a slave” (Ibid: 58).

In an attempt to expand the wealth of America, the government sought to expand the enslaved population. A slave owner himself, President Thomas Jefferson implemented the Protectionism policy in 1808, which prohibited the importation of African labour from Africa. The purpose was to increase domestic trade within the United States in order to boost its local economy. The westward expansion driven by the doctrine of “Manifest Destiny” reinforced the belief that the United States was destined to expand across the continent. This expansion led to an increase in the production of labour, as the policy enabled the U.S. to acquire vast amounts of land that were forcefully taken from Native Americans. To meet the growing demand for laborers on this newly acquired land, some scholars believe that farms began to be established that bred enslaved people like livestock. Though an extremely controversial discourse, many scholars are torn on this subject, but it is pertinent to probe the



Map 1: United States Showing States and Capitals. Source: <https://ontheworldmap.com/usa/>

possibility of its existence and its effects on the destitution of the family unit of many African American communities in recent times.

In an attempt to enlarge the domestic economy of the United States without the importation of slaves, the Slave holders introduced the system of stock breeding, which depended on the scheme of ‘natural increase’ as described by Eric Foner (William, 2019). Stock breeding was a system anchored on the use of forced reproduction. The sexual violation of the enslaved population knew no limits during these times or even prior to them. Richard Dunn, in his work, described the contrasts between slavery in the British Caribbean and the United States. He explained that though slave experiences in the two areas differed, the real difference was that in the Caribbean, slaves were worked to death like machines, then replaced with another from Africa, while in the United States, slaves were treated like breeding machines (Dunn, 2015). Similarly, Smithers, a Professor of History, affirms that slave breeding farms did exist, despite attempts to erase their existence from historical records. Researching beyond the documents of White slave holders, he expands the boundaries of his historiography to unexplored territories such as folklore, oral histories, religious sermons, political and abolitionist speeches, plays, and other similar sources to explain and uncover the deep, dark secrets of antebellum America (Smithers, 2013).

According to Ned and Constance Sublette, Richard Sutch identified forty-seven suspected breeding farms in 1972, where women and children outnumbered men. One example was a farm in Drew County, Arkansas, which had only two men, twenty-two women, and twenty-seven children. A similar farm was located in Wake County, North Carolina, which had twenty-eight men, thirty-eight women, and 120 children (Sublette et al., 2016: 27). Although some historians dispute the existence of breeding farms, it’s important to recognize that prior to 1808, male slaves were in higher demand than women or children. This was largely due to their physical strength and vitality, which made them more effective as field hands on plantations. As a result, scenarios involving the breeding of children would not have been profitable for planters, as children were not able to work as efficiently as men or women. Similarly, women were unable to perform the same level of work as men. For the disproportionate number of women and children compared to men on farms, particularly in the Wake County case, the most logical explanation is that these farms were breeding operations for enslaved individuals. Women were specifically encouraged to give birth to as many children as possible to be sold in domestic slave markets across the country. The Federal Writers’ Project interviewees referred to the men on these farms as “stock men.” One such stockman was Jeptha Choice, a seven-foot-tall enslaved man born in Texas in 1835. Another notable breeder was Luke Blackshear, the grandfather of Ida Blackshear Hutchinson, who was known as the “giant breeder” for fathering fifty-six children across different plantations. Additionally, there was Wilson, who is believed to have fathered hundreds of children at various plantations, including the infamous salt-making mansion at Hickory Hill, which was known as the Reverse Underground Railroad (Ibid: 28).

One thing the breeders had in common was their extraordinary height. These ‘stocks’ were men of great imposing stature who were handpicked by the slavers to routinely have intercourse with enslaved women with the sole purpose of making tall, strong, and able-bodied offspring who would be as physically fit as their parents and would fetch sufficient money at the slave markets. A practice in the United States that had the trappings of Eugenics. Eugenics is a scientific theory that asserts that humans can be improved through the selective breeding and preservation of specific groups within the human population.

It was coined in 1883 by Francis Galton, an English statistician, ethnologist and demographer (who was a cousin of Charles Darwin). Its ideologies were not far from the concept of natural selection as entrenched in the doctrines of Social Darwinism affirmed by Charles Darwin in his book ‘Origin of species’. Described as “the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial equalities of future generations either physically or mentally”. Methods such as involuntary sterilization, segregation and social exclusion were used to rid society of individuals or groups considered inferior or unfit (Genomics, 2022) Practiced by enslavers in the United States in the form of slave breeding, they often castrated enslaved individuals with smaller physiques to prevent the reproduction of their kind. This was recalled by a formerly enslaved woman named Cornelia Andrews (Ibid: 33). Oral histories such as the one told by Charlotte Martin, an eighty-two-year-old in Live Oak, Florida, explained that her master, Judge Wilkerson, “selected the strongest and best male and female slaves and mated exclusively for breeding”. Further atrocities include pregnant women who were sold for higher prices while the ones who were unable to bear children were sold off, as she was worth nothing. As Thomas Johns puts it, “kill a nigger, breed another, kill a mule buy another” (Ibid).

