
UNDER THE SKIN: THE HIDDEN TOLL OF RACISM ON AMERICAN LIVES AND ON THE HEALTH OF OUR NATION

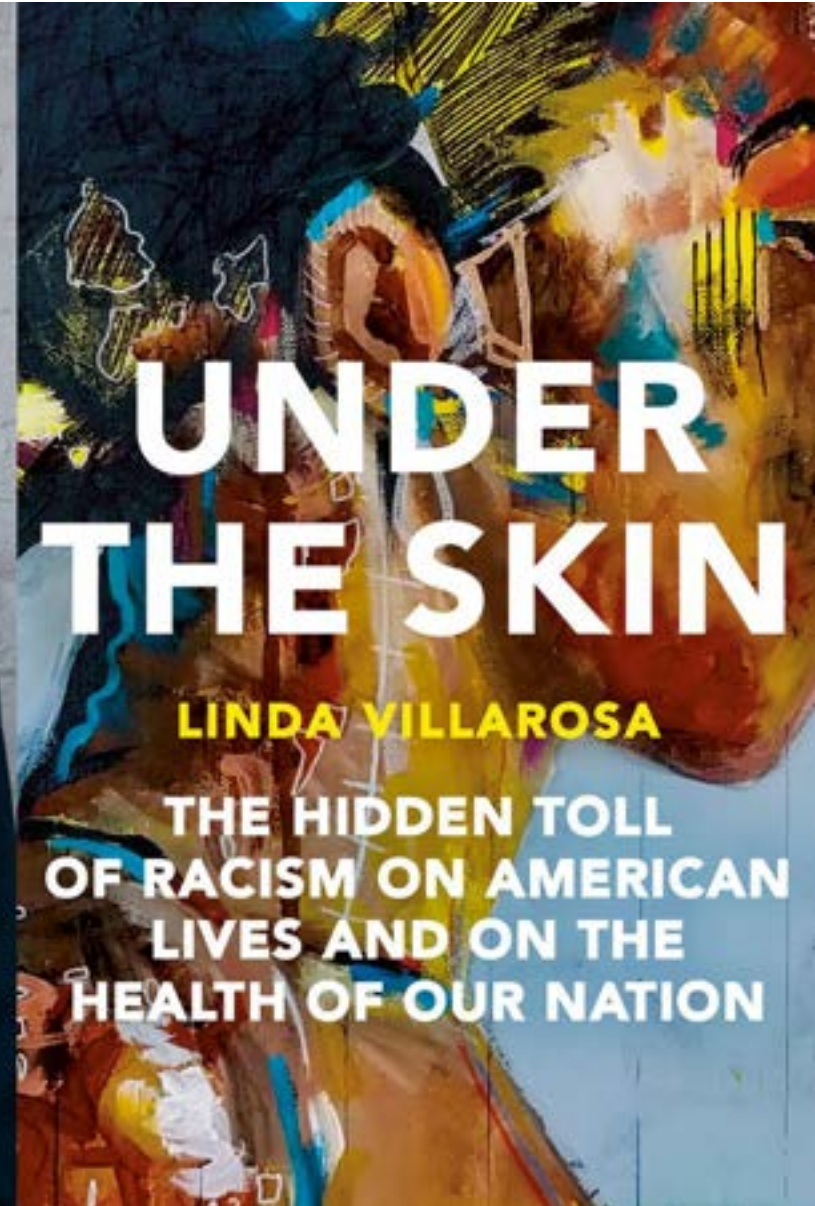
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UNDER THE SKIN

- Everything I Thought Was Wrong
- The Dangerous Myth that Black Bodies are Different
- Unequal Treatment
- Something About Being Black is Bad or Your Body and Your Baby
- Where You Live Matters
- Strong, Loud and Angry: The Invisibility of Black Emotional Pain
- Discrimination and Ill— Treatment Can Harm Every Body
- Putting the Care Back in Health Care: Solutions



