



# Funding the Research on the Post-memory of African American Descendants: Breaking Social Gaps and Building a Shared Bright Future

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**Abstract.** This paper advocates for the urgent need for United States government funding to support research on the post-memory of African American descendants. Collective and generational trauma, stemming from the legacy of slavery and systemic racism, continues to shape the social and psychological realities of African American communities today. Post-memory—the intergenerational transmission of trauma through collective memories, family narratives, and physical memorials—serves as a critical lens for understanding these enduring impacts. This essay argues that state-sponsored research into post-memory is essential for three primary reasons: it deepens the understanding of historical trauma, provides an evidence-based framework to guide future public policies in education and mental health, and actively counters the misconception that memory-work is merely a passive indulgence in the past. While community-led initiatives offer valuable grassroots engagement, they frequently suffer from funding constraints and a lack of standardized research methodologies. By analyzing the work of leading scholars in trauma and memory studies, this paper concludes that federally funded research is a necessary investment. Addressing these deeply rooted historical wounds will not only facilitate healing but also promote social justice, ultimately helping to bridge racial divides and build a more equitable, shared future.

**Keywords:** Post-memory, African American Descendants, Social Gaps

## 1 Introduction

Collective and generational trauma never disappeared and it still shapes the lives of African Americans, who composited 14.4% of the USA overall population in 2023 <sup>[1]</sup>, a research done by Pew Center, a trustful organization focusing in the field of social surveys. The impact of slavery and racism is indirectly experienced by young descendants when family stories or collective memories are passed. This phenomenon is known as post-memory, which helps account for passed down traumas overt time. As debates and controversies focuses around memorials, history and racial trauma, it is urgent to conduct in-depth research in the field of post-memory. The essay firmly believe the U.S

government should fund such research to deepen the understanding of African American historical issues, establish policies to promote the just and protection, and challenge against misunderstandings of the urgent issue.

## **2 Deepen the Understanding Historical Trauma through Post memory**

Post-memory means past events, objects or memorials with trauma transmit to the younger generation, often in the way of collective memory, family stories or some photos, primary object of this trauma. This is extremely important in African American communities, since the trauma from slavery passed down through generations. As shown in *Trauma and US Minority Children and Youth* <sup>[2]</sup>, the consequences of historical left-over trauma still influence today's lives of this ethnic group. For instance, the physical separation of Black mothers with their babies caused a huge impact in the modern women, often in causing issues in parenting practices in African American communities. Dr. Andres J. Pumariega, the lead author, has been a well known psychiatrist with over 30 years, whose work focuses on the psychological effects of trauma in minority populations, particularly African American families, he have the credential to explain this issue. By understanding these historical left overs, we obtain insight into how the descendants of enslaved people are still struggling with these traumatized past, and giving us a clear sight to help them in the future.

Besides these historical events, physical objects such as family photographs also serve as important "sites of memory." These memorials carry emotional and historical weight, preserving oral history, emotion, covered stories through generation. In Musleh-Motut's 2012 study, *Negotiating Palestine through the Familial Gaze: A Photographic (Post)memory Project*, she emphasizes that photographs serve as powerful memorials, these items carry the weight of history, transmitting stories, emotions, and experiences across generations. Musleh-Motut is a celebrated scholar in memory and trauma fields, with authority to explain how personal belongs contain collective histories in past of the society. She has the absolute authority to deeply explain this topic. For African American descendants, family photographs and other objects that acts as memorials are urgent in securing them to gain and pass the rich cultural heritage of African Americans ancestors but also enables them to understand and carry on building their culture bonds and roots. The following actions allows them to connect themselves with the experiences of their ancestors, fostering a sense of identity and continuity that is essential for personal and community development. Research in this area is very necessary and crucial since it can drive people deeper into these complex left over issues, uncover and show the logical chain and process that how these historical events have shaped present - day social, psychological appearances of African American communities.