On slave breeding farms, male and female enslaved individuals were forced to engage in sexual intercourse as often as possible, to the point where some of them died from sexual exhaustion. Spivey reports that hoods were placed on the enslaved to conceal their identities during these forced mating, which could involve familiar individuals, such as siblings or other family members (William, 2019). According to Hacker, estimates indicate that between 1620 and 1865, over 9.3 million enslaved people were born in the United States, with 5.6 million, or 60 percent, born after 1830. He suggests that researchers generally agree that birth rates among the enslaved population in the 19th century were exceptionally high, nearing the biological maximum for humans (Hacker, 2020). This data helps to explain why the number of enslaved individuals increased rather than declined after 1808, despite the extreme cruelty and life-threatening conditions they faced daily. The enslavers deliberately bred those deemed fit and sterilized those deemed unfit.

Both male and female enslaved individuals were subjected to various forms of sexual violence and exploitation. In many instances, enslaved people were forced to participate in the depraved orgies of their masters. Enslaved women were often raped by White males in the household, including their masters, leading to many of them bearing children. These children, considered the offspring of their masters, did not escape

the harsh realities of slavery. According to the Virginia Hereditary Slave Law enacted in 1662, known as Partus Sequitur Ventrem, a person's status as a slave was determined by that of their mother (Morgan, 2015). Women in these circumstances were often victims of violent outbursts and physical assaults from their mistresses. These mistresses directed their anger and feelings of betrayal towards the slave women, sometimes resulting in horrific acts where the children of the enslaved were violently killed. Enslaved individuals were compelled to perform explicit sexual acts in front of their masters, mistresses, and house guests, whose depraved desires often knew no limits.

Enslaved males were not exempt from the sexual assaults prevalent during this time, but were victims of 'buck breaking.' The latter was an extreme practice used to torture and break the mind, spirit, and will of enslaved males who were deemed as rebels or deviants. During buck breaking, these males were tied, hanged for days, and whipped to the point of unconsciousness or even death while naked. This was intended to serve as a deterrent against those planning insurrections. Other licentious acts carried out on the enslaved males during buck breaking include methods where the male is stripped naked and asked to bend his buttocks in front of all the members of the household and enslaved persons on the plantation including his family. The White males in some cases, would proceed to rape the Black male slaves in these situations, sometimes in full view of the public. Also, White homosexual owners used these heinous acts as opportunities to live out their homosexual fantasies during a time when such sexual preferences and practices were viewed as deviant or taboo. This method broke the spirit of the enslaved males who had to endure the ignominy in front of their families, along with the physical and psychological trauma that came with buck breaking.

White females were not exempt from the inapt perversions and the power dynamics that prevailed in the slave system. White females who owned slaves frequently engaged in forced relationships, rape, threats, coercion, and other forms of sexual humiliation with the enslaved males they owned. A married slave owner, Katherine Watkins, a Virginian woman, was known to exert sexual dominance over her enslaved persons, usually by assaulting, raping, groping, and using other forms of

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sexual coercion against them. White women in the South were known to sexually dominate and exploit the Black males on their plantations (Woods, 2022: 55-56). Stephanie E. Jones Rogers asserts that, based on a wide range of sources, White women inherited more enslaved people than land, making enslaved individuals their primary source of wealth. Often refusing to cede ownership of enslaved people to their husbands, these women employed management methods that were both shrewd and brutal, similar to those used by men. Rogers highlights that they were active participants in the commercialization of human labour, which became a defining feature of American capitalism in the 19th century (Rogers, 2019: 205). An example of a blood thirsty White female slave holder predator was Marie Lalaurie from New Orleans, an evil serial killing machine who tortured and murdered numerous of her enslaved individuals using unimaginable and unprintable methods that surpass mortal comprehension.

The institution of slavery was established on a culture of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse that attempted to destroy the humanity of enslaved persons and reduce their worth to that of less than a mule. Sadistic male and female slave holders who relished in inflicting pain while possessing an unnatural thirst for blood and affliction, perpetuated brutalities on their enslaved individuals that even the lowest of beasts would never be subjected to. They were allowed to carry out these atrocities because they were supported by a system that aided and abetted these morally reprehensible behaviours.

The constant selling of children, mothers, and fathers to different plantation owners led to the separation of families, which effectively destroyed the fabric of African American family structure. Laws prohibiting solidarity, community, and camaraderie among enslaved individuals, such as the 1723 Virginia Anti-Assembly Law, were enacted to prevent any form of family cohesion among the enslaved. The internal practices of slavery, particularly the breeding farm system, severely disrupted family bonds between spouses, children, and their parents for generations to come. The family unit within Black society was so fragmented that its remnants remain remarkably visible today. President Lyndon Johnson in 1965 stated that “Its influence radiating to every part of life, is the breakdown of the Negro family structure. For this most of all, White America must accept responsibility. It flows from centuries of oppression and persecution of the Negro man. It flows from the long years of degradation and discrimination which attacked his dignity and assaulted his ability to produce for his family” (Foner, 2014: 281).

