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Inner Lions: Definitions of Peace in Black Women's Memoirs
A Strength-based Model for Mental Health

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INNER LIONS: DEFINITIONS OF PEACE IN BLACK WOMEN'S MEMOIRS. A STRENGTH-BASED MODEL FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Abstract

Through a close reading of memoirs by six Black women authors, "*Inner Lions*" connects peace studies to issues in public and mental health. Evans defines "womanist peace" as Black women's willful quest for health and freedom. A framework for race and gender-centered definition of peace is created through six key concepts that address complex personal and public challenges facing Black women: body, mind, spirit (health) and social, economic, political (freedom). The author's methodological process begins from an online database of 500 Africana women's global narratives. Black women's voices from around the world engage readers in dialogue about what it means to be peaceful, particularly from the standpoint of those historically and systematically attacked. Each of the six authors highlighted offer narratives that activate our imagination while providing a deeper understanding from which to develop effective health praxis, especially in the area of mental health.

Keywords: **Africana narratives, womanist peace, intellectual history, mental health, praxis**.

Introduction

This article provides critical cultural dialogue for peace studies scholars and identifies practical tools Black women can use to enhance peace in our lives.

> " …when I first began doing family history research in the South, I began having a series of recurrent dreams about lions. I believe these lions are me, myself. Perhaps they are my deepest African self.… I have begun to make peace with my own inner lions. …In Buddhism, the lion's roar is the mark of eloquence and power of the Buddha's speech. …Every now and then, a lion must roar. It is part of her nature. If my life's story is of some benefit to others, that will be *a fine roar*.
>
> ~ Jan Willis, *Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist, and Buddhist*.[19]

Black women define peace in poignant ways, particularly given the disproportionate level of violence visited upon our lives worldwide (United Nations, 2000).[20] From a position as experiential experts on violence, Black women's voices of how to define and establish peace should be given wider consideration in peace studies. Most formal academic training and publications in peace studies foreground macro-level, structural, institutional, or government definitions, mainly from the perspective of those who hold power or privilege. Even outstanding programs like Peace and Justice Studies at Wellesley College that offer compelling courses (such as "Feminist Interrogations of Peace Studies") emphasize contributions of White women (i.e. Virginia Woolf, Betty Reardon, and Cynthia Enloe), to the exclusion of Black women or other women of color.[21] Yet, even Betty Reardon acknowledged in her groundbreaking text, in *Women and Peace: Feminist Visions of Global Security*, that the intersection of race, gender, and colonialism complicate the concepts of "positive peace" and "human rights" (Reardon, 1993, pp. 76-77).

In this article, I explore ways that Black women's intellectual history and Black women's psychological process can contribute to definitions, discussions, and constructions of peace. I foreground insights of Black women who have endured inhumane conditions and yet have embraced the difficult imperative to creatively fight back against centuries of attacks on Black people, families, communities, and nations. Specifically, I argue that Black women's actions have contributed to "building a better world," and Black women's ideas can deepen our commitment to continuing peace struggles (Bethune, 2002). As a prime example, Jan Willis, a religion professor at Wellesley College demonstrates the multilayered and complex ways peace work takes place in Black women's lives. Willis chose the path of non-violence during the 1960s

[19] See also, Jan Willis, Zen Peacemakers Symposium, Wesleyan College. September 27, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LoC5GtiChY . Accessed July 1, 2014.

[20] The United Nations *Gender and Racial Discrimination Report of the Expert Group Meeting* noted, "Discrimination emanating from categorical distinctions on the basis of sex and race have historically intersected in multiple and diverse ways, and have taken specific forms during particular historical conjunctures, such as in the contexts of slavery and colonialism. The dominant structures of power often relied on violence to sustain their patriarchal and racial boundaries."

[21] PEAC 259: Topics in Peace and Justice Studies. Topic for 2012-13: Feminist Interrogations of Peace Studies. http://www.wellesley.edu/peaceandjusticestudies/curriculum, July 2, 2014

Black Power Movement in the United States. However, she did not relinquish her capacity to "roar" and create conditions which bring about "the cessation of suffering" while on her Buddhist journey (Willis, 2008).

The term "literary mentoring" means that readers can gain insight from books in a similar way they gain guidance from mentors. In *Black Passports: Travel Memoirs as a Tool for Youth Empowerment* (2014), travel memoirs provide insight from authors about how to engage life, school, work, and cultural exchange. The same principles of ABCs (attitude, behavior, choices) can be applied to mental health concepts and practice. There is a wealth of information offered by authors like Willis, who are explicit in their desire to pen narratives that help others on their journey. In closing her book, Willis writes: "Every now and then, a lion must roar. It is part of her nature. If my life's story is of some benefit to others, that would be a fine roar" (Willis, 2008, p. 345).

Grounded theory readings of Black women's autobiographies, including the Willis narrative, chronicle experiences of personal peace and quests for social justice. Authors' most frequently referenced ideas include: peace of mind, peace and love, justice of the peace, disturbing the peace, peace offering, peace and justice, nonviolent peace, rest in peace, peace and quiet (calm, tranquility, serenity), a moment's peace, keeping the peace, peace be with you, peace treaty, offering, domestic peace, social peace, peace sign/symbol, peace-making, peace keeper, peace officer, peace demonstration, peace activist, peace movement, war and peace, Prince of Peace, Peace and Freedom Party, Peace Corps, Nobel Peace Prize, and Versailles Peace Conference. By amplifying these voices, we add dimension to our work for humanization and harmony.

This article explores intellectual history rooted in Africana women's lived experiences. I uncover definitions of peace from six very different life narratives: Vivian Stringer (American basketball coach), Sylvia Harris, (American horse jockey), Jan Willis (American Buddhist religion professor), Maria Bueno (Cuban community mother), Fiona Doyle (Australian Aboriginal land rights activist), and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (Liberian president). The womanist peace framework emerges from ideas by scholar-activist Angela Davis and engages research by several Africana women including: Verna Keith (sociology), Layli Maparyan (women's studies), Corliss Heath (public health), Soraya Mire (FC/FGM activism), and Kanika Bell (psychology).

