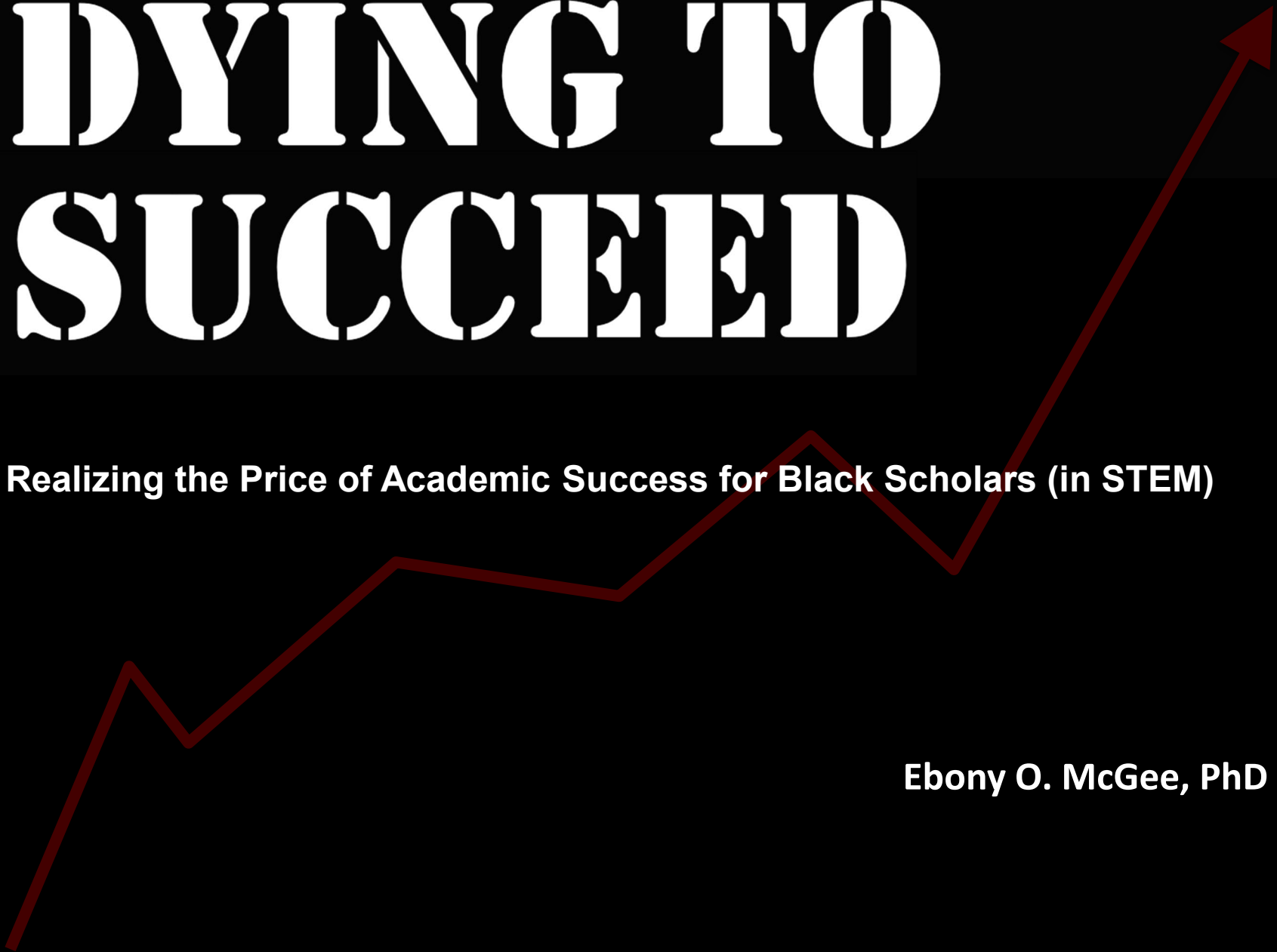




DYING TO SUCCEED

Realizing the Price of Academic Success for Black Scholars (in STEM)

Ebony O. McGee, PhD



“**Racism**, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.”