Historians like Ulrich Bonnell Phillips tried to romanticize and portray slavery as a licit institution, buttressing the idea that no rational economic motive existed for slave breeding. Du Bois explained that “the mere fact slavery left to the world today a heritage of ignorance, crime, lynching, lawlessness and economic injustice to be struggled with by this and succeeding generations is a condemnation by Mr Phillips and unanswerable.” Smithers poses the question: how can the increase in the Black and mulatto population be explained? Historians from his time, including Phillips and Claude G. Bowers, argued that the rise in the African American

and mixed-race population was a result of the sexual immorality and promiscuity attributed to Black women. In 1929, he argued that Black women were debauched at the Union camps and so these whores gave birth to a new nation during the Civil War and Reconstruction (Smithers, 2013). Immoral and uncontrolled sexual behaviour by Black women was offered as the reason for the increase in African American and biracial populations. No accountability has been taken for the dehumanization and centuries of sexual and commercial exploitation of Black people. Furthermore, the defamation of their character, especially that of Black women, has been perpetuated within Eurocentric scholarship.

Enslaved persons in the United States worked an estimated total of 410 billion hours over the centuries that slavery endured (Hacker, 2020). Even after slavery ended in the United States, its abolition did not end the enslavement and expropriation of Black people. The general attitude of the confederacy in the South was “The Yanks freed you, now let the Yanks feed you”. After emancipation and generations of labour exploitation without compensation, formerly enslaved individuals were left without resources. They were sent away empty-handed, without land and any form of financial or moral support from the system that had built its unparalleled wealth from their labour, blood, and sweat. As a result of their predicament, President Lincoln termed them “A labourless, landless and homeless class”. In March 1865, Congress established the Freedmen’s Bureau, which aimed to create a structure for the newly emancipated people through education. Believing that the economic and political emancipation of enslaved persons would topple their hegemony, the White population reacted by killing many Black and White teachers alike who were involved in the education of the Freedmen (Hughes, 1983: 198).

In many Southern states, Blacks were prohibited from participating in politics or the judicial system. Black witnesses could not testify against Whites in courts over the abuses they suffered. However, because Blacks were generally prohibited from jury services, the practice of peonage (also called debt slavery or debt servitude) emerged and was encouraged by police courts, which sentenced Blacks to work for planters who paid their fines. Often, excessive fines were levied against African Americans with impunity over very minor offenses. Through the system of peonage, a new forced labour system was born after slavery was abolished in 1865. Hundreds of forced labour camps were littered throughout the South, operated by large corporations, small-scale entrepreneurs, state and county governments, and provincial farmers. Douglas explains that these bulging slave centers became a weapon of suppression against Black aspirations and racial repression.

By 1900, the judicial system in the South was designed primarily to coerce Black individuals into complying with the labour demands of White employers. This system, often referred to as neo-slavery, included practices such as convict leasing and debt peonage, which generated tens of millions of dollars for the treasuries of Louisiana, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, where seventy percent of the Black population resided. Wrongfully accused people and so-called ‘dissidents’ were sold to giant corporate prison mines

that further leased a larger number of Blacks to local farmers, even as more Black labourers were acquired by courtrooms and given to Whites who required labour of various capacities (Blackmon, 2008: 21). In Alabama alone, hundreds of thousands of documents corroborate the arrests, subsequent sales, and delivery of Black people into quarries, farms, lumber camps, mines, and factories. More than thirty thousand pages related to debt slavery cases are stored in the files of the Department of Justice at the National Archives. Millions of entries in public records detail the forced labour system, documenting the capture and recapture of thousands of impoverished citizens who fell victim to a flawed judicial system (Ibid: 22). Douglas estimates that the total number of victims from this system exceeded one hundred thousand and could potentially be double that figure.

According to Bowman and Forde from The Washington Post, between 1885 and 1913, Standard Oil founder Henry Flagler built an industrial empire in Florida by constructing hotels, steamships, railroads, resorts, and cities from Jacksonville to Key West. He constructed Palm Beach and Miami from the ground up by utilizing two labour systems that existed in the South for fifty years after the Civil War: convict leasing and debt peonage. Established to maintain White supremacy, the system targeted African Americans by exploiting their labour and ensnaring them in involuntary servitude sanctioned by the state. Florida and Flagler criminalized Blackness and free Black people by arresting them for trivial pseudo-crimes and misdemeanors, then forcing them into free labour. The convict leasing system generated significant revenue and served as a means to control African American citizens. Those forced into this labour endured brutal treatment and often worked beyond their physical limits. The system was particularly violent, employing methods such as whips, hounds, chains, sweat boxes, and even suspending individuals by their thumbs. Sick laborers faced threats of death if they refused to work; these were just some of the punishment methods used against them. Even with gruesome injuries sustained during the work, they were still required to continue with little or no medical attention in very unsanitary conditions. Some drowned while others died from diseases, gunshot wounds, and other fatal injuries. Black women were frequently sexually assaulted by their White taskmasters, while young Black children were not exempt from the horrors and hazards of these diabolical jobs operated by ruthless, profit-driven capitalists. When convict leasing was insufficient, debt peonage was introduced, which further exploited Black labour (Bowman et al, 2018).

During slavery, slaves in antebellum societies not only worked on plantations but also in mines, railroads, factories, quarries, and in many other forms of labour. The same individuals who constructed these railroads using slave labor in the 1850s were among the first to employ African American labor in the 1870s. The practice of leasing enslaved people, which involved transferring them from one farm or railroad to another, persisted alongside traditional slavery and evolved into the leasing of convicts during the decades of the 1870s and 1880s. The harsh treatment applied to enslaved individuals in 1840 was mirrored in the treatment of prisoners in 1910. Douglas argues that the anger expressed by white individuals in the 1920s stemmed

from a deep-seated bitterness that had persisted since 1866. This new wave of racial prejudice and hostility became a tool used to suppress the freedom and aspirations of millions of Black individuals in the 20th century (Blackmon 2008, 24).