Peace and Social Location (Theory and Method)

Black women's intellectual history is inextricably linked to peace studies. As outlined in *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History* (2007), Black women's scholarship exemplifies empowerment education and advances four central characteristics: applied research, cultural standpoint, critical epistemology, and moral existentialism. In the 1800s women like Maria Stewart, Frances E. W. Harper, Nannie Helen Burroughs, and Anna Julia Cooper wrote that the disadvantaged position of Black women based on race and sex was one that allowed for and required Black women activists to lead the country into the true possibilities inherent in both liberal and radical ideals of democracy. The quest for peace through meaningful work is Black women's living legacy (Evans, 2003).

Intellectual History and Memoir

African American women like Mary Church Terrell and Mary McLeod Bethune actively engaged in World War I and World War II peace movements. Organizations like the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) clearly demonstrate Black women's involvement at the epicenter of historic peace movement work. In the edited volume, *What Kind of World Do We Want?: American Women Plan for Peace* (Litoff & Smith, 2000), Bethune's leadership of NCNW is a well-documented attempt to shape 1940s policy within Congress, the United Nations foundation, and Committee on the Participation of Women in Post War Planning (CPWPWP). Bethune's letters to colleagues and influential politicians offer rich insight into the attempt to shape the public policy area of peace.

In her June 1945 *Aframerican Woman's Journal* article, "Our Stake in Tomorrow's World," Bethune outlined how Black women have much to contribute to the "transition" from war to peace (Litoff, p. 221). Having attended the San Francisco International Security Conference which established the United Nations, Bethune had an introspective view of the global peace infrastructure building process. She wrote to NCNW members that, "The extended horizon that has so rapidly appeared for women during the war has opened new areas which of necessity have brought rich experiences. Women have found themselves in new fields of work and service which have given them an unparalleled opportunity to develop new skills and habits of thought and behavior—a new kind of mental attitude and stamina, essential in tomorrow's world. May we accept the challenge to work together toward a new world of peace and security! It will take great skill in human relations—it will take common sense and an alert consciousness of national and world problems" (Litoff, p. 220-21).

Mary Church Terrell, another CPWPWP activist who served as the NCNW treasurer, rightly argued in her 1944 speech "Human Relations and Transition to Peace" that, "there can [not] be any peace during the transition period or any other time, until colored people are granted all the rights, privileges and immunities to which they are entitled as citizens." Terrell's post-WWII sentiments echo her 1915 speech to the International Speech Congress, in the Hague, Netherlands which she delivered in German. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was founded in 1915 and, as the first president, Jane Addams was instrumental in including Terrell in international peace conference talks (Terrell, 1940, p. 329).

Despite (or perhaps because of) the various deadly challenges Africana women from around the world face, definitions of peace are useful to inform public health, mental health practice, corporate and environmental policy, and problem-solving initiatives to eradicate gender and race-based oppression (Davis, 1990; Avery 1990). Accessing Black women's voices provides empirical data to more clearly define concepts of social and individual peace for culturally-appropriate solutions.

In the broader picture, peace is a very common theme in Black women's narratives; of course, some pen the concept much more frequently than others. For example, in a "peace" word search of narrative texts, Layli Maparyan's writing topped the list with 72 references, while President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf followed with 67 references. Maparyan's text is largely an explication of five other women's memoirs, but her own story is very much concerned with the concept of

peace, particularly at the spiritual level. Of course, President Johnson-Sirleaf's narrative chronicles the civil war in Liberia that lasted over a decade, so peace was paramount in her story, mainly concerned with national affairs.

Hundreds of Africana authors steeped their prose in peace by using the word several times in their text. Their interest in finding peace is no wonder considering the challenges that they faced. Black women's memoirs address a multitude of challenges in health, violence, and access:

- Enslavement, hunger, genocide, war (Cooper, Bashir, Nthunya, Twongyeirwe)
- Surviving foster care (Rowell) or child's murder (Diallo)
- Exile (Assata, Cruz) or Imprisonment (Cross)
- Bulimia (Armstrong) or HIV (Brown)
- Gaining activist/political power (Assegid, Brown, Brazille, Cotton, Seacole)
- Violence in marriage or family (Collier, Shakur, Swafford)
- Spiritual guidance or leadership (Bowman, Easton, Gray, Smith)
- Race, color, and identity (Haizlip, Jones, Langhart)
- Making a living as an artist (Ringgold)
- Fighting African oppression of lesbians (Nkabinde)
- Depression (Danquah, Harris, Herrin)

A careful reading of historical and contemporary data show how thousands of Black women activists, writers, and educators articulated practical ideas and useful plans for peace. Through primary documentation such as Bethune's comment that Black women must serve in "zones of activity which call for equally vital, strong, if not spectacular leadership," it is clear that Black women have been inextricably linked to national and international peace activism (Litoff, p. 220). Like the intersection of race and gender in peace studies, the specific topic of inner peace has been relatively understudied.

Inner Peace and Health

> "The pursuit of health in body, mind, and spirit weaves in and out of every major struggle women have ever waged in our quest for social, economic, and political emancipation."
>
> ~ Angela Davis, "Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: The Politics of Black Women's Health."

As duly noted in a recent *Peace Studies Journal* special issue on disability studies, identity plays a very large part in "the health and well-being of society" (August 2013). Citing Black theorist Kimberlè Crenshaw's intersectional analysis, scholars argue that, "Within and across groups defined by gender, ethnic, or sexual orientation, from a DS [disability studies] perspective, disability suggests possibilities for social justice" (Blaser, Kanavou, and Schleier, 2013, pp. 14-15).

Black women struggle in hostile social environments that degrade their history and downgrade their worth, so self-love is a healthy, revolutionary, and very necessary practice (Brown & Keith,

2003). Black women's insights of race and gender can expand discussions of the social impact on inner peace from an intersectional and international perspective.

Though a paucity of literature exists, the topic of inner peace has been selectively addressed for well over a decade. Research on inner peace appears in several scholarly publications in various disciplines: *International Journal of Information and Education Technology* (2015); *Journal of Social Sciences* (2012); *Journal of Business Ethics* (2012); *National Catholic Reporter* (2011); *ed Cetera: A Quarterly Journal of Artistic Essays and Art Criticism (*2011); *International Journal of Humanities and Peace* (2005); *Journal of Peace Education* (2005); *Justitia: Justice Studies Association Newsletter* (2004); *American Journal of Health Behavior* (2003); *Global Review of Ethnopolitics* (2002); and *Library Journal* (2002). Scholars have also penned dissertations on the topic of inner peace in areas of social work (1999) and American literature (1973).