Ruth Gilmore, PhD

Overview

**Cognitive
Dissonance:
Recovering Engineer**

**My Childhood:
Pizza Box
Narratives...**

**History Reveals the
Mystery**

**Misguided Turns in
Mental Health**

**1. Underestimating
the Cost of Making It**

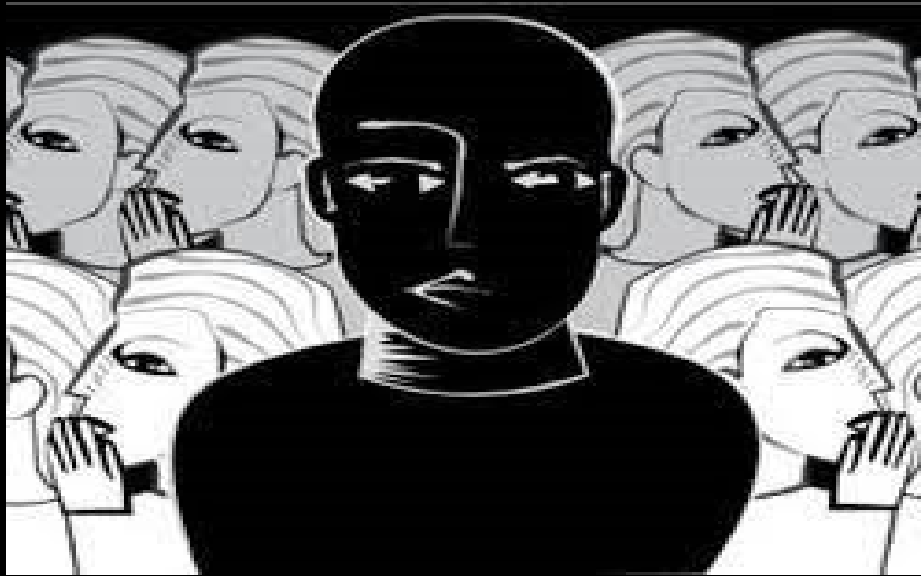
**2. The Harms and
Limits of Resilience
and Grit**

**Mental Health
Vs. Structural Racism**

**3. Critique of Self
Care**

Black STEM Futurist

Mythical BLACK EXCEPTIONALISM & COGNITIVE DISSONANCE



Where Others Created my Narrative

Pizza Boxes as Bookbags?



RECOVERING ENGINEER

BLACK

MOTHER

MENTOR

WOMAN



Still Recovering...



BLACK GIRL MAGIC

We are real & we are suffering!

**BEING BLACK is not
MAGICAL!**



BLACK GIRL MAGIC

We are real & we are suffering!

We are more likely to be killed at almost 3x the rate of white women, yet when we are missing or murdered, headlines do not call for our safety!



BLACK GIRL MAGIC

We are real & we are suffering!

We are more likely to be killed at almost three times the rate of white women, yet when we are missing or murdered, headlines do not call for our safety.

*We are 3x more likely to die giving birth. And so do our **BABIES!***

BLACK GIRL MAGIC

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We are more likely to die giving birth.

Black girls are the most suspended of any student group in our nation.





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Black girls are the most suspended of any student group in our nation.

At work, we must navigate antiblackness and sexism: misogynoir. “Smile More”

STEM Success Not Failure

Mental & Physical Health

Cost of Coping with Racism, Sexism, Classism, Capitalism, Etc.

Career Trajectories; Perceptions Of STEM CAREERS

Racially Underrepresented STEM Students, Faculty, and Staff of Color

Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous

Coping Mechanisms

Responses to Racism, Antiracism

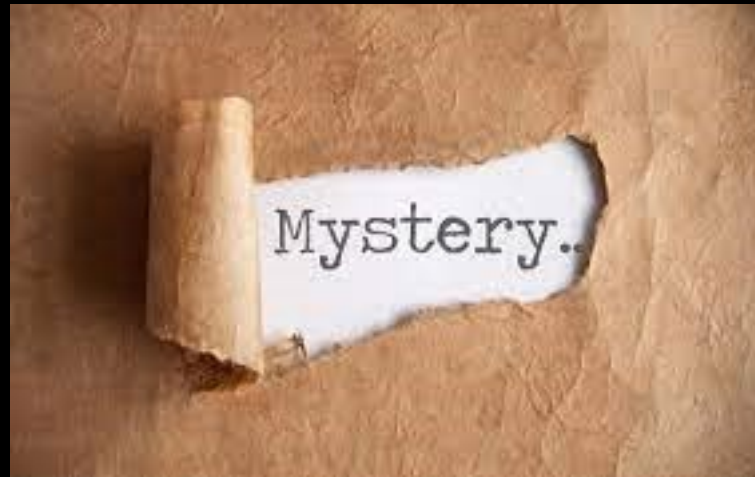
Race & Racism

Racialized Structures, Stereotypes, and other forms of bias

Success ≠ Problem Free



REVEALS THE



THE IMMUNITY HYPOTHESIS

*“Slaves are immune
from stress and from
the subsequent risk of
mental illness because
they do not own
property.”*



John Galt, M.D.(1840)

THE END OF SLAVERY & THE RISE OF ***“INSANITY”***

1840 US Census:

***“Insanity”* 11 times more
likely among African
Americans living in Northern
free-states than in South**

Slavery Proponents:

***“Burdens of freedom”* drive
African Americans “insane”
...slavery saves them from
*“mental death”***

Whitaker (2002)



1

**Understanding the
Costs of Being
Black and Academically
High-Achieving**

BLACK BRILLIANCE LOST



Michelle Evon Scott

Age 29

Vanderbilt University

Navy veteran pursuing degree in Biomolecular Science seeking to find a cure for cancer.