Another area where Black labour was unjustly exploited was sharecropping. The system of sharecropping also evolved from the slave system, where former slave owners employed former enslaved persons to work on their plantations, but this time, they were required to pay for their services. Sharecropping can be seen as a form of neo-slavery, where White employers often exploit sharecroppers by withholding their wages. Any efforts to form unions aimed at advocating for fair and equitable treatment of African American laborers were quickly crushed through extreme violence. A good example of such repression was the infamous Elaine Massacre of 1919, where more than two hundred and fifty Black people were massacred in Elaine, Arkansas. The events leading to the massacre occurred as a result of White suspicion over meetings held by Robert Hill and a few Black sharecroppers who attempted to organize a union that sought to end unfair and exploitative payment methods as well as promote better working conditions for sharecroppers.

This massacre turned out to be one of the bloodiest race wars in American history, while playing out the intersection between race and labour aspirations controlled by power dichotomies of the bourgeoisie-proletariat realisms of Western capitalism. It further silenced the voice of a people who had been subdued and dehumanized by an agenda that attempted to sabotage the proliferation of Black independence and optimism. Even after slavery was defeated, many forms of neo-slavery emerged that further tightened the manacles of socio-economic permutations that had long characterized Black existence in America. Other structural issues, such as institutionalized racism, emerged from the Southern segregation system, causing Black people to be segregated in public spaces such as employment, housing, schools, restaurants, theaters, public facilities, public service, religious institutions, participation in jury duties, etc. Racism in the United States is monolithic as it has remained strongly impenetrable in the North and the South, though changing its appearance at different points in the nation's history.

Long-term prejudice towards the Black personality has left behind a wreckage of mental slavery. Frantz Fanon, in his analysis of colonial Algeria, explains that colonialism, which is a systematic negation of the colonized and a furious determination to deny the latter all attributes of humanity, forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question, 'In reality, who am I?' (Fanon, 1967: 200). Fanon's assertion implies that discrimination leads to low self-worth. Marginalized groups placed in such disadvantaged scenarios by historical antecedents stirred by imperial misadventures are very likely to lose their history and the cultural vibrancy that accompanies it. Any race or group forcefully stripped of their identity faces the long-term effect of this wear and tear, often leading to 'self-deprecation.' The harsh treatment and racial brutality faced by Black individuals in the diaspora have created a legacy of embittered people struggling to find their identity and prove their humanity to a global system that once held them in physical captivity. It is important to recognize that

slavery today is no longer confined to physical chains; it has evolved into a modern form in which the former captives are incarcerated in a psychological prison. This prison's walls are constructed from historical frameworks, with its foundations supported by centuries of racial debasement. These prolonged periods of oppression play a significant role in the discrimination experienced by people of African descent, both in Africa and the diaspora, long after the chains of enslavement have been removed.

#### **4. The Psychodynamics of Mental Slavery: The Black Experience**

The concept of psychodynamics is best understood within the context of the study of psychology as a set of theories developed by Sigmund Freud. Based on his writings from the 1890s to 1930s, he developed the former with information derived mostly from his patients during therapy (McLeod, 2024). Freud believes that the unconscious mind is the primary source of human behavior, and just like an iceberg, it is the most important part that is not visible. Wilson further explains that the unconscious mind comprises mental processes that are inaccessible to conscious awareness but strongly influence judgments, feelings, and behavior. The psychodynamic theory believes that feelings, motives, and decisions are strongly influenced by past experiences and are then stored in the unconscious mind, which then shapes our character (McLeod, 2024).

The psychodynamics of the human mind can be quite complex, often shaped or formed by one's life experiences. Who we are currently and will be in the future is determined by the collective and diverse experiences springing from the wells of our past. This invariably shapes the present and affects the future, respectively. That is to say, our opinions, thought processes, and personalities are a result of the cumulative experiences we have garnered over time. While the psychodynamics of an individual's mind form the collective experience that affects behavioral patterns, it can be argued that the aggregate of people's mental and psychological configurations stems from two factors, which significantly affect human character: nature and nurture. The circumstances in which people are raised coalesce into the subconscious that later forms an active part of the conscious mind. Psychodynamics states that early childhood experiences, such as trauma locked in the subconscious mind, often trigger and shape conscious actions. Racism against Black individuals and its various intersections has often resulted in deeply rooted feelings of inferiority among Black people, particularly regarding skin tone, hair texture, and cultural identity. To exacerbate this issue, enslaved individuals were routinely subjected to indoctrination, leading them to believe they were docile, unattractive, unintelligent, and incapable of making rational decisions, serving only as laborers and objects of sexual exploitation. Centuries of slavery, combined with persistent racism, have created a cycle of intra-cultural and intra-racial conflict that has significantly impacted the identity and essence of people of African descent.