One of the most salient articles addressing inner peace was published in *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* (2000) by Mary Soledad L. Perpiñan of the Third World Movement against the Exploitation of Women, International Peace Research Association, and Asia-Pacific Peace Research Association. Perpiñan provided a valuable theoretical frame that connects inner peace, psychology, and women's experiences. In "The Reign of Peace," she offers concepts of "peace, harmony, and conflict from a feminist viewpoint" and cites Elise Boulding on "how inner peace is achieved in the healing process of survivors of exploitation" (p. 237). However, relatively little connects intersectional causes of exploitation with quests for peace by Black women survivors of violence.

In 1987, Angela Davis delivered a speech at Bennett College entitled, "Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: The Politics of Black Women's Health." The speech, taking its title from Mississippi Civil Rights Movement activist Fannie Lou Hamer, detailed health disparities like heart disease, arthritis and hypertension, diabetes, cancer, and AIDS and how these issues are exacerbated by poverty and political disenfranchisement. In the speech, published in *The Black Women's Health Book: Speaking for Ourselves* (White, 1990), Davis offers a clear and straightforward look at six fundamental elements of Black women's experience: body, mind, spirit (health), and social, economic, and political (emancipation). Davis's list of six health imperatives is intimately connected to Black women's quest for personal and public peace.

Based on word use of the word "peace" in their autobiographical writing, six authors were selected as examples of these main themes. The authors are, literally, all over the map, ranging from an American college basketball coach, horse jockey, and religion professor to a Cuban community mother, Australian Aboriginal land-rights activist, and Liberian president. Black women's life stories are filled with invaluable gems of self-love despite insurmountable personal, political, and social challenges. The terms, "clarity, hope, choice, joy, salvation, and justice" open doors for broadened understanding based on Black women's positive and adaptive ideas.

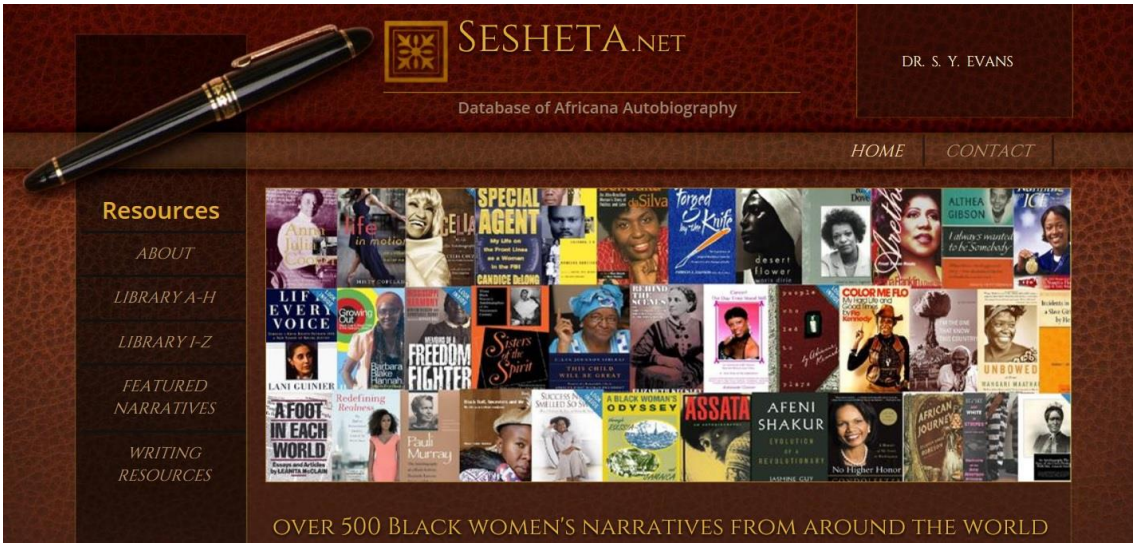
Africana women are not a monolith, so a systematic approach to survey over 500 women's autobiographies garnered significantly diverse results, including over 159 narratives that reference the term "peace" in life stories.

Diversity and Complexity: 500 Black Women's Lives

> "A simple dichotomy of strength versus vulnerability is counterproductive for capturing the diversity and complexities of Black women's lives as they affect emotional well-being."
>
> ~ Verna Keith, "In and Out of Our Right Minds: Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and the Mental Well-being of African American Women."

The source for identifying Black women's narratives was made simple through the Sesheta online database, which catalogs over 500 Africana women's published autobiographies. Of those listed, well over 200 narratives were searched for the word peace: 159 texts reference "peace"; 23 texts had over a dozen references; 19 used the term "inner peace"; and 14 used "world peace."

Figure 1 - Sesheta.net database



The collage of 159 voices shows that regardless of time or place, Black women's relationships to health, well-being, and non-violence all represent a disadvantaged social position even though experiences vary greatly in different countries on the African continent, Caribbean, Europe, and the Americas. In the African diaspora, Black women have penned life stories that offer insight into the shifting kaleidoscope of violence and harrowing social experiences with domestic and sexual violence, foster care or forced child home systems, public humiliation, inadequate health care, employment discrimination, and disenfranchisement that have negatively impacted their physical and mental health.

Yet, Africana women also write about the beautiful and powerful array of ways we have not only

survived attack, but how we have effectively created lives of meaning and beauty for ourselves and for others. While these narratives clearly identify "vulnerabilities" due to Black women's social location, the womanist theoretical analysis focuses on complex "strengths" that can be gained from reading life stories and the complexity this reading offers to peace studies (Brown & Keith, 2003).

After identifying major themes central to Black women's experience, recognizing six authors' contributions brings the themes into focus. Each use of the word "peace" in narratives encapsulates a relevant concept and, together, these definitions create a foundation for a better understanding of inner peace and mental health:

Table 1 - Six main themes of womanist peace, representative authors, and narrative definitions

Theme	**Author**	**Definition**
Body	Vivian Stringer	Clarity
Mind	Sylvia Harris	Hope
Spirit	Jan Willis	Choice
Social	Maria Bueno	Joy
Economic	Fiona Doyle	Salvation
Political	Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf	Justice

I chose authors with the most pervasive use of the word peace, who exemplified the heart of the category, or who were community elders to represent the group. This methodology of using only searchable texts unfortunately eliminated valuable memoirs such as Tina Turner's narrative that chronicled how Buddhism and chanting impacted her path from domestic violence to a life of creative, professional, and personal freedom. Hers is a classic tale of transcendence but the methodology did capture more obscure voices of women who may not have otherwise been identified. These narratives form just the beginning of a necessary dialogue about locating and engaging resources authored by Black women.