### **3 Form a Guide to a Better Future Policies to Ensure Justice and Protection**

In addition to the deepen of the understanding on the problem, studies on post-memory also fits with the latest international conversation in which monuments and memorials exemplify the broader struggles over the interpretation of history and the construction of identity. Powell's work emphasizes that monuments are not just historical markers but tools for shaping contemporary and future societal values, especially in the circumstance of racial justice. Powell believes that memorials is creating a collective and shared understanding and curing societal bruise<sup>[3]</sup>. In which that the memorials can be guidepost to future policies. Moreover, similar ideas are also posted in "Contesting Monuments: Heritage and Historical Geographies of Inequality" which "The contestation over monuments is part of a broader struggle over the meaning of history and identity."<sup>[4]</sup> Legg has enough expertise in historical geography and cultural heritage studies which also includes deep understandings of the role of monuments in affecting collective memory and national identity.

However, the establishment of such memorials are not just a signal to the past, but also can be formed into hint to the future. They are able to offer insights into the past that will eventually participate in the progress of forming new policies and regulation in various fields to reach a more humanitarian solution. In addition, with supports from Marianne Hirsch's concept of "post memory" in her article "The Generation of Postmemory" shows great relevance to this topic. As Hirsch argues, post-memory is "distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection"<sup>[5]</sup>. More importantly, "these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and effectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right." Marianne Hirsch, a professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, is the founder of the "post-memory" concept, with her identity for also being one of the leading scholars in the field of memory studies, particularly the inter-generational transmission of trauma, she has the most credential in explaining post memory related concepts. This understanding can be converted into more effective policies in such areas as education, mental health and social welfare. More importantly, with the development and spreading of African American studies, students are able to gain and more empathetic understanding of the history of various races of America. At the same time, societies will also be more specific and efficient to address help and support to the descendants of the African Americans.

### **4 Correct and Argue Against the Misunderstanding of Limited Influence**

Besides the two benefits proven above, another major significance it can correct mistakes and misunderstanding of past research on African American post memory field. Commonly there is a misunderstanding that post memory may only have a limited impact and is considered as an indulgence in the past. However, on the contrary, inferring

from “Historicizing historical trauma theory: Troubling the trans - generational transmission paradigm”<sup>[6]</sup>, Maxwell, a believed scholar in trauma theory, is recognized for his work on the inter-generational transmission of trauma, particularly in marginalized communities. His ability ensures him to objectively talks about the issue. The article shows that there are misunderstandings in trauma - related discourses, that actually there it highly urgent to do related research. What’s more, in “Jesmyn Ward’s Post - Katrina Black Feminism: Memory and Myth through Salvaging”, a journal by <sup>[7]</sup>, Henry, a trusted scholar of African American literature and cultural studies, has the credential in topics related to American resilience social justice engagements. Ward’s concept of renewing old memories to create new listeners proves the practical value of doing memory fixing work and effort. It has become a practical way for African American communities to resist and rebuild their identities in the face of adversity, proving that it has practical value and is not a mere indulgence in the past. To further support, the power of post memory is still under discovery. In Hirsch’s journal “The Generation of Post memory”, she stated that “Post memory can be a powerful tool for social change”<sup>[5]</sup>. By pushing future research progress, people can have a deeper understanding of the long-term influences of the left-over problems and the harms of related post-memory consequences. These activities help to break down stereotypes, cultivate an empathetic mindset as well as promote social inclusion. To be more specific, they can high light the experiences of the descendants of African American race, and set community activities to inspire and motivate individuals and collective groups to take actions towards creating a warm and just society for these people.