Scholars of Atlantic Studies such as Joseph Harris analysed the slave trade and its effect by examining its global impact. He states that several millions of Africans were taken across the Sahara to Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Americas and

this contributed to an enormous amount of capital around the world regardless of the inhuman operations of the trade. These global footprints impressed by the Atlantic and trans-Saharan slave trades in the different geographical areas around the world where Black people were dispersed, caused the shift in how Black people are collectively perceived as a race. Harris posits that “the era of the slave trade further entrenched and indeed extended the concept of Black inferiority” (Harris, 1987: 89). William Safran

discusses the Black experience and the African diaspora using the approach of a different argument which has been criticized by other scholars. Though recognizing the experience of Africans and how they were unwillingly dispersed and uprooted from their homeland, he however pointed out that Black Americans can no longer have a clearly defined African cultural heritage to preserve but rather have chosen to maintain and rationalize their ethno-racial distinctness by creating a culture representing their new reality, which according to Safran is a hindrance to social mobility (in the case of Black English such as Ebonics) or an artificial graft as in the case of Black Islam which lacks a convincing connection with the Black experience. Safran’s ideas concentrated on the disconnection of the African diaspora from the homeland explaining that a specific homeland cannot be restored to the American Blacks and thus the homeland myth is translated into solidarity with African liberation struggles (Safran, 1991: 81-90).

Udo rather expounds that though Africans were physically removed from Africa, they still maintained their spiritual connections to the motherland. Using the Yoruba experience as the main focus of its argument, Udo’s argument on culture preservation in the diaspora by people of African descent discusses how Blacks in the Americas particularly those of Yoruba extraction have preserved their African heritage in the form of religious practices such as Candomble practiced in Brazil and Santeria in Cuba (Udo, 2020). Falola on the other hand affirms that “certainly the trans-Atlantic slave trade was one of the causes of negative Western stereotypes about Africa.” He added that imperialism was an additional factor, as many European writers regarded the partition of Africa as a small price for a ‘barbaric people’ to pay for receiving civilization” (Falola, 2018: 638).

Slavery and colonialism, which are two intertwined evils, may seem like distant historical events, but their impacts are still evident in the Black experience today. These realities are reflected in how people of African descent are treated around the world. Some Eurocentric reductionists argue that individuals of African descent should have moved on from these historical experiences and should stop complaining about the past. However, it is important to recognize that long-term trauma, especially the kind endured by Black people over centuries, cannot simply be erased.

**Udo rather expounds that though Africans were physically removed from Africa, they still maintained their spiritual connections to the motherland.**

## 5. Epigenetics and Transgenerational Trauma in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Though the debate still persists, experts have argued whether trauma can be inherited or not. Though some disprove the existence of trans-generational trauma, it was first discovered among children of those who lived through the Dutch Famine during World War II. A 2018 review suggests a link between inter-generational trauma and depression. This could be passed down to generations epigenetically, meaning that trauma experienced by an ancestor may affect the way one's genes are expressed (Yehuda et al., 2018: 243-257). To explain this phenomenon, recent studies have developed the science of epigenetics. According to the Harvard Center on the Developing Child, epigenetics is an emerging area of scientific research that demonstrates how environmental conditions and children's experiences affect the expression of genes. Epigenetics explains how early experiences can have a lifelong impact. During development, the DNA that makes up genes accumulates chemical marks that determine how much or little of these genes are expressed. Experiences, whether good or bad, leave a unique epigenetic signature on the genes (Harvard, 2019).

Going further to understand people who have experienced historical trauma, experts like Bezo explain the effects of trans-generational trauma on traumatized people. He illustrates this by explaining that the Ukrainian population, as a result of the Holodomor mass starvation (1932-1933), carried out by Joseph Stalin's regime, had a profound effect on future generations. Conducting research on families directly affected by the Holodomor, he noticed trans-generational impacts such as shame, anxiety, risky behaviours, food hoarding, overeating, high emotional neediness, distrust, cohesiveness, and authoritarian parenting styles all manifested in one aggregate called 'survival mode' (Bezo et al, 2018). Danieli argues that massive traumas, such as those experienced during the Holocaust, impact societies in complex, multifaceted ways. Focusing her research on the children of Holocaust survivors, she observed certain behaviours among them, such as being overly protective of their parents and exhibiting a strong need for control. She described these reactions as "reparative adaptational impacts." Her theory outlines a pathway connecting the initial trauma, the family's history, and the socio-cultural environment after the trauma, along with the adaptational styles of survivors and their children and grandchildren (Danieli, 1998). A similar pattern was noticed among children and grandchildren of Native American families who were survivors of cultural oppression. Behaviours such as anxiety, depression, suicidal attempts, and susceptibility to drug use were all observed by Amy Bombay. Trans-generational effects are not only psychological but also social, neurobiological, familial, cultural, and possibly genetic (*Ibid.*).

Although this area of research is still in its early stages, experts believe that epigenetic pathways and environmental processes influence how genes are expressed. Dora L. Costa explains that trauma can be transmitted to the human body, illustrating it through the research carried out on Prisoners of War. He found out that children of those POWs (Prisoners of War) who faced harsh conditions died at younger ages than children of the POWs who lived in better environments. Though not widely studied, the impact of slavery on the African diasporic population is no doubt quite

similar to that of other traumatized groups, such as Native Americans and Holocaust survivors. However, the Afrocentric experience is unique and could arguably be far more profound than any of these groups mentioned above since the Black personality has had to grapple with a plethora of life-changing alterations that have had annihilating outcomes on their culture, psyche, security, physical, political, and economic freedom for an extended period of time spanning centuries. Juxtaposing the possibility of the transmission of trans-generational trauma and the pathways of epigenetics in communities with historical trauma, we can better assimilate and empathize with the struggles of Black people. The pathways of these historical experiences have become palpable through the manifestations of epigenetics, which have taken the form of psychodynamic trappings that have affected many in Black communities for centuries (Danieli, 1998).