Narrative Definitions of Peace (Findings)

Many narratives by those like Jan Willis and critical observations by scholars like Angela Davis define health in terms of "body, mind, and spirit," while others referenced "world peace," "poverty," or multiple social issues, so these six main categories shape the investigation. The key word categories are below:

Table 2 - Narratives of body, mind, and spirit themes

Body - Physical Peace	**Peace of Mind**	**Spirit - Inner Peace**
1. Ali (4)	1. Allen (8)	1. Assegid (21)
2. Copeland (2)	2. Anderson (3)	2. Brown (3)
3. Garrison (6)	3. Armstrong (10)	3. Cross (5)
4. Harris (2)	4. Cameron (10)	4. Danquah (7)

5. Holdsclaw (6) 6. Jones (9) 7. Leslie (1) 8. Stringer (8) 9. Williams, S (1) 10. Williams, SV (3)	5. Carroll, R (2) 6. Collier (10) 7. Dirie (7) 8. Easton (13) 9. Gray (6) 10. Green (4) 11. Harris (2) 12. Haugh-Smith (2) 13. Hill (5) 14. Jackson (4) 15. Ruffin (7) 16. Mire (15) 17. Souljah (6) 18. West (4) 19. White (2) 20. Winfrey (3)	5. Derricotte (1) 6. DuBray (5) 7. Hurston (1) 8. Ione (3) 9. Love (6) 10. Maparyan (72) 11. Nkabinde (2) 12. Oufkir (10) 13. Shabazz (13) 14. Taylor (3) 15. Willis (23) 16. Young (7) 17. Evans (13)

Though there is not a vast representation of Black women's issues or voices in United States peace studies scholarship, Black women have written insightful definitions of peace personally, socially, institutionally, and institutionally. Research approaches that reveal patterns in the African diaspora are especially useful.

Table 3. Narratives of social, economic, or political themes

Social - Several Peace References	**Political - World Peace**	**Economic - One Peace Reference**	**One Peace Reference (cont.)**
1. Armstrong 2. Halima Bashir 3. Bowman 4. Braxton 5. Brazile 6. Brown 7. Bueno 8. Cameron 9. Cooper 10. Collier 11. Cotton 12. Cruz 13. Easton 14. Gray 15. Haizlip 16. Herrin 17. Jones 18. Cohen 19. Nthunya	1. Ali (12) 2. Amaro (6) 3. Angelou (19) 4. Black (2) 5. Davis-Dee (23) 6. Edwards (5) 7. Goodwin (8) 8. Gordly (6) 9. Johnson-Sirleaf (67) 10. Kassindja (7) 11. Maathai (24) 12. Roundtree (26) 13. Sanchez (8) 14. Santana (27) 15. Smith (4) 16. Walker (17) 17. Wilson (8)	1. **Adair** 2. **Anderson** 3. **Bandele** 4. **Bennett** 5. **Booker** 6. **Brown-C** 7. **Brown-O** 8. **Butler** 9. **Carmichael** 10. **Carroll** 11. **Cary** 12. **Chambers** 13. **Cheatham** 14. **Chihoro** 15. **Clark** 16. **Cole** 17. **Cook** 18. **Cromwell** 19. **Dandridge**	1. **McKenzie** 2. **Mendez** 3. **Mock** 4. **Morgan** 5. **Muir** 6. **Norfus** 7. **Norris** 8. **Parker** 9. **Pemberton** 10. **[Pittman]** 11. **Poe** 12. **Prince** 13. **Reece** 14. **Reider** 15. **Reynolds** 16. **Rice** 17. **Rice-C** 18. **Rowell** 19. **Shakur-A**

20. Ringgold *21.* Seacole 22. Shakur 23. Smith 24. Swafford 25. Twongyeirwe		20. **Delany** 21. **Diallo** 22. **Dickerson** 23. **Doyle** 24. **Dunham** 25. **Elliott** 26. **Grier** 27. **Harris-S** 28. **Hawkins** 29. **Herald** 30. **Hunter** 31. **Johnson** 32. **Joyner** 33. **Julien** 34. **Latifah** 35. **Levi**	20. **Simone** 21. **Slamans** 22. **Snyder** 23. **Tarpley** 24. **Tharps** 25. **Tharps-L** 26. **Thompson** 27. **Toler** 28. **Tuff** 29. **Watson** 30. **Waters** 31. **Wilkins** 32. **Williams** 33. **Williams-M** 34. **Williams-P** 35. **Williams-W**

As historic scholar Dr. Anna Julia Cooper stated, Black women around the globe offer a "calorimeter" to measure social justice from critical intersections of race and gender.

Spirit: Jan Willis

The origin of this study was an epiphany after reading the narrative of Dr. Jan Willis, now Professor of Religion at Wesleyan University. Willis was a student at Cornell University during the Black Power Movement struggle and after assisting with arming students for campus battle and takeover of the administration building, she retreated to Tibet and India to study Buddhism. Instead of joining the Oakland Black Panther Party, she decided that she would move her life towards further study of peace. Not as widely known as Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, or Elaine Brown, Willis chose to contribute to the struggle for Black equality in a different way…spiritually. In *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties (2000)*, Margo Perkins highlights Davis, Shakur, and Brown, but Willis is not discussed because her narrative was published after Perkins' work. The "activism" by Willis is markedly different from the Black Panther involvement by several other women of the 1960s. In her autobiography *Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist, and Buddhist* (2008), Willis shows that revolutions are both external and internal; her life also demonstrates that making peace while advancing just causes is an essential but protracted process.

Jan Willis chose peace when given a distinct opportunity to pursue a path of guns and armed struggle. It was a difficult, but important choice:

> I was, and am, a Pieces, always deliberating between choices. … Amid the revolutionary timbre of the times, I was tossed and pushed along, it seemed inevitably, toward violence. But then, just before taking the fateful step, I bolted. My whole being—mind, body, and soul—bolted. And even though doing so made me feel like a coward and chickenshit deserter, I had to turn away from it.