## 5 Alternatives

Community-led initiatives can offer valuable contributions to post-memory research, particularly in fostering community engagement and preserving African American history. These programs, such as oral history projects, enable younger generations to interview their elders, thus strengthening intergenerational bonds and creating a sense of pride and identity. Clemmons in his A Sense of Place project funded by the New England Foundation for the Arts in 2018, clearly shows that such community-led projects can reduce social isolation and promote cultural pride<sup>[8]</sup>. Clemmons, a sociologist with experience in community work and studies, has the credential in this area. Despite their achievements, community - led initiatives face significant challenges. One of the primary issues is the limited resources and scale of these projects. Shown in Clemmon’s work in 2018, without adequate funding, these initiatives often struggle to expand their reach, hire professional researchers, or access advanced research tools and technologies. Although it aimed to reduce social isolation and promote multicultural communication, the project faced difficulties in ensuring long - term efficiency due to funding constraints, limited scale, and challenges in maintaining research accuracy.

Another major problem is the lack of standardized research methodology in community - led projects. The American Historical Association (AHS) has emphasized the importance of standardized research methods in historical studies<sup>[9]</sup>. However, a large proportion of community - level history programs, as high as 60% according to some

studies,<sup>[10]</sup> which is a reliable source origin, states that related studies lack clear research methodologies. In oral history projects, for instance, interviewers may not be properly trained to use open - ended questions effectively. In short, this may cause the collection to be unable to provide researchers with deep and insightful evidence to form logical and precise solutions to better help the descendants of African Americans. This not only wastes resources but also undermines the potential impact of these programs.

## 6 Limitations and Response

Since, this study is composited by great number of experts such as historians, sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists, professional equipment is also needed. These efforts, which often include high intensity of fieldwork, such as interviews in various locations, leads to high financial and ability demands.

Conversely, such studies are significantly beneficial from long-term perspectives. Studies in the Caribbean have shown that historical trauma from slavery and colonialism is related to high rates of chronic illnesses such as Type 2 diabetes and hypertension. These health issues increase medical costs, leading to the long-term impact of unresolved historical trauma on public health.<sup>[11]</sup> Sherman is the official officer focusing in Caribbean areas, who has the ability to explain the issue accurate. These founding and studies may be able to solve these issues from its origins, which saves up money for a long-term curing cost for related problems. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is positive feedback in the reality, TRC is known as a very credentialed organization with authority, they used public hearings and reconciliation programs to successfully foster social cohesion and national stability, laying the foundation for economic growth. From this example, we can infer that solving post-memory issues—such as the psychological impacts of racial trauma—can lead to long-term societal benefits, reducing future costs while promoting justice and shared future-building. By the hard work of these two organizations as future examples, the root of conflicts and mental illness caused by post memory issues can be better solved with less payment, while ensuring the social just and forming a shared future of mankind.

Another resistance from the public is the contradictory from certain groups. Certain groups may oppose or resist the funding of research on African American post memory, deeming it unnecessary or a divisive force. They may argue that focusing on the past only exacerbates racial tensions and that resources would be better allocated elsewhere. This perspective, however, fails to recognize the importance of addressing historical traumas for the sake of social progress. This view forbids the crucial role that addressing historical traumas plays in addressing contemporary inequalities.

Giving example of the destroyed statue of the Confederacy soldier in USA, people are very sensitive and harmed by those traumatized past and the belongs of the post memory events. By further studying on the post-memory wounds, we can create more efficient policies to eliminate the negativity of racism and work towards a more just society. Refocusing and researching about the oppression that African Americans once faced can help with developing advanced policies and effective policies to better safeguard the descendants of African Americans.

## 7 Conclusion

In conclusion, funding for the descendants of African Americans' study is essential for solving a historical left-over problem of trauma and issues lead by post memory, which can foster social justice and build a solid "bridge" across the gaps of different races. By uncovering the hidden narratives and the disguise caused by the misunderstanding of important facts, the collective heritage of African American regions can be better carried on safely by their descendants. Although from short term perspectives, concerns of financial as well as the mistrust from certain groups may be a resistance, but from long term insight, funding this vital research will be a powerful step towards a brighter future of societal transformation and the establishment of a harmonious future.

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