Suicide

BLACK BRILLIANCE LOST



Dandry "DJ" Henry

Age 20

Pace University

Defensive back on football team studying
business management

Killed by Police

BLACK BRILLIANCE LOST



Tatissa Zunguze

Age 20

Scripps College

Student leader, mentor, and advocate
conducting lab research to combat HIV

Suicide

BLACK BRILLIANCE LOST



Giovonn Joseph-McDade

Age 20

Green River College

Former High School football player
pursuing Associates of Arts degree

Killed by Police

BLACK BRILLIANCE LOST



Cariann Hithon

Age 22

Temple University

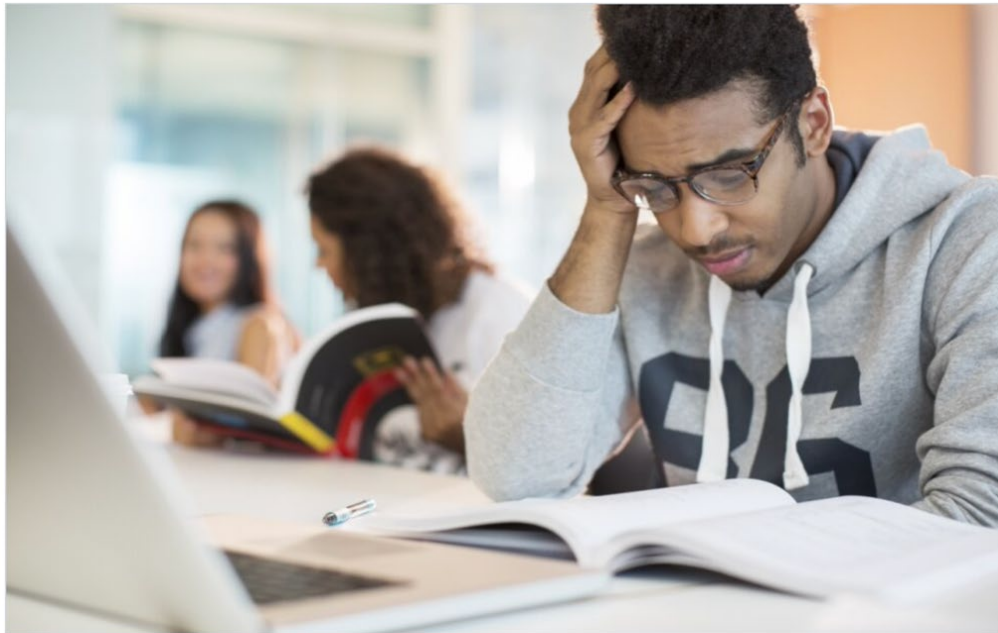
Studying to become a defense attorney
to assist the underrepresented

Killed by Police

Study Warns of Looming Mental Health Crisis for Black College Students

Researchers have noted anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide and "John Henryism."

By [Lauren Camera](#) | Dec. 31, 2015



The additional mental burdens black college students face can take a toll on their health, according to a new study. (CAIAIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES)

STUDY WENT VIRAL!

McGee, E. O., & Stovall D. O. (2015). Reimagining Critical Race Theory in Education: Mental Health, Healing, and the Pathway to Liberatory Praxis. *Educational Theory*, 65(5), 491-511.

RACIALLY TOXIC

STEM Places & Spaces



Pressure to Represent
One's Racial Group

"Pet-to Threat"
Syndrome

Relationship Break Up

Isolation: too few STEM
students & faculty of color

Minority Status Stress

Racial & Gender
Microaggressions

Lack of role models
or mentors

Weathering

the "Revolving Door"
syndrome of faculty
of Color leaving

Tokenism

Racial/Ethnic
Stereotypes

Financial
Difficulties

Powerlessness

Impostor
Syndrome

John/Johnetta
Henryism

Racial Battle
Fatigue

Illness or Death
of Friend/Family

Alienation

Prove Them Wrong
Syndrome

Invisibility/Hypervisibility

Family and
Friend Hardships

Pioneerism

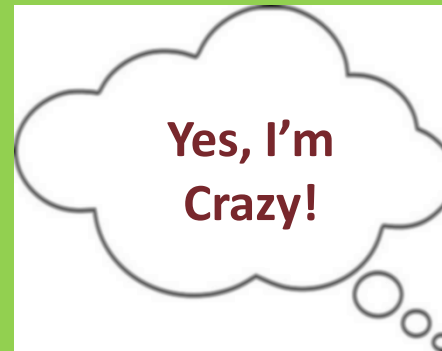
Devaluing/Compromising
Authentic Racial Identities

"Pedigree" Snobs

Creation of Fragile
Identities

Negative Future
Stress

IMPOSTOR SYNDROME



change
your
thinking!



recognizing
your
expertise



yoga



building your
self-confidence
in STEM



mediating,
breathing
exercises



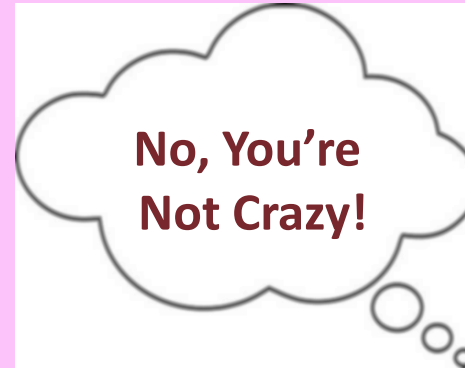
talking
to mentors



realizing that
perfection is an
unachievable goal



YOU CANNOT YOGA POSE YOUR WAY OUT OF OUT A STRUCTURALLY TOXIC ENVIRONMENT



what if
your thinking
is right?