(p. 146)

Because she refused to "pick up the gun" as so many others did in that era, she admitted feeling like she had betrayed the cause of social justice. Writing about the Black Panthers in Oakland she recalled that her choice to cancel the meeting came just months before Fred Hampton's assassination in Chicago:

> True, I had learned to shoot a piece. I had even helped deliver guns to the Straight [at Cornell University] when I had to. But I had also marched, nonviolently with King. And I had wanted to talk with those Klan folk who'd burned a cross in front of our house [in Docena, Alabama]. "To thine own self be true," the saying goes, and my sister, San, had always said, "Trust your first mind." I decided not to meet with the panthers. (p. 146)

The choice to return to Nepal instead of going to Oakland seems to haunt Willis all these years later, even though her conviction indicates that she did the right thing. Given the generations of violence and terror visited on Black communities, peace and non-violence have always been contentious choices.

Body: Vivian Stringer

In the book Spectacular Leap: Black Women Athletes in Twentieth-Century America, Jennifer Lansbury traces the history of Black women athletes. Lansbury brings to light champions who shape their bodies publically, despite racist and sexist stereotypes such as "mammy" or "jezebel." Beginning in the 1920s, college athletics was often the surest path from poverty to educational access. Then, as now, many Black women chose to endure the often public ridicule of their bodies, because the goal of college graduation would have been much harder to achieve without a sports scholarship. As shown in Vivian Stringer's narrative, the price is often high.

In many nations, by law or custom, males have defined females as property and male domination was always a central part of African enslavement. In 2007, radio disc jockey Don Imas created a spectacle and animated an image of Black women based on longstanding stereotypes. The trope of jezebel, through the tool of popular media, added power to familiarly vicious images used to dominate, shame, enslave, and dehumanize generations of Black women.

Vivian Stringer grew up in a small Pennsylvania town and demonstrated her athleticism through softball, field hockey, and basketball in college at Slippery Rock University. Her autobiography, *Standing Tall: A Memoir of Tragedy and Triumph* (2008), presents her rise to the position of head coach of the Rutgers University women's team and assistant coach of the 2004 U. S. Olympic women's basketball team. Stringer cites values instilled by her father, a coal miner, as the basis for her work ethic, strength, and ability to lead thirty years of young women through grueling physical contests in high-stakes public arenas. She also learned fortitude through the family challenges of her daughter's diagnosis of spinal meningitis and her father's eventual loss of both legs due to work-related illness. The Imas comment came after the 2007 national championship game, and Stringer had to manage not only the pressure of post-championship stress for her team, but also had to choose how to facilitate a response to public humiliation on a national level. Imas' choice of the term "nappy headed hoes" called upon stereotypical negative

imagery of women's “bad” hair and a fictionalized hypersexuality: both often used to excuse abuse of Black women.

The Imas incident and Stringer’s response highlight the vulnerabilities of Black women in public spaces, especially when they willingly place their physical selves in arenas. Thus, her definition of peace as "clarity" offers a uniquely powerful counter image, claiming peace in the midst of a national media storm of hate and hurt. Stringer's victory over adversity is only one example of many by U. S. Black women athletes who have found peace either through their athletic ability or in competition. Additional sports narratives include Layla Ali (boxing), Misty Copeland (ballet), Zina Garrison (tennis), Sylvia Harris (horse racing), Serena Williams and Venus Williams (tennis), Chamique Holdsclaw (basketball), Marion Jones (track), and Lisa Leslie (basketball).

Laila Ali's use of peace is especially interesting because the nature of her sport, boxing, is predicated on raw violence. Ali, the daughter of boxing legend Muhammad Ali, boasted an undefeated professional record of 24-0, but some of her toughest fights were outside of the ring. Her life story revealed her survival of molestation as a youth and the mental impact boxing had on her determination to persevere and protect herself. Ali's book *Reach: Finding Strength, Spirit, and Personal Power* (2002) clearly is written to inspire a younger audience and includes large type and motivational quotes. After completing the book, Ali gained acclaim in the public eye for moving from boxing to ballroom dancing. As a highly competitive participant on the popular television show, Dancing With the Stars, Ali's positive personality came to the fore, and she traded in gloves for glittering gowns. Ali writes about finding peace through her mother’s example of spirituality, even as she embraced her father’s boxing career.

Many athletes reveal the difficulty of their personal struggles while in the public eye. Chamique Holdsclaw’s story is especially poignant because the championship WNBA basketball player wrote her book for the same reason as Jan Willis: to help, especially those who are also struggling with depression. In large part due to a mother who suffered from alcoholism, Holdsclaw grew increasingly depressed and after having attempted suicide, she wrote:

> To prevent anyone from having the horrible experience that I did, I started traveling around the U.S.A speaking with different groups about my mental health issues. I’ve since come a long way from being a shy person who didn’t understand the power of her voice to a woman who feels comfortable connecting with thousands and advocating for mental health. Depression is a disease like any other, and awareness needs to be raised so that we can more easily talk about this very personal issue. I’m trying to do my part to help eliminate the stigma and take away the shame that is associated with this disease by talking openly about it, and by writing this book. (Holdsclaw, 2012)

Given the immense public pressure Black women athletes are under in their work, comments like those by Don Imas further erode their health. Unfortunately, public humiliation of Black women’s bodies is a long-held American cultural standard.

Some American authors who were not athletes also faced very public challenges, like Marian Anderson, the opera singer denied the right to sing at Constitution Hall (and consequently

performed under magnanimous pressure in front of 75,000 people at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C). Also, Anita Hill's *Speak Truth to Power*, detailed her struggle to maintain dignity under national pressure during the 1991 Clarence Thomas Supreme Court confirmation hearings. Singer David Ruffin's ex-wife also revealed the struggle from being a private partner in a public relationship. Further, authors wrote about struggles which include alcoholism (Allen), bulimia (Armstrong), foster care (Cameron), incest (Collier), poverty (Green and West), and abusive relationships (Winfrey). As each story shows, violation of Black women's bodies, truly impact peace of mind and peace of mind is difficult enough to maintain without public scrutiny.

Mind: Sylvia Harris

At least two Black women's narratives chronicle activism against Female Circumcision/Female Genital Mutilation (FC/FGM). Wiris Dirie's *Dessert Flower* was made into a movie in 2009 and the model-turned-activist set an early stage for greater awareness. Two years later, Soraya Miré published *The Girl with Three Legs: A Memoir* (2011). She detailed the social pressures and cultural mores that led to her painful circumcision at ten years old and subsequent forced marriage to an abusive cousin. A filmmaker whose activism cost her close family relations, Miré insisted that she found a way to live and work despite the fact that her activism caused her mother and other family to disown her. Her activism also resulted in several death threats from Somalian and Islamic fanatics bent on silencing her. Miré wrote that after facing physical and emotional pain, she turned to her activism as foundation for her peace of mind (Miré, 2011, p. 277).

