

Divergent History: Reflections on Race, Lineage, and Trauma

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Author Note

This paper is a response to prompts paraphrased from the online course rubric in re selected chapters from Menakem (2017, pp. 3-26, 37-65):

- *What is historical trauma and how does this compound over time?*
- *How can social and political issues influence how we understand and treat trauma?*
- *What did you find most interesting or challenging about these readings?*
- *How will these perspectives inform how you operate as a therapist?*

Divergent History: Reflections on Race, Lineage, and Trauma

Every human lineage carries trauma. At first it was impacts from natural processes and conflict within undeveloped spaces, recently set aside from humanity with labels like wilderness. Negative impacts peaked during the Middle Ages in England, where hurt people hurting people were conferred professional status. “Torture wasn’t just wildly popular, it was a spectator sport” (Menakem, 2017, p. 59). “It was the English who controlled nearly all the colonized territories in what would become the United States.” And it was there that eugenics, and its utter contempt of difference, turned outward and projected ire upon anyone deemed inferior compared to a pale skinned, binary cisgender, heterosexual, capitalist normative standard for genetic excellence.

Menakem explains the havoc wrecked upon European bodies by European bodies over generations as an embodied experience. We feel “love, fear, anger, dread, grief, sorrow, disgust, and hope” in our bodies, and psychobiology research has confirmed these emotions as activating bodily structures via the vagus nerve (2017, p. 5). There is no cognition or reasoning happening before the body is reacting to any given environmental input. Whatever trauma is stored in our bodies, whether it arrives through mistreatment by a family member, abusive cultural norms, or genetic inheritance, the experience that blends with the unhealed dissonance of suffering from our ancestors must be bodily processed; focusing the work on our thinking brains through practices like cognitive therapy cannot heal trauma, somatic solutions must be prioritized.

With an eye toward post-normal futures, one powerful lens through which we might examine sociopolitical influences in our approaches to trauma and healing includes the ways each of us relate to definitions of divergence. One’s social location correlates to much of the suffering they are likely to endure throughout life; this includes observable determinants of

diversity (e.g., skin color, public behavior) as well as non-obvious outliers (e.g., hidden disability, queer affect, masked tics, etc.). For those who are neurologically divergent, whether or not they are self-identified or officially diagnosed, intersections of observable and non-obvious contributing factors must be both understood and validated by humble and attuned clinicians in order to effectively mitigate the risk of further harm via compounding effects of trauma. Support for this notion may be found in recent literature, throughout research directed by members of affected communities into various observable and non-obvious aspects of common experience (Douglas & Sedgewick, 2023, Jones, et al, 2020, Larson, 2023, Pearson & Rose, 2021, Sasson, et al, 2017, Silberman, 2015, Walker, 2019, Walker, 2021, Yergeau, 2018).

I was immediately drawn in by the experiential focus Menakem brings forward in *My Grandmother's Hands* (2017). He expertly crafts practices for his readers, accompanied by thorough explanations behind the reasons for following given routes through this guide for resolving trauma. By focusing on three obvious groupings who are challenged in unique ways by historical trauma (e.g., Black, white, police), he emphasizes the universality of the experience as well as the need to focus on one's body to resolve tension. My pacing through the material was very much dictated by exploration and integration of the thoughtful cues provided within.

Favoring curiosity over pathology seems to be our best path forward. Through life-long pursuit of first hand discovery of differing views and opinions, primarily sparked by exposure to student exchange programs in my youth, I continue to hone my understanding of the awesome depth of variety expressed in universal terms. Over the years, recently reinforced and validated by experience with our program curriculum, I've learned that we each have our own trauma story, whether or not we have each acknowledged that truth.

Our human inheritance is the task of resolving enough of the distress accompanying our trauma stories before we let continual exposure compound too much to bear any longer; we each have to process the embodied leftovers to avoid harming others in the various ways trauma gets passed along. Whether an increasingly likely global break down ends up species specific, or an entirely shattered planetary ecosystem, may depend on how haphazardly we continue to other the natural and subdue biodiversity. Monocultures, simply put, are not sustainably functional. The deep historical roots of all three of the focus groups Menakem defines, with all of their trauma stories tracing back through the same breakdown of a widely assumed and passionately pursued monoculture, holds plentiful and undeniable evidence to support that claim.

In contemplation of how this knowledge might affect my therapeutic presence in practice, I spent a fair amount of time with my ancestors. I come from a predominately Norwegian lineage, a people turned against themselves by normalization to English preferences and systems of power. Faced with convert-or-die ultimatums, an openly animistic and polytheistic people turned their backs on intimate connections with natural processes and accepted a singular deity before migrating across the Atlantic Ocean, eventually working farms near Minnesota while practicing being good Lutherans. This ethnocide rid the world of most evidence of cultural practice that hadn't already sailed west to be held secret in communities like those that continued in Iceland. The fact that viking influence in the Americas is not generally mentioned in our shared histories, especially during the ~500 years before the accidental arrival of an infamous colonizer from Spain, might speak to a lack of generally abusive empire building practices, their wont to isolate and preserve oppressed ways of being, or the continued erasure of difference brutally enforced by *kristjan* people settling in to develop their "new world."

As much as possible (except where it serves to subvert the prevailing paradigm in some way), I reject the widely assumed white male status of my physical form and endeavor to model doing better upon knowing better. Intersecting identities, especially abused in combinations featuring impaired, non-white, non-straight, and/or non-male people, provide one with perspective that cannot be attained through adherence to compliant perspectives that assume one's personal experience of a default as a worldwide default. Marginalized people are the best candidates for teaching anyone how to avoid marginalizing people; their wisdom was earned. Right use of power demands that platforms be yielded to down-power relations; centering more than marginalized humanity, contemplating truths about the ways it has been stolen away.

Privilege might be defined as the ability to define normal, so I utilize the privilege others assume when witnessing my embodiment in concert with wisdom earned through oppressed and erased experience as a disabled neurodivergent queer viking. I hold these apparently disparate perspectives simultaneously during reality testing, in dispelling culturally generated myths about lived experience, in celebrating oddity as a fundamental necessity, in radically accepting.

Clinical practice is an ideal venue for providing support to marginalized people, and all too often used for quite the opposite aim (e.g., conversion therapy, compliance demands). When I think of my own gratitude practice, I am very often focused on difference. I am thankful that I see these issues with such depth of clarity. I appreciate learning and recalling new language for the ways I've struggled. I am in awe of communities of activist academics who have laid the critical groundwork to allow and encourage authentic representation and invaluable support of frequently and unreasonably pathologized realities. I will offer clients lived experience, backed by ongoing literature review, and a commitment to accessible, open, accepting, consistency.

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