recognizing
your
expertise



yoga



building your
self-confidence
in STEM



mediating,
breathing
exercises

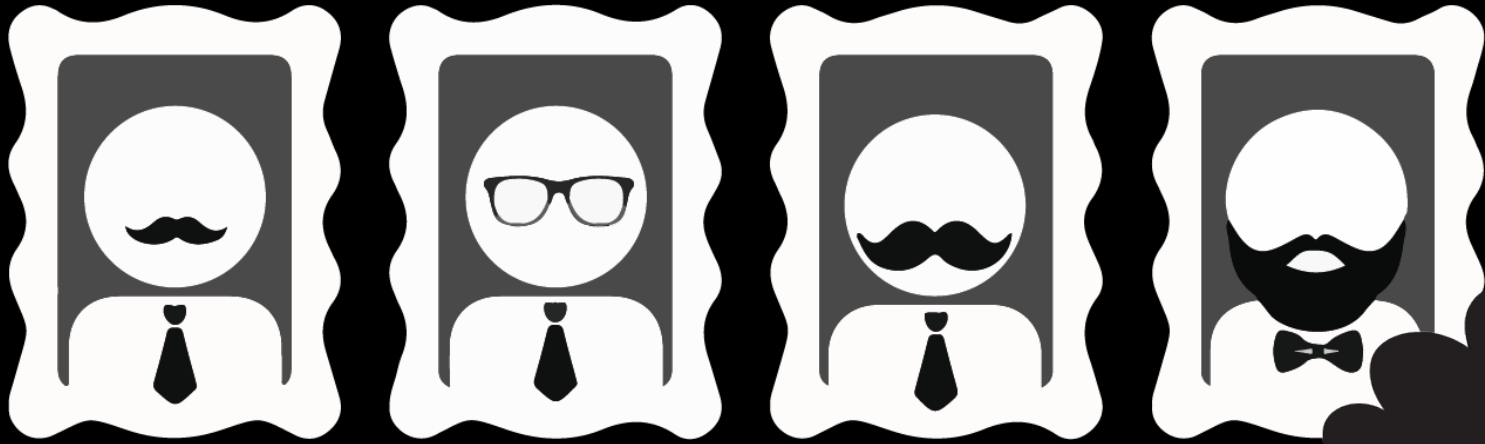


talking
to mentors



realizing that
perfection is an
unachievable goal





WHAT IF IT IS NOT IN YOUR HEAD?

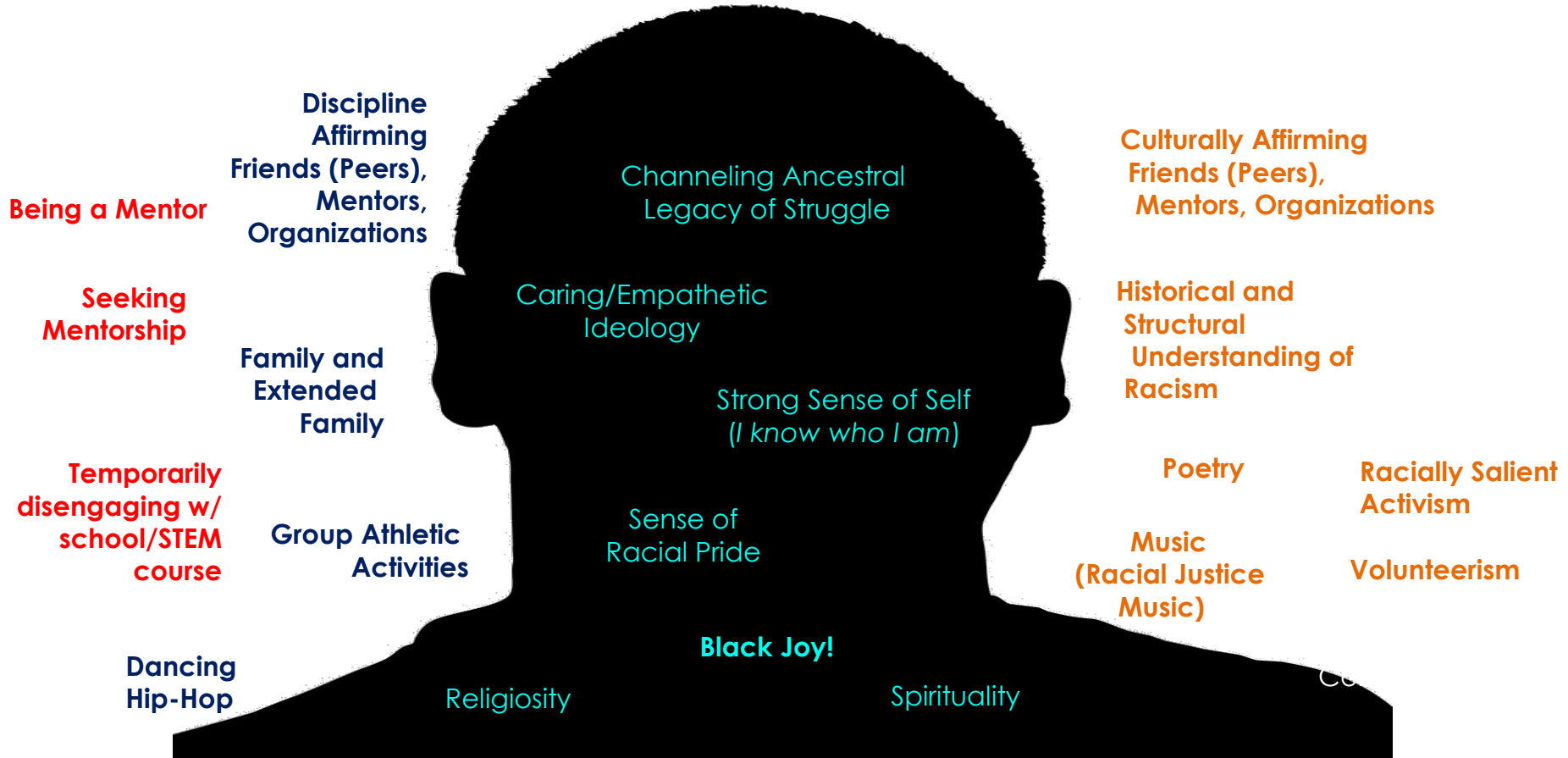
If the space is **IMPOSTOR**-ish, why is it the STUDENTS' job to fix themselves?