Africana authors write of their desire to calm their mind through various means like meditation (Easton) or by carving a fruitful career in academe (White). Two authors' narratives showed their struggle to reconcile adoption by a White family and the mental disruption that caused in their identity development (Black and Carroll). Psychology and peace of mind in these narratives are case studies in survival and quest to calm the sea of doubt, insecurity, and mental torture coupled with physical terror or displacement. Writing is a well-known means of catharsis and healing; most authors indicated that even if the process and aftermath of writing presented mental difficulty, penning their experiences contributed to their overall sense of well-being.

In some cases, the body itself seemingly is an enemy. For example, the narrative that most readily illustrates the need for increased focus on Black women's mental health is Sylvia Harris' *A Long Shot: My Bi-polar Life and the Horses Who Saved Me* (2011). Born of two military parents and raised in Santa Rosa, California, Harris began riding horses before she was a teenager. After her father left because of her mother's illness, Harris suffered an emotional breakdown. At the age of nineteen, she experienced several days without sleep and followed by visions of an end-of-the-world holocaust. After a public manic episode in a store where she pulled down several shelves of seaweed soap, she became a repeat visitor to the Oakcrest mental health facility. Mental institutions became a constant part of her life, even after having had three children (who all were removed from her care). Eventually, after a period of homelessness, a mission center director who learned of her love for horses bought her a bus ticket to Ocala, Florida; once there, she again began to work again with horses, which greatly improved her

health (2011).[22]

She began to ride, then professionally race horses in order to keep her life "level." At the age of 40, she became only the second African American woman to win a major thoroughbred horse race. Describing "peace of mind" as a sunrise in a small town, Harris wrote that peace is the hope that each new day offers her to make sense and more effectively deal with her physiological illness. Her son's attention deficit disorder (ADHD) diagnosis and doctor's requirement for him to take Ritalin, deepens the need for greater attention to mental health, and the problematic role played by large pharmaceutical corporations. Clearly, corporate accumulation of wealth has irretraceable impact on several areas of Black women's lives, including access to treatment.

Economic: Fiona Doyle

It is difficult to accept poverty, especially after a lifetime of labor. By writing *Whispers of This Wik Woman* (2004), Fiona Doyle, granddaughter of Awumpun (Jean George), sought to legitimize her grandmother's story to stake her claim in financial awards to Aboriginal people in the northern Australian communities of Napranum (Weipa South) and Aurukun, Cape York. After fighting for rights on several levels, Jean George was chosen to sign an agreement between native communities and state parties. But Doyle reveals this signing did not mean the end of Jean George's struggle for basic living funds:

> One part of her life is ending ... What more can be said? It's over two years since the 'historical signing' took place, in March 2001, between the four communities, Comalco/ Rio Tinto and the government. On reflection, I wonder how my grandmother has benefited from the signing of the agreement. How exactly will her descendants benefit? Who can speak for all our different groups properly and fairly? Our different clans must be well represented. Who can speak for my family and, just as importantly, who will listen? There are millions of dollars at stake and the alternative is the starkest poverty. Who is going to determine how the terms of the funds distribution are set up and if it is done fairly? Nana often questions me. 'Baby, what time them mob gonna pay up?' 'Nana, they put im in big fund,' I tell her. 'What! How come? They should come straight to us. Them other black fellas gotta only take care of their own mob. We, we take care of our own business.' Nana still awaits her old-age pension from fortnight to fortnight. She often forgets if it's pension day or whether she would have money in her bank account or not. (Doyle, 2004)

Evan after the agreement and trickling down of funds, her mother and grandmother do not have enough to eat.

> 'Nana, what you doing here?' I asked. 'I just need hot chips and little bit money to catch taxi home, baby.' Before seeing me she had been asking relatives for a few dollars. She had expected money to be in her bank account. My stomach knotted up as I gave her the money that she and my mum needed to buy a feed and get home. Two people, two

[22] See also, "Bi-Polar Jockey Finds Salvation In Racing." National Public Radio interview, "Tell Me More" with Michelle Martin. March 7, 2011. Accessed July 7, 2014. http://www.npr.org/2011/03/07/134332439/Bi-Polar-Jockey-Finds-Salvation-In-Racing

> women, with the richest connection to rich, rich country and look at them. Is there something that is not quite right? (Doyle, 2004)

Indigenous communities are perpetually in struggle with colonizing agents. Though much attention is paid to the role of men in political agreements and employment trends for Aboriginals, the long and treacherous history of treaties continues to impact generations of women and their children as well.

Doyle's own story is interwoven with the story of her grandmother, and she defines George's peace in terms of connection to "her Savior, great-grandchildren, and spending time with loved ones (Doyle, 2004). This concept of peace is also complicated because she uncovers that peace agreements between state and community representatives are often made difficult by rifts between generations and ethnic antagonisms. Doyle carries on cultural history through tribal dance, but her narrative clearly implicates inter-tribal and inter-family jealousies as a cause that negatively impacts the ability of families or communities to gain a secure financial basis for children. Doyle unflinchingly shows that intra-racial wars for primacy too often exacerbate interracial wars for adequate material resources. Like blackness in many countries, Aboriginal identity demonstrates complexity and diversity of the issue. Social mores are clearly tied to economic standing, and cultural mores are not stagnant or one-dimensional.

Social: Maria Bueno

Maria de los Reyes Castillo Bueno, called "Reyita," is an elder of the Sesheta collection of women authors, and her life spans almost all of the twentieth century. Her story, recorded by her daughter, recounts her 94 years of life in Cuba as a Black woman who was painfully aware of race: Reyita was dark skinned with close-knit African roots. She recalled her grandmother Antonina (nicknamed Tatica), was taken from Cabinda, Angola, near the Congo. Tatica was abucted with her two sisters, who also were captives in Cuba. Tatica died in 1917 and Reyita's story exemplifies that African enslavement is still recent history.