THE STANDARD LINE

- Misconception that poverty alone was driving the adage that African Americans “live sicker and die quicker.”
- However, despite income, education and access to health care – African American lives are still shorter
- The Heckler report drew attention to the Social Determinants of Health
- We blame Black people for their poor outcomes – their behaviors
 - “Progress depends more on education and a change in personal behavior than it does on more doctors, more hospitals or more technology”



INTEGRATION BABIES

- The exceptional ones
 - “You don’t seem Black”
 - “You aren’t like other Black people”
- Tremendous burden and isolation



LESSONS LEARNED

- Race is NOT a proxy for poverty and vice-versa (“Excess Mortality in Harlem” by Harold Freeman, MD)
- Myths abound
 - Hypertension: Enslaved people who survived the middle passage had a genetic predisposition to retain sodium. No genetic evidence of a difference. No evidence that death on slave ships was from dehydration. What about the stress of racism?
- Weathering (Arlene Geronimus) – stress affects our bodies, physically
- Mainstream medicine could not accept evidence of racism driving disparities in infant and maternal mortality.

“

Today I am chagrined to think I believed that the impact of insidious discrimination associated with the lived experience of being Black in America can be washed away in a bubble bath or calmed with journaling or meditation and me time.

”

FUBU? NOT THIS TIME!

- Often time we are led to believe that we need to solve these problems
- This is NOT a FUBU issue – it is an American problem and Black people should not be expected to solve it alone.
- “Racism is an American problem in need of an American solution.”



THE DANGEROUS MYTH THAT BLACK BODIES ARE DIFFERENT



MISTRUST OF THE HEALTH SYSTEM

The Relf Sisters— Forced Sterilization

- Those who helped – hurt.
- Creation of theories (called scientific) of biological differences, physically and mentally, to justify inhuman treatment.
- Roots in slavery. “Science” used as justification to not only deny rights but to torture, experiment,



RACIAL VIOLENCE – ROOTS IN SLAVERY

Generating wealth for White institutions and people

- The lie that Black people can withstand enormous amounts of pain provided rationalization for cruel aspects of slavery
 - Backbreaking unpaid labor
 - Squalid living conditions
 - Brutal punishment

Examples of Early Misuse of Science and Medicine

- Benjamin Moseley – “A Treatise on Tropical Diseases: and on the Climate of the West Indies”
 - Claimed Black people could bear surgical operations much more than White people
- Thomas Jefferson, a non-medical, non-scientist slave-owner – “Notes on the State of Virginia”
 - Cataloging the ways Black bodies differed from white bodies
- Dr. Samuel Cartwright – “Report on the Diseases and physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race”
 - Another laundry list of unproven claims of differences between Blacks and whites
 - Used claims to reinforce the “need” for slavery

EUGENICS PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES

- Sterilization was part of a eugenics program across the country
- Because of the Relf sister's case and other, estimated 100K to 150K poor, mostly Black women sterilized each year in the US under federally funded programs
- In North Carolina doctors performed ~7600 (majority Black) sterilization between 1933 and 1974 – to keep welfare rolls low, reduce poverty and improve the gene pool
- In California more than 17,000 Mexican women were sterilized between 1920 and 1945 via a law meant to prevent reproduction of those “unfit”
- Between 1973 and 1976 four of twelve Indian Health Service regions sterilized 3405 Native American women without permission
- Over 37% of Puerto Rican women sterilized between the 1930s and 1970s

UNEQUAL TREATMENT



MATERNAL OUTCOMES

- Black women were 3-4 times more likely to die and Black infants twice as likely to die compared with white mothers and infants.
- Why are the disparities greatest when mothers are at the upper levels of education?
- Racism that is structural has yielded longstanding disrespect and abuse of women that leads to poor outcomes and increased disparities
- Black doulas and how their advocacy can impact outcomes

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A Black woman's body was never
hers alone.”