## **6. The Impressions of the Atlantic Slave System on the Afrocentric Personality in the Dominican Republic and Cuba Since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

One of the most prominent impressions of the slave trade on the Afrocentric personality is racial discrimination against people of African descent, which was and is still institutionalized and ingrained in many societies around the world. The struggle for racial equality and economic emancipation, created by colour compartmentalization, has been widely publicized in the United States and constitutes a very significant aspect of the American narrative. In the Dominican Republic and Cuba, the flotsam of the trans-Atlantic slave trade has insistently impacted the anthropological tapestry of these nations.

The need to strengthen White hegemony led to the development of Western ideologies and idiosyncrasies supporting White supremacy and its innuendos. In the heart of the culture of the African diaspora are the residues of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which continues to mark its imprints on Black societies. To meet Western standards of beauty, Black people have bleached their skin, processed their hair, and altered their appearance to appear ‘white’ or at least ‘near white.’ It is evident that, though emancipated from physical captivity, a fraction of people of African descent still live in a bubble of psycho-mental slavery, which has unconsciously entrapped them in a conundrum of socio-cultural bondage that is being enabled by Eurocentric sentiments. One of the physical legacies of slavery and colonialism is colourism. This is a practice whereby people with a lighter skin tone are given special preference over those with a relatively darker skin tone. This form of prejudice occurs among people of the same race. Within Black communities in Africa and the diaspora, this can be determined as a byproduct of centuries of hate projected by the dehumanization of the race, which has created disunity among Black people of diverse skin tones worldwide.

It is conspicuous that people of lighter shades are more favored for employment, marriage, beauty pageants, romantic relationships, and are considered better looking by the media. Light-skinned persons are generally given far more preference in post-colonial societies than their dark-skinned counterparts. This form of intra-race

conflict creates division by categorizing Black people into certain groups, where a specific group is considered to be superior to the other because they are of a lighter skin hue. This is not only peculiar among Black people, as colourism is equally obtainable among other non-Caucasian societies around the world. The world's preference for and fascination with light-skinned persons is an age-old phenomenon that has persisted through modern times.

As the second island in Hispaniola in the Greater Antilles in the East (Dominican Republic), after Haiti in the West, it was also the first site where Christopher Columbus landed in 1492. This imperial discovery led to the Spanish occupation and colonization of the area. One of the stamps of Spanish influence in the area were ideologies supporting White supremacy against other racial groups especially Black people within the Dominican demographic contexture. In the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean, the concept of colourism looms in devastating ways as racial identities are not determined by lineage or ancestry, but rather along the lines of hypodescent sentiments. According to Lamb and Dundes, a significant number of people in the Dominican Republic self-identify as “Indio.” They note that the demographic breakdown includes 73% who are mulatto, 16% who are White, and 11% who are Black. Despite this distribution, 82% of the population identifies their race



 *Map 2: Dominican Republic Showing National Borders, Provincial Borders, Provinces, Provincial Capitals, National Capital, and Major Cities. Source: <https://ontheworldmap.com/dominican-republic/>*

as Indio, while only 4% identify as Black. This is somewhat misleading, as the self-identified Indio population is predominantly phenotypically Black, and their Indian ancestry constitutes only about 9%. The above scholars assert that the use of Indio allows the nation to avoid the acknowledgment of their Black heritage, which is why the usage of Mulatto is often omitted in the designation of their racial demography.

In fact, in an attempt to eliminate the appearance of the Black phenotype, the inherent cultural strains advocate the concept of 'adelantar la raza,' which literally means 'improve the race. This phrase is so commonly used that it has been integrated into the lexicological apothegm of the local Spanish language and has, over time, become part of the cultural folklore in the Dominican Republic. It is safe to say that the practice of Eugenics is a part of the social practices in the Dominican Republic where the notion supports that people with darker complexion should marry or commingle with those of a lighter tone or someone of the White race in order to improve the appearance and beauty of the dark-skinned Dominican. So romantic or even social association between dark skinned people is blatantly discouraged. The term blanqueamiento, on the other hand, connotes socio-economic advancement through gaining acceptance from those classified and self-identified as White (Lamb et al., 2017). Additionally, Black physical traits are often derided. For instance, the pajon (afro) is often referred to as pelo malo, which means bad hair, while straight hair is widely accepted as the best texture. All these are legacies of racial colonization, where Whiteness is appraised and Blackness is abhorred, allowing the establishment of racial dichotomies imposed by racial prejudice. Racial discrimination and hatred for Black people continue to affect race relations between people of African ancestry and other groups in the island. In spite of all these racial tensions, the existence of racism is still denied in the Dominican Republic making race tolerance an impossible reality. This denial of systemic racism informed the selection of this island country as a case study in this research.