Given the multi-generational exploitation of Afro-Cubans and skin color discrimination within the Cuban community, Reyita made a conscious decision to marry a "White" Cuban, even though his family rejected her for her blackness. She bore 12 children and in the year 2000, had 118 family members including grandchildren and great-grandchildren documented in her narrative. She traced her childhood and told her story in terms of the many dreams dashed because of her race and gender…and because of her dark skin

Bueno's "Afro-Cuban history from below," ties race and gender experiences from Africa through the Caribbean to Europe and North America in ways that transcend Africana women's homogeny but unmask unmistakable parallels of oppression and determination. In the final section of her book, "Speaking from the Heart," Bueno writes:

> I've enjoyed living. There have been sad times and happy times. It doesn't grieve me to have lived! If I had to start all over again? I'd do it with pleasure, but with my own voice, in my own place, putting into practice all the experiences acquired through my struggle and my efforts. That would

> be worth it. I'm not worried about whether I've acted well or not. I'll always live at peace with myself, because I believe I always did what I had to do. I have walked along with life, I haven't been left behind. And so, at ninety-four years of age, I feel good as new. Life is reborn with every dawn and so am I. (Bueno, 2000, p. 170)

Like Sylvia Harris, Bueno found hope in each new day and she made peace with her life, as is. Bueno's attitude at the end of her long life's journey, prompts provocative questions about our own mortality and allows us to reflect about when we might comfortably settle into our own daily happiness. If we celebrate ninety-four years, will we be able to express similar contentment? At what point in our own lives might we begin to appreciate each moment as an opportunity to restart our attitude, behavior, and choices? Is joy in each day of life only the capability of elders or like Harris, can we claim that joy now?

The challenge to find and keep joy in the midst of struggle for basic human rights remains a fundamental issue for Black women in the diaspora. However, we are not without joy and we are not without power. Black women's quest for political power has steadily improved, most notably with the 2005 election of the first woman president on the continent of Africa.

Political: Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf

Africana women's inner peace is often tied to securing peace for families, communities, and nations, thus authors' definitions inner peace solidifies the popular adage, "no justice, no peace." The Honorable Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first woman president of any country on the continent of Africa, penned a narrative that signally expands dialogue of peace in terms of securing justice. In the autobiography, *This Child Will Be Great: Memoir of a Remarkable Life as Africa's First Woman President* (2009), the author had to fight for peace at every level of social location. She sought power in personal and familial realms as well as national and international arenas. Having married her high school love who later turned abusive, she had to survive domestic violence. After choosing divorce, she worked to provide a foundation for her four sons, even while working and studying abroad in order to secure a better future for herself and her family. On her rise through economic branches of government, she endured unending sexism, and she experienced political persecution during national turmoil which resulted in a fourteen year civil war.

Johnson-Sirleaf's political victory was tumultuous at best because of the colonial history of Liberia--colonized by "returning" African Americans in the mid-1800s. Black colonizers from the United States created social inequities by dominating the resources and holding power over the larger population of indigenous Africans of the area. President Johnson-Sirleaf steeps her memoir in words of peace most prominently by citing the Liberian Declaration of Independence where she commits herself to leadership "...in order to secure these blessings for ourselves and our posterity, and to establish justice, insure domestic peace, and promote the general welfare..." (p.5). She argues that women's leadership is just as essential to national growth as all other types of unity and equity, especially ethnic and economic. As a survivor of her husband's abuse, Johnson-Sirleaf's declaration of "domestic peace" is imbued with multi-layered meaning. Like other Africana women authors, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai, poet

Sonia Sanchez, and philanthropist Deborah Santanta, who participated in Russian peace movement during her quest for spiritual peace, Johnson-Sirleaf embodies inner peace on several levels that can operate as a much-needed springboard for further study.

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Investigating Black women's conceptual understanding of peace—especially our own struggles for peace in daily living—offers a vantage point from which to meditate on how peace can be found within lives too often shattered by violence. Moreover, intellectual history, with special attention to Africana women's autobiographical voices, offers an inside view on how Black women around the world define the idea of peace in their lives and work.

The healing process for women of color entails an additional variable of race, so a womanist interpretation of Black women's autobiographies offers both a critical subject and a critical lens from which to view the subject.

Womanist Peace

> "A womanist research agenda is needed to contribute to the process of understanding the liberating function of spirituality in Black women's lives…. Moreover, we need new theories; theories that will tear down the walls of demarcation between disciplines; theories that will enable researchers and health care providers to counter negative images and formulations of Black women; theories that will attend to the diverse life and cultural experiences of Black women; theories that recognize there are different ways of seeing reality as it pertains to Black women's strengths, resilience, and struggles…; and theories that will allow Black women to communicate their personal experiences of oppression with the hopes of developing interventions that are consistent with Black women's ways of ''knowing.''
>
> ~ Corliss Heath, "A Womanist Approach to Understanding and Assessing the Relationship between Spirituality and Mental Health."

Building on the foundation of Black women's intellectual history, this work engages Black women's theoretical frameworks in order to define peace and health in terms of Black women's experience. Angela Davis rightly connected personal and political aims. Alice Walker's original definition of womanism named Black women's "willful, courageous, and outrageous behavior" (Walker, 1983). With these combined lineages, I define womanist peace as *Black women's willful quest for health and freedom*.

Africana Womanism

Several collections of Black women's feminist thought are now in print. Though there are a wide range of approaches, Black women writers have used to define their ideological positions, there are certain points that are nearly universal. In *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Though* (1995), Beverly Guy-Sheftall identifies basic premises regarding activism at the intersection of race and gender. Like the multiple interpretations of Black feminism,

womanism has evolved beyond Alice Walker's initial definition. A new generation of scholars has employed groundbreaking thought of Clenora Hudson Weems' Africana womanism and Chikwenye Ogunyemi's African womanism and applied the fundamental ideas to multiple areas of analysis (Phillips, 2006). Scholars from many disciplines, especially theology, have broadened usage of the term womanism and initiated thought-provoking dialogue about the variant shades of womanism, feminism, and Black feminism (Coleman, 2006).

Existing scholarship on inner peace clearly shows Alice Walker's classic definition of womanism is highly appropriate for this project, particularly given the starting point of Jan Willis's text. Specifically, social ethicist Melanie Harris connects Alice Walker with Jan Willis in her article, "Buddhist Meditation for the Recovery of the Womanist Self, or Sitting on the Mat Self-Love Realized" (2012). Harris uncovers the inherent connection between Black theorists and Africana authors. Harris offers "reflections on how engaging Buddhist texts as a Womanist scholar opens up a new perspective on the Womanist theme of self-love and how this can shift our understanding of the Buddhist self." The recognition that self-love is the glue between Buddhism and womanism is a powerful one, and Harris skillfully reads Willis's experiences through Walker's lens resulting in a rich convergence of ideas of how to practice self-love, even in a Buddhist tradition that seeks to eliminate the "ego" of self.