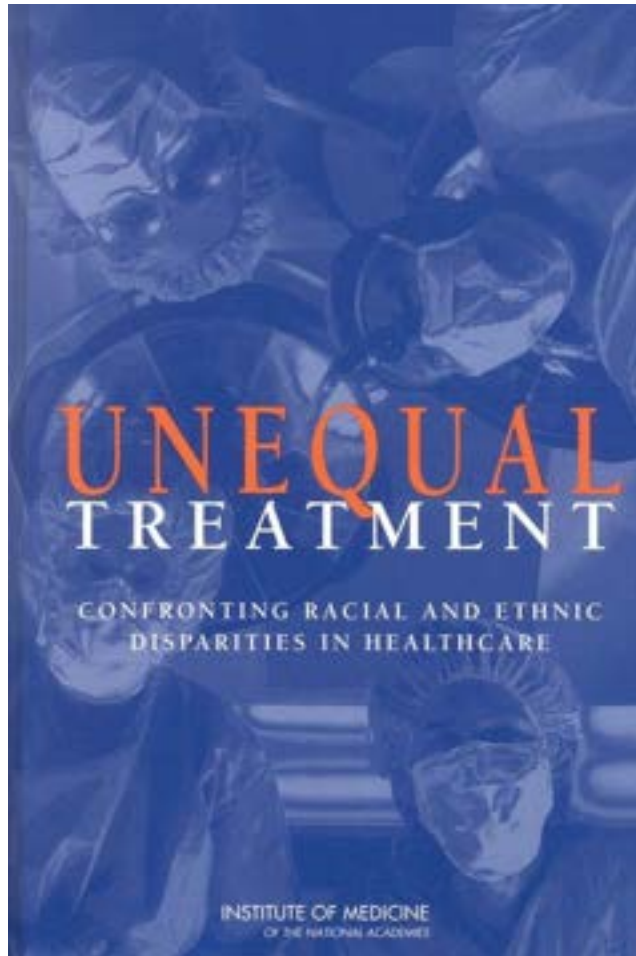
- - Fannie Lou Hamer

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

- “The Effect of Race and Sex on Physicians’ Recommendations for Cardiac Catheterization” by Kevin Schulman, MD, MBA
 - Blacks in the US age 18-49 are twice as likely as whites to die from heart disease but less likely to be referred for cardiac catheterization
 - “Bias may represent overt prejudice on the part of physicians or, more likely, could be the result of subconscious perceptions rather than deliberate actions or thoughts.”
 - “The real implication of the [Schulman] study was actually quite simple: doctors are human,” (Thomas Perez, contributed to *Unequal Treatment*)



UNEQUAL TREATMENT



- Released March 2002 by the National Academy of Sciences – committee of mostly white medical educators, nurses, behavioral scientists, economists, health lawyers, sociologist and policy experts
- “Unconscious racism is every bit as damaging as the more overt forms of bigotry.”
- Despite the groundbreaking findings proving the disparity in care for Black people and other people of color, we have seen little movement forward

SOMETHING ABOUT BEING BLACK IS BAD FOR YOUR BODY AND YOUR BABY



MIGRATING TO THE “LAND OF OPPORTUNITY”



- Drs. Richard David and James Collins studied birth weights of babies – comparing two generations of women
 - Higher birth weights in impoverished countries in Caribbean and Africa
 - Lower birth weight once daughters moved to US and had children
 - Genetics not at work
 - Not an issue of affluence
 - Do we blame the victim? Lifestyle and behaviors?
 - Racism

STRESS RESULTS IN PHYSICAL DISTRESS

- Black Women's Health Study (BHWWS)
 - 1990s Team of female researchers from Boston and Georgetown Universities launched study since most large long-term studies
 - Julie Palmer, ScD PI
- BWHS used Williams' questions and additionally:
 8. Have you every been treated unfairly due to your race at work, in housing or by the police?
- David Williams, PhD attempted to define Race-related insults
 1. You are treated with less courtesy than other people are.
 2. You receive poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores.
 3. People act as if they think you are not smart.
 4. People act as if they are afraid of you.
 5. People act as if they're better than you are.
 6. You are called names or insulted
 7. You are threatened or harassed