Who is fixing the environment that breeds **IMPOSTOR**-ism?

Maybe it's RACISM camouflaged as Impostorism



STEREOTYPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES



AND STILL, THEY RISE?

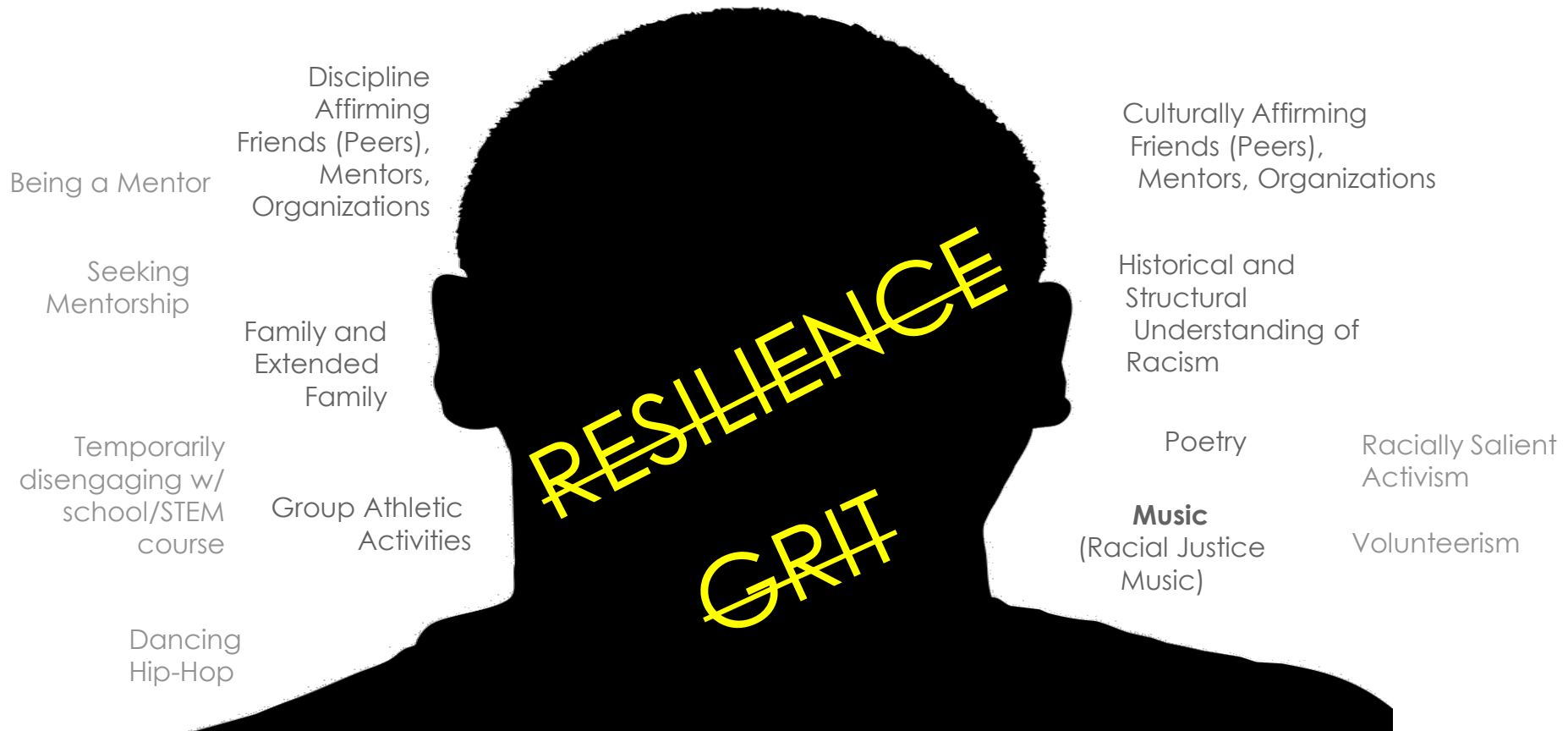
**COLLEGE
DEPT**

2

**STOP the
PEDDLING of
RESILIENCE as THE
CURE!**

*...it's not a DIY
endeavor!*

STEREOTYPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES



CELEBRATING OPPRESSION!!