Map 3: Cuba Showing Islands, Provinces, Province Capitals and Major Cities. Source: <https://ontheworldmap.com/cuba/>

Another Caribbean country in denial of the existence of systemic racism which continues to eat deep into the fabric of its society is Cuba. In a bid to protect the economy in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cuban government introduced the Cuban Convertible Peso or CUC and the Cuban Peso, the CUP, in 1994. This dual monetary system created a distinction in class that divided people along racial lines. The Whites with access to the tourism industry enriched themselves while the Blacks with little or no access to the engine room of the nation's economy remained at the bottom of the totem pole. The CUP is primarily used by the Cuban residents, especially the Afro-Cuban population. In contrast, the CUC is used by tourists and the White population that controls the tourism industry. The CUC was worth about 25 times more than the CUP and is pegged to the dollar (Forde, 2021). Many Afro-Cubans found it difficult to secure jobs in the tourism industry because they are often not considered for employment in that sector. Without access to dollars, it is very challenging to start a decent business. However, on January 1, 2021, the two currencies were unified.

In Cuba, the way the Census categorizes people based on self-identification presents a challenge regarding population numbers. In many cases, some Black individuals in Latin American societies identify as mulattoes, while others identify as White. Additionally, mestizos often choose to identify as White as well. This practice complicates the ability to determine the actual number of Black people on the island. According to The Washington Post, the official Cuban Census posits that people of colour make up about 35 percent of the population. However, the Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies at the University of Miami puts the figure at 68 percent. Though the statistics from multiple sources vary between 33.9 and 62 percent, at this point, one can only speculate that the answer may lie somewhere in between (Paul, 2021).

In Cuba, Afro-Cubans are more likely to face criminalization, violence from law enforcement, and longer sentences in court compared to their White counterparts. Economically, they are at a disadvantage as well. Approximately 70 to 80 percent of small businesses in Cuba are funded by remittances from abroad (Williams, 2016). While 60 to 90 percent of White households have relatives living abroad, only 30 to 40 percent of Afro-Cuban households do (Paul, 2021). Additionally, 83.5 percent of Cuban households abroad self-identify as White. It is estimated that \$680 million out of a total of \$800 million in remittances ends up in the hands of White individuals, making self-employment more attainable for them due to their greater access to capital.

The implication of this for Afro-Cubans is that they have very little access to capital for establishing businesses. The development of small businesses that are run out of homes (Paladares) has been an advantage to the White Cubans because they live in bigger and better housing facilities. The use of paladares by Afro-Cubans has proven to be a challenge because many Afro-Cubans live in small, dilapidated homes in densely concentrated neighbourhoods, which limits their opportunities for owning businesses at home. These factors and the lack of capital continue to

create disproportionate economies between the White and Afro-Cuban populations. Afro-Cubans have also endured discrimination and segregation in public and private facilities, jobs, economic and political sectors, which continues to inhibit their progression. Afro-Cubans have suffered at the hands of violent racist groups as extreme as the Ku Klux Klan Kubano. Though the major problem with racism in Cuba remains the continuous denial of its existence, the rise in the Afro-Cuban hip hop movement has been crucial in the advocacy and struggle for equality. Although they had been previously silenced, the use of rap as an instrument for change and a channel of communication has helped elevate the voices of many Afro-Cubans (Glassman, 2011).

Any form of Black consciousness or political assertion exhibited by Black activist groups is often suppressed and swiftly removed before it takes root. The most copious problem the Afro-Cuban faces is the silence of Black expression or consciousness, and the people's lack of knowledge of African and Afro-Cuban history. Also, the somewhat deliberate exclusion of Afro-Cuban history from the nation's educational curriculum points to subtle racism against Black people. The silence surrounding the discussion around race or race-related issues in some Latin American countries has been a weapon used as a tool to cripple Black movements of any kind, even as many Black people continue to be victims of hate crimes perpetrated against them as a result of the colour of their skin. Discrimination based on skin tone has allowed the cascade of colourism, as discussed earlier, to thrive in many Black communities around the world, thereby inhibiting the unity of Black people. This trajectory of discrimination, which has manifested over centuries and decades, stems from a sea of hatred and disdain effectuated by the vestiges left behind by the Atlantic slave trade and the anathema attached to Black slavery.

The three nations namely: the United States of America, the Dominican Republic and Cuba examined by this study all have one shared experience, resulting from the Atlantic slave system which had persisted in these nations for centuries. The elongated period of slavery and brutalization of the Black character have laid the layers of systemic racism which exists to this day. Though experiences may seem similar, but historical and contemporary manifestations differ in variant ways across the landscapes of these nation states being affected by social, cultural, demographic, economic and political factors peculiar to each clime.

In the United States the subject of racism is well discussed and many African American leaders have been outspoken about the existence of racism in the United States. Also the history of the United States is gravely reliant and intrinsically connected to the slave trade and the institution of slavery. The nation also has a well-documented history of resistance and struggle for freedom by Foundational Black Americans dating to a period as early as the Nat Turner Rebellion of 1831 to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s. However in the Caribbean, countries such as the Dominican Republic and Cuba the discussion surrounding race struggles are barely acknowledged and racism is assumed to not exist. These case studies were selected by this research due to the subjective peculiarities prevalent in these areas.