YOUR DEGREE AND PEDIGREE WILL NOT GIVE YOU A FREE PASS

- Overcoming disadvantaged upbringings:
 - Ron Howell, Yale '70: 41 years after graduation, nine of thirty-two Black men who entered Yale in 1966 were dead (three times the death rate of the class as a whole)
 - Moving from poor areas to white suburban communities is not protective
- Weathering (Arline Geronimus)
 - “Wear down” and “Withstand”
 - Discrimination and bias wear away the bodies of those continually beating them back
 - Protective factors: positive forces of family, friendship and community support



WHERE YOU LIVE MATTERS



FENCE-LINE LIVING

- Living in safe communities with adequate healthcare services, outdoor space, clean air and water, public transportation and affordable healthy food (as well as education, employment and social support) contributes to longer, healthier lives.
- Blacks are 75% more likely than the average American to live in fence-line communities
 - Areas near facilities that emit hazardous waste
- Blacks are exposed to 1.54 times more of the kind of sooty pollution that comes from burning fossil fuels
 - Lung disease
 - Heart disease
 - Premature death



DISPROPORTIONATE CLIMATE IMPACT

- Even though Blacks and Latinx people are more likely to live near factories exposing them to air pollutants, they are less likely to consume the goods and services that produce it.
- When weather disaster strikes, people of color are hit first, worse longest and hardest.



DISPROPORTIONATE TOXIC IMPACT

- “Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States” – United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice and the follow-up “Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty, 1987-2007”
 - POC made the majority of populations in communities within 1.8 miles of a polluting facility. Race (not income or property values) was the most potent predictor.
- The face of the environmental movement is mostly white, not like Danielle Bailey-Lash, featured in this chapter, who experienced the impact of environmental toxins firsthand
 - White people make up 85% of staff and 80% of board of 2057 environmental nonprofits, despite making up 60% of the population. POC make up only 4% of senior staff of 40 environmental foundations



STRONG, LOUD AND ANGRY: THE INVISIBILITY OF BLACK EMOTIONAL PAIN



BLACK MENTAL HEALTH IN AMERICA

- 2018 survey by SAMHSA found African Americans are 20% more likely to have serious psychological distress than whites
- More likely to report persistent symptoms such as sadness, hopeless and feeling as if everything is like a struggle
- Poverty worsened these struggles
- Proliferation of high-profile police killings of unarmed Black people has created repeated stress and trauma



BLACK PAIN: IT JUST LOOKS LIKE WE'RE NOT HURTING

- Perception of the mentally ill as *violent* compounded by racist stereotypes leads to extreme intolerance and lack of empathy and fear
- Suffer in silence – signals weakness to share
- False assumptions
 - Black people don't suffer from eating disorders
 - Black people die from homicide, whites from suicide



BLACK PAIN: IT JUST LOOKS LIKE WE'RE NOT HURTING

- **Stigma** keeps many from getting needed care
- Instead of seeking help, we carry the load, often turning to religion
- History of **distrust** in the medical system
- 84% of the psych workforce is white and 4% Black (APA)
- Stories of misdiagnosis and undertreatment / overtreatment



BLACK PAIN: IT JUST LOOKS LIKE WE'RE NOT HURTING

- Dr. Samuel Cartwright – discovered “drapetomania”
- 1960s scientific community described schizophrenia as a violent social disease affecting Negro men. Justifying treating mental illness as a criminal not medical condition
- Black men 4X as likely than white men to be diagnosed with schizophrenia and underdiagnosed with post-traumatic stress and mood disorders.
- Intersection of race and masculinity makes Black men even less likely to seek treatment for mental illness



CRIMINALIZATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN BLACK PEOPLE

- Black Americans who use drugs are disproportionately criminalized when they struggle with addiction
- Drug rates the same for Blacks and whites but they are 2.5 X more likely to be arrested for possession.
 - War on Drugs (Nixon, 1971) – national jail pop went from 300K to 2.3M – half on drug charges in federal facilities. 2/3 of them are POC
 - 100:1 cocaine to crack disparity