RESILIENCE/GRIT

**WITHOUT UNIQUE EXTERNAL
SUPPORTS & RESOURCES IS**

OPPRESSION!



Epigenetics:
Generational Trauma that Lives Within

Chronic Stress



Increases

- Heart Rate
- Blood Pressure
- Blood Glucose



Alters the
Immune
System



Slows
Digestion and
Hair Growth

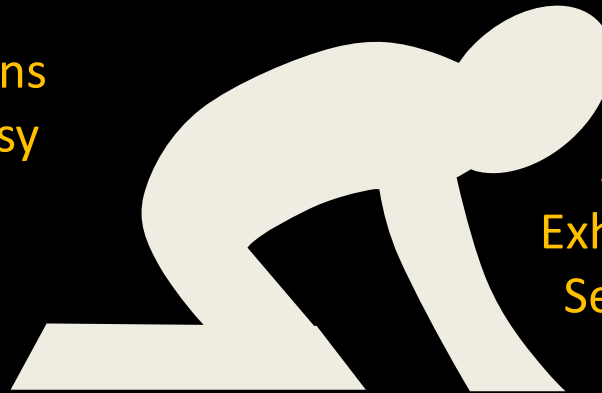


Affects Aspects
of the Brain
That Controls
Mood

NOT JUST MENTAL HEALTH, BUT PHYSICAL HEALTH TRAUMA

(All interviewees were 27 years & younger)

Hospitalizations
Many Cases Bells Palsy
Anxiety Attacks
Miscarriages
Difficult Pregnancies



Strokes
Suicidal Thoughts
Exhaustion
Self-medication

McGee, E. O., & Stovall D. O. (2015). Reimagining Critical Race Theory in Education: Mental Health, Healing, and the Pathway to Liberatory Praxis. *Educational Theory*, 65(5), 491-511

McGee, E. O., & Bentley, L. C. (2017). The Troubled Success of Black Women in STEM. *Cognition and Instruction*, 35(4), 265-289.

HIGH ACHIEVERS OF COLOR ARE HIGH FUNCTIONING



Must spend mental energy considering whether they are genuinely accepted or just being tolerated.

Their intellect and frequent coping masks the depression mental health and at times the physical health outcomes that they have.

More interactions with racism, sexism, and classism the more educated Black and Brown folks are. Placed at Greater Risk...