## **7. Pan-Africanism and the Reawakening of Black Consciousness and Camaraderie Across the Diaspora and Africa**

This study has confirmed that the root of prejudice against Black people can be traced back to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This four-century-long institution, marked by inhuman degradation, has left an indelible scar on Black identity that continues to resonate today. Given the magnitude of this issue, it is essential to note that the negative perceptions built up over centuries about Black people can only be changed by Black individuals themselves. For significant changes to be achieved, Black communities in Africa and the diaspora would greatly benefit from the establishment of systems rooted in African ideals and customs, rather than those influenced by Eurocentric ideologies. This study reviews several ideologies developed by people of African descent that have, in contemporary times, explored the Black experience and its complexities. These Afrocentric ideas can provide tailored solutions to indigenous challenges, specifically addressing the needs of the contemporary Black world.

Referred to as Falolaism, Bangura offers Toyin Falola's intellectual perspective on advancing the course of a united Africa. Falola proposes that Pan-Africanism should be constructed to advance political consciousness and build close ties among people of African extraction globally by placing Africa at the center. He explains that the schism that occurred among Pan-African intellectuals in the 1960s was a mistake; therefore, each fragment needs to be assembled into a cohesive whole in order to achieve its goal of uniting people of African descent. He recognizes that the African diaspora is a vast and diverse people, and so Pan Africanism should serve as a motivator for Blacks to utilize the ideas of nationalism, tradition, and modernity in order to reimagine Africa by employing both local and external knowledge. This reflects the global linkages and the diversity of the African diaspora, where both traditional and modern ideals converge, thereby demonstrating the many representations of the ethical dynamism of the culture and identity of the people. He postulates that Pan Africanism goes beyond the enclaves of wearing African clothing and performing sacred African rituals. As a result, its many components should be used to advance the race as a whole. Falola emphasized that modern Pan Africanism should promote communalism, the positive politicization of culture and identity, and its capacity to promote unity, military and religious integration, and economic cooperation between Black nations and communities, which involves movements and exchanges of culture. Finally, he maintains that advancing contemporary Pan-Africanism necessitates a rich understanding of shifting African identities, hybridity, and transculturation (Bangura, 2019: 192-195).

Walter Rodney, another Pan-Africanist regarded as one of the most brilliant minds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, suggested ideas that would help build bridges of growth and sustainability in many Black communities. The fulcrum of Rodney's political thoughts posits that the vestiges of colonization can only be undone when Africans recognize their past through the knowledge of history, while their leaders work towards reconstructing their societies by severing ties and socio-economic dependence on the continent's former colonizers. He buttresses that the loss of Africa's

power to European superpowers in the centuries that followed during and after the slave trade had relegated Africa and her people to a state of chronic underdevelopment and irrelevance, unraveling a continent and people grounded on their knees. Rodney determined that in order to emerge from this conflagration, the decolonization of the continent and the regaining of control from the capitalist West held the solution to complex issues that seemed unsolvable for most of Africa.

Udo and Akpan suggested collaboration and partnership programmes between Africans in Africa and Africans in the diaspora that would aid in building human capacity projects thereby establishing bridges where Black people on both sides of the Atlantic would meet each other halfway. They postulate that pillars of these bridges should be erected by African governments on the Motherland as it is important that Africa is the initiator of this interface which would assist in healing wounds and creating strong alliance systems between Black people everywhere (Udo and Akpan, 2025:90).

Building Black communities in Africa and the diaspora presents significant challenges due to centuries of trauma and dehumanization that continue to hinder progress. The effects of trans-generational trauma, including its epigenetic impacts, are evident in the genes of many people of African descent, making it difficult to achieve unity and advancement. It is essential to advocate for the teaching of African and African American history in countries with significant Black populations, both in the diaspora and on the continent of Africa. This education would be especially beneficial for the younger generation in helping them understand and appreciate the uniqueness of the Black experience, including the struggles and triumphs throughout different periods of Black history, both before and after slavery.

## **8. Conclusion**

The depreciation of the Black mind is indeed traceable to the captivity of the Atlantic slave trade, and to date, this colonized mentality perennially lingers in the subconscious of the people. In the words of the Jamaican reggae icon, Bob Marley, in his thought-provoking anthem “Redemption Song,” he states, “emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds.” These words logically imply that the expedited solution to this dilemma is to believe in Pan Africanism and its principles of African unity and communalism. People of African descent must blatantly refute Eurocentric racist claims of Black inferiority by liberating their minds, as this would redefine the ratiocination, self-worth, and unity of Blacks in Africa and the diaspora.

The proclivity of this paper is not to apportion blame to any group, but to stress the need for unity and cooperation between Black people in Africa and the diaspora. The scars Black people bear today are emblems heralding our victories over the sordid truth, which depicts the role some African ancestors played in the existence of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. However, through reconciliation, the foundations of collaboration can be established, which would heal the piercing wounds of the Afrocentric identity and, along with it, the manifestation of trauma that had for centuries

characterized the Black past and has been a symbol of Black identity for centuries. The implementation of a cultural, economic, and political alliance between Africa and the African diaspora will bring together the ancestral ties that bind the people and, in the long term, foster a collective future that shines brightly for Africa and her descendants in the motherland and across the Atlantic. African governments should be the instigators and drivers of the vehicle of unity and collaboration between Blacks in Africa and the diaspora. Rather than embezzling African resources that find their way into Western banks, projects promoting economic growth should be advocated for by African leaders. Bridges rather than barriers should be built by exploring the similarities between diasporic cultures, which affirm Black greatness and the uniqueness of these two groups, who, despite being separated by the Atlantic, are still linked by blood, genetics, and shared experiences. ☀

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