DISCRIMINATION AND ILL-TREATMENT CAN HARM EVERY BODY



STRESS AND DISCRIMINATION WILL HURT ANYONE – WHITE APPALACHIAN POOR

- West Virginia, one of the whitest of all states but one of the most impoverished has the lowest life expectancy of any state in the country
- Poor physical and mental health, obesity prevalent
- Poor whites are generally blamed for their circumstances
- Weathering may apply to other disadvantaged groups who are the target of sustained discrimination



STRESS AND DISCRIMINATION WILL HURT ANYONE – LATINX IOWAN COMMUNITY

- Postville IA raid – arresting 389 suspected of being undocumented in a factory, most from Guatemala. Handcuffed, linked by chains at the waist, held in detention centers. Families ripped apart.
- Birth outcomes of Latinx mother, both US-born and immigrant – 24% higher risk of low birthweight babies even those living far away.
 - Fear, trauma, anxiety created a weathering effect on their bodies.



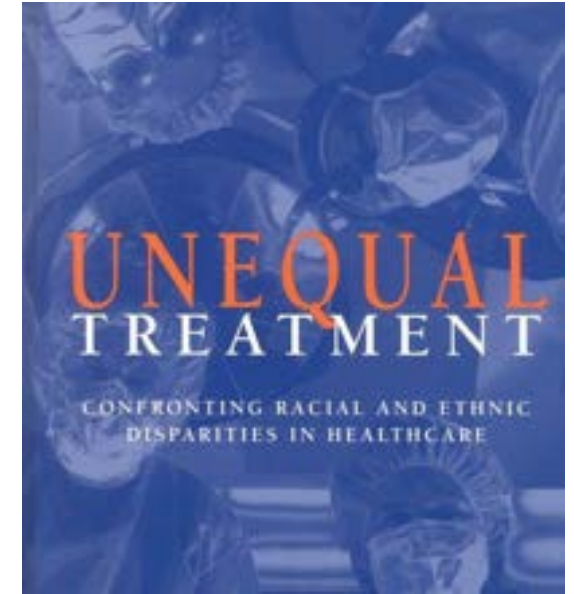
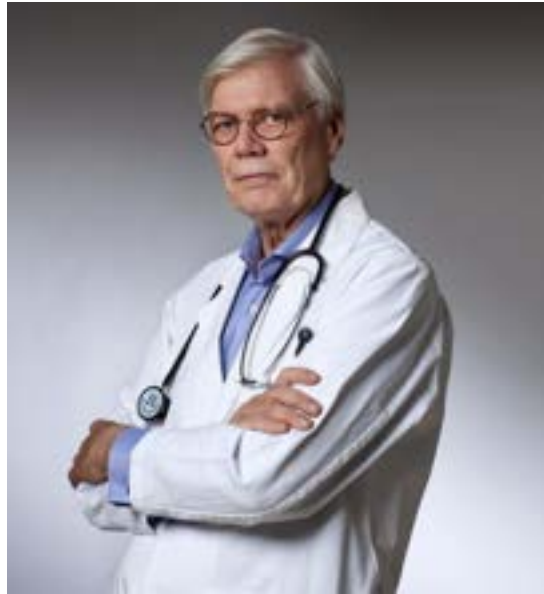
MIDDLE AGED WHITE PREMATURE DEATH

- Increased death rates of whites in their mid-forties to mid-fifties between 1999-2013
 - Suicide, drug overdoses, alcoholic liver disease
 - AK, KY, MS, WV
 - WV at epicenter of opioid overdoses
 - False belief that poverty and unemployment stem from laziness and bad personal choices and that addiction results from weakness and lack of will power



PUTTING THE CARE BACK IN HEALTH CARE: SOLUTIONS





LET'S REVIEW: CAUSES OF RACIAL HEALTH DISPARITIES

- Long-standing discrimination in the institutions and structures of American society that has harmed and continues to harm Black communities
- Racism in a society that wears away the bodies of Black people and those from other groups who are treated poorly
- Bias in health care that creates a system of unequal treatment

CHWS AND HEWS



- Trained healthcare providers who act as a bridge between clinical and community settings, between the patient and provider
- Trusted members of the community
- Work to improve patient communication and adherence, care coordination, outreach, prevention, early diagnoses
- Advocate for patients
- Studies show that CHWs can improve outcomes of chronic illnesses, including diabetes and heart disease
- Shown to reduce health care costs
- Can provide meaningful employment and job creation in communities that need them most