JOHN HENRY



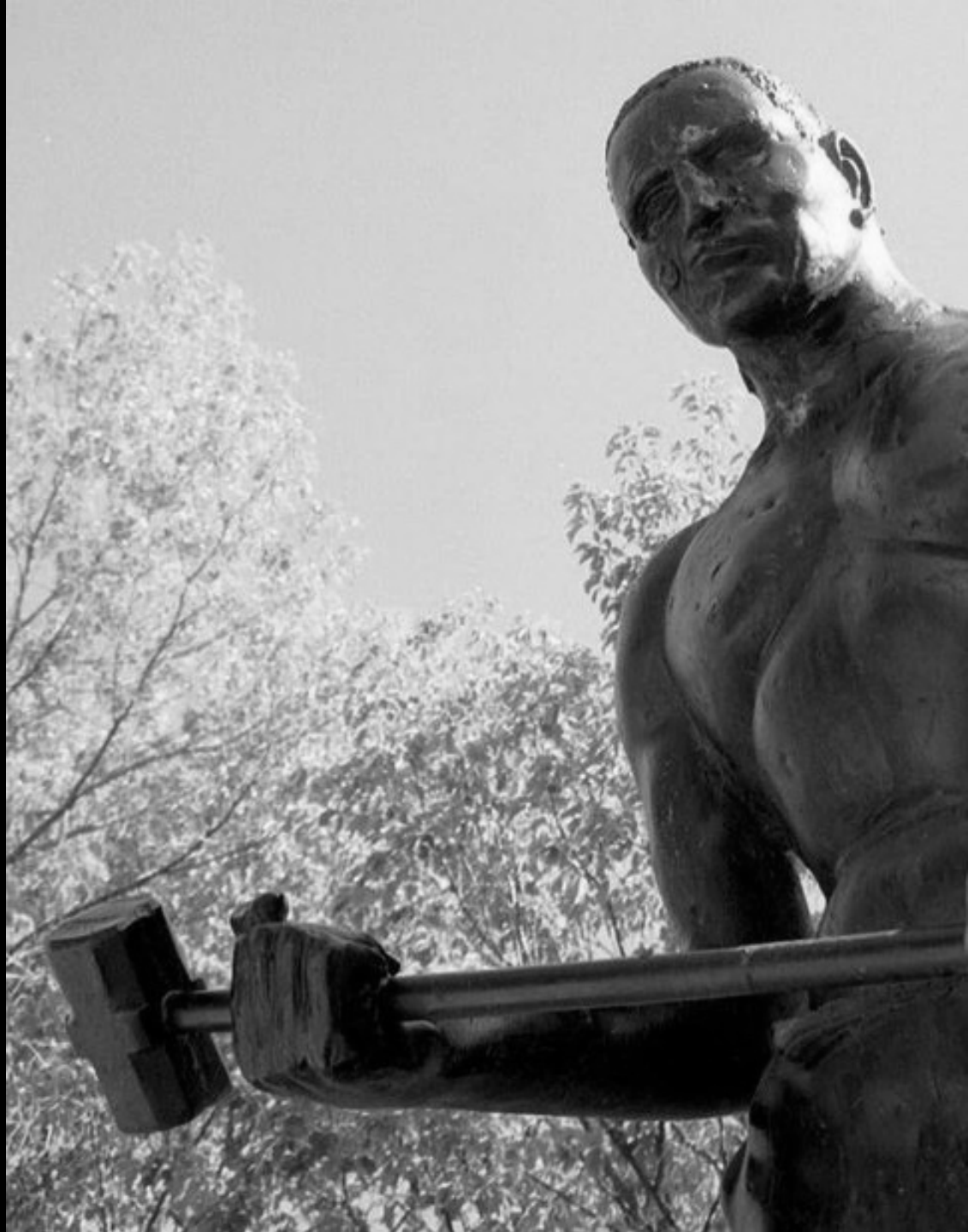
African-American
Folk Hero



Worked so hard
that he beat a
steam-powered
machine



Died from
his efforts



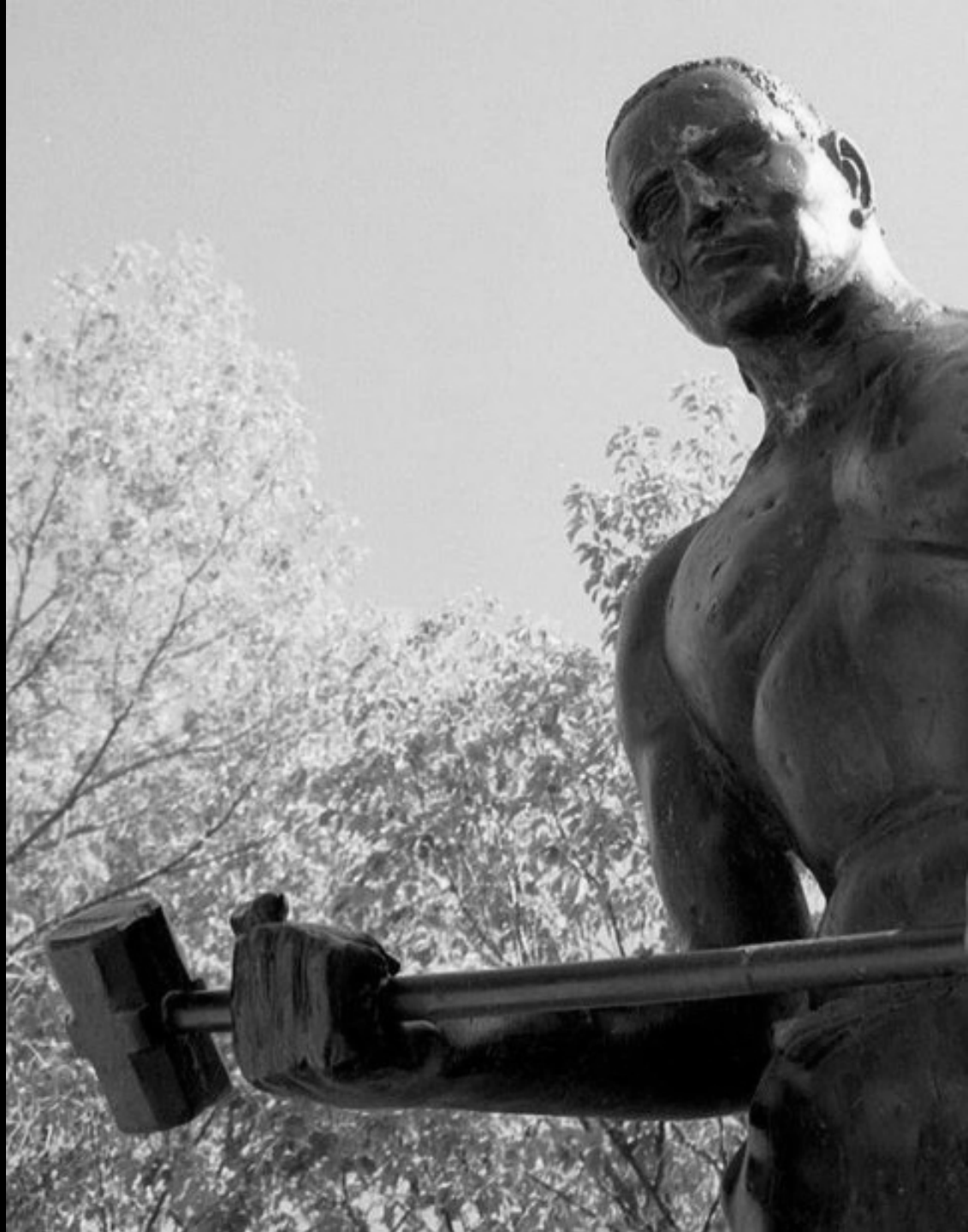


JOHN HENRY *isM*

African-Americans have to work much harder than their white counterparts to combat the day-to-day psychosocial stressors which are ubiquitous in their educational contexts.



Results in detrimental physiological and psychological effects.



3

**(Mental) Health Outcomes
are a Byproduct of
Policy/Structural Violence**

**Policy
Violence
Led to
Racist
Violence**



**CARING FOR
MYSELF IS NOT
SELF-INDULGENCE,
IT IS SELF-
PRESERVATION
AND THAT IS
AN ACT OF
POLITICAL
WARFARE.**



Audre Lorde

1934 – 1992
Died age 58 of cancer

PROBLEMATIZING SELF CARE... NOT AUDRE LORDE!

Self Care

VS

Community Care

Capitalistic

Non-Capitalistic

KROGER WINE BAGS: "Wine is Basically Fruit Salad!"



Personal Training

High Fashion

\$200 Massages

Promotion of Unhealthy Behaviors

\$10 Latté's

Cosmetic Surgery as SELF-CARE?? WTF!!

Self Care

VS

Community Care

Capitalistic

Non-Capitalistic

Meritocracy: STEM is not racist, our motto is “STEM as Survival of the Fittest”

Inditing STEM Companies and the Military as Responsible for Planetary Destruction

Self Care

VS

Community Care

Capitalistic

Non-Capitalistic

Meritocracy: STEM is not racist, our motto is “STEM as Survival of the Fittest”

Inditing STEM Companies and the Military as Responsible for Planetary Destruction

*Measuring Black Death
With Preexisting Conditions and Statistics*

*Examining the Role of
Racism, Sexism, and Classism
as Determinants in BLACK DEATH*

Self Care

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Measuring Black Death With Preexisting Conditions

Examining the Role of Racism, Sexism, and Classism as Determinants in BLACK DEATH

Normalizing racism by spending money to cope (not heal) with the discrimination

Supporting Black/POC Owned Coffee Shops, Community Centers, and UNIONS

Self Care

VS

Community Care

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Non-Capitalistic

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Supporting Black Owned Coffee Shops, Community Centers, and UNIONS

Violence as Individual Acts... and Guns as THE SOLUTION

How Policies/Companies Manufactures and Normalizes Violence

Self Care

VS

Community Care

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Non-Capitalistic

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Inditing STEM Companies and the Military as Responsible for Planetary Destruction

Measuring Black Death With Preexisting Conditions

Examining the Role of Racism, Sexism, and Classism as Determinants in BLACK DEATH

Coping with racism by spending money for temporary fixes

Supporting Black Owned Coffee Shops, Community Centers, and UNIONS

Violence as Individual Acts... and Guns as THE SOLUTION

How Policies/Companies Manufactures and Normalizes Violence

Community Care

Self Care Café

Teachers

Doctors/Nurses

Allies

Community Organizations

Friends

Neighbors

Government



AFROFUTURISM



**BROWNTech
BLOGGLE**



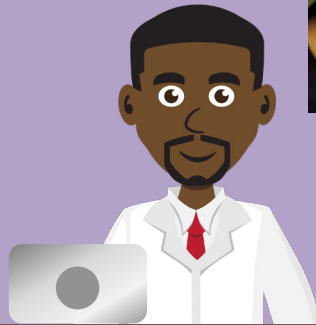
**CANCER CURE
PHARMACEUTICALS**



**FLYING CAR
COMPANY**



**MARS
VACATIONS**



FROM STEM...

WORKERS...

TO STEM...

**...OWNERS
...DESIGNERS
...INNOVATORS
...ENTREPRENEURS**



McGee, E. O. & White, D. (2021). Afrofuturism: Reimagining STEM for Black Urban Learners. In R. H. Milner & K. Lomotey (Eds.) *Handbook of Urban Education*: Routledge.

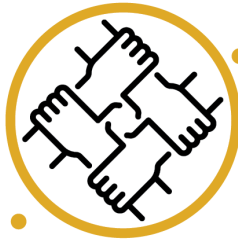
UNIVERSITY



ENTREPRENEUR



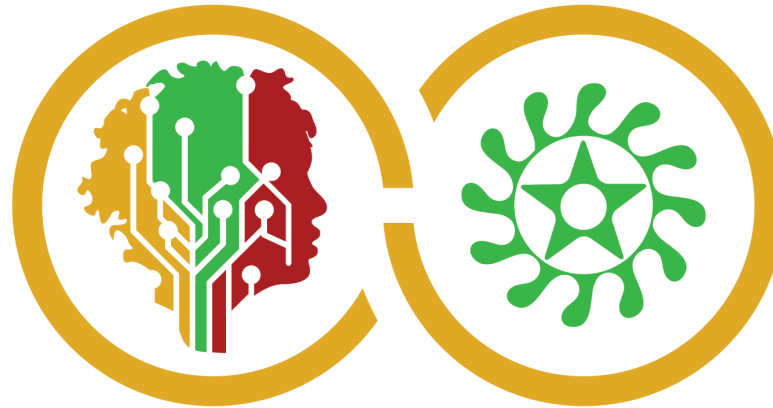
NONPROFIT



INDUSTRY



GOVERNMENT



R+RIGHTS

**RACIAL REVOLUTIONARY and INCLUSIVE GUIDANCE for
HEALTH THROUGHOUT STEM**



FOCUS: MENTAL HEALTH

THANK
YOU