REDESIGN CARE

- Community and patients providing input to healthcare providers and researchers
- Example: Institute for Healthcare Improvement redesigning maternal care with a focus on improving clinical outcomes and increasing dignity, equity and safety
 - Doulas
 - Clinicians
 - Administrators
 - Black women from NOLA



REPRESENTATIVE WORKFORCE

- 2020 study showed Black newborns in US more likely to survive childbirth if cared for by Black doctors, but 3X as likely to die compared to white babies when treated by white doctors. No change in white baby mortality regardless of doctor's race.
- Although the country is increasingly diverse
 - 12% of graduating medical students were Black, Latinx or Native American as of 2018-2019
- Underrepresentation in the workforce limits Black patients from being treated by physicians who look like them. Lack of role models



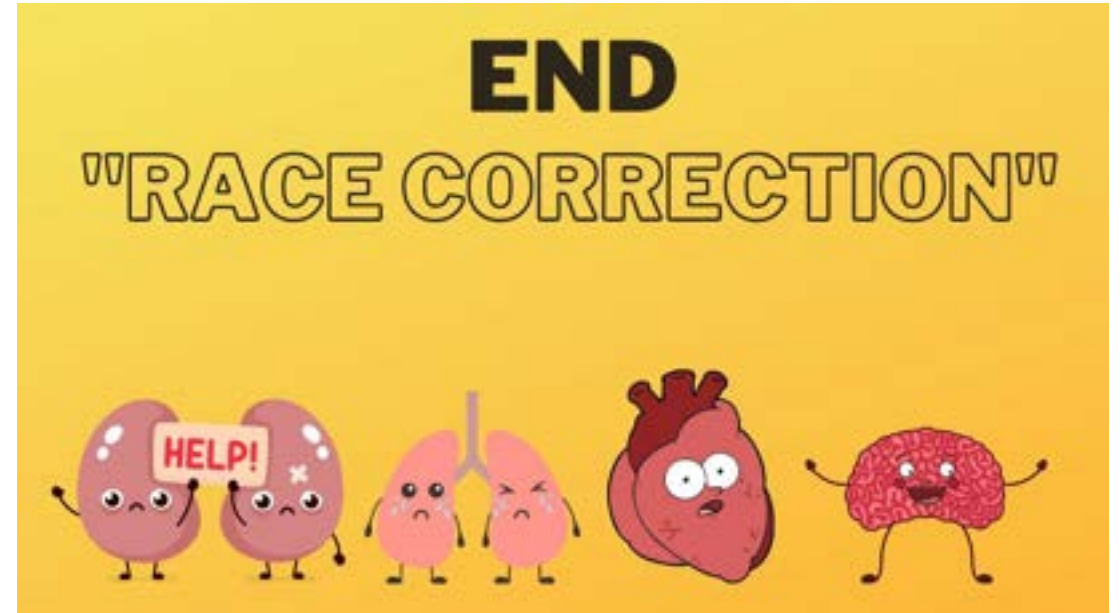
TRAINING



- Some states, like California, require training
 - Implicit bias training required for all healthcare providers treating pregnant women and delivering babies
 - Quality initiative alone decreased overall maternal mortality but Black women did not benefit and disparities persisted

ABANDON RACE CORRECTION IN MEDICINE

- There are tests in medicine that are interpreted based on race, such as kidney function (eGFR) and lung function.
- They have resulted in harm
 - Making function appear normal
 - Reduced access to specialists and advanced care
 - Reinforcing myth of racial biology



AND COVID BROUGHT IT ALL TOGETHER

- Reinforced racial stereotypes – attempts to prove there is a biological reason for poor outcomes
- Back to blaming the victim
- Emphasizing the structural issues in place leading to increased exposure to COVID, decreased early access to care
- Publicly showed disrespect and stereotyping
- In the midst of racist policing and murdering of Black people



THANK YOU

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