In the afterword to Willis's narrative, feminist scholar-activist Bettina Aptheker admits that finding inner peace is not an easy commitment, especially for those who have survived sexual attacks and who are committed to fighting injustice committed against women. Those who have balanced peace and self-defense definitely deserve our attention. While much scholarship documents Black women as survivors of violence, trauma, and torture, too little is written about Black women's role as actors *and* thought leaders in non-violence and peace studies. A clear example can be found in a leading text on the topic: *Cultivating Inner Peace: Exploring the Psychology, Wisdom and Poetry of Gandhi, Thoreau, the Buddha, and Others* (2011). Paul Fleishman is a psychology scholar who trained in psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine, where he also served as Chief Resident. In *Cultivating Inner Peace*, he acknowledges several highly visible activists in his text (Gandhi, Thoreau, Buddha, and Walt Whitman), but African Americans are missing from the text and women are scarcely heralded as thought leaders or community organizers.

My model of Africana womanism and the specific strength-based, activist approach to mental health is grounded in the Clark Atlanta University Africana Women's Studies program founded in 1982, where Dr. Shelby Lewis served as founding director. Dr. Lewis worked in Uganda with a Gender Mainstreaming Program to diversity African higher education. In her *Journal of Political Science* career path essay, she credits communication with Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf for helping her to gain a clearer understanding of the need for gender mainstreaming and "in what ways women engage education and development on their own terms (Lewis, 3). Lewis, whose degree is in political science and who served as an appointed member of J. William **Fulbright** Foreign Scholarship Board, grounded the Africana Women's Studies program in an international and interdisciplinary agenda of women's scholar-activism. Lewis and the program personify the foregrounding of woman-centered problem-solving research, upon which peace studies should more heavily lean.

Four documents published in 1985 provide course syllabi and bibliographies from the original program curriculum. Professors of the era collectively shaped the discussion on mental health:

> Mental health issues—Dominating this theme is research on mental health services for Black women and strategies for coping with a pathological environment. Recommendations for changing the environment, rather than merely coping with it, are seldom discussed. Likewise, research on self-destructive reactions to the pathological environment, for example, drug abuse, alcoholism, depression, etc., as well as forms of physical and psychological abuse directed at Black women, is grossly lacking. (Lewis, 1985, vol. 1, pp. 131-132)

Recognition that the racist and sexual fabric of the national environment is pathological—not Black women—is a sea change of perspective. The framers of these syllabi knew better than to simply blame those without power for creating the conditions of their disenfranchisement. Topics in the bibliography include: service needs and intervention strategies; strength, coping, and adaptation strategies; alcoholism; depression and suicide; rape and other forms of physical abuse; drug abuse; Black women and the criminal justice system; and psychotherapy.

Scholars listed in the syllabi and bibliographies include women who are now recognized as formidable foremothers of Black women's studies: Patricia Bell Scott, Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Delores Aldridge. Delores Aldridge continues to her commitment to Clark Atlanta University by serving on the Board of Trustees, demonstrating the endurance, commitment, and longevity of many Africana scholars from the 1980s. This foundational Africana women's studies curriculum included two class in Black women's psychology: "The Psychology of African American Women: A Systems Analysis" taught by Charlyn Harper at Atlanta Jr. College (now Atlanta Metropolitan State College) and "Personality Development of the Black Woman" taught by Susan Brown Wallace at Hampton University.

Both courses emphasized investigation of non-Western sources (i.e. Yoruba, Toni Bambara's 1970 *The Black Woman* anthology) and moved beyond defining Black women's mental state as pathological. Consequently, Africana womanism and Clark Atlanta University's foundational curriculum provide a uniquely suitable frame for understanding dimensions of Black women's inner peace.

Inner Peace and Mental Health

Black women's mental health issues are complex and must be dealt with soberly if we are to fully recognize the depths of oppression's impact. Brown and Keith (2003) rightfully state in their seminal text *In and Out of Our Right Minds: The Mental Health of African American Women*, Black women's "social location" uniquely—and most often adversely—impacts their mental health. In *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*, Kirk and Okazowa-Rey define social location as "micro (personal), meso (community), macro (national), and global (international) environments that overlap to define a person's circumstances. Regardless of geographic location or historic time, unyielding systematic racism and sexism has too often driven Black women to self-destruction--literally.

Dr. Layli Maparyan, professor of Women's Studies and Executive Director of the Center for Women at Wellesley University provides the most expansive textual treatment of peace. Though her book, *The Womanist Idea* (2012), is not entirely autobiographical, the chapters construct an argument for "Luxocrity" that builds up to her powerful narrative in the final part of the book. "Luxocrity" is rule by light and Maparyan explores five women's memoirs to examine how their life stories contribute to an idea of womanism in general and spiritual activism in particular. In the final chapter, Maparyan reveals a devastating experience that riveted her entire being and placed her in a position to make a life-altering choice. Maparyan defines peace in terms of "good vibrations" (p. 42). While some might be inclined to make fun of a light-hearted concept of peace, her light heart becomes impressively sobering when reading about the weighty impetus for Maparyan's turn to peace. Her choice to pursue inner peace became an emotional imperative after the suicide of her daughter.

Maparyan's story, involving her daughter Aliyah jumping from a fourteen story building, complicates ideas of mental health in compelling ways, because Maparyan's reflection does not attribute her daughter's choice to end her life to textbook definitions of mental illness. Further complicating the issue was Maparyan's learning that Aliya's paternal great, great, grandmother had also committed suicide. By tracing her daughters temperament growing up and her constantly keen awareness and seemingly in tune nature of otherworldliness, Maparyan notes there was no discernable unhappiness in the weeks leading up to her daughter's passing. In fact, they had just taken a trip together overseas and her daughter was visiting her brother at the time.

Evidence showed that the impetus for the jump was a movie she was watching where the protagonist jumped off a building and into another plane of the universe. Aliyah simply jumped to the other side. Maparyan is unblinking in her questions about the nature of her daughter's choice, and the decision to not give into a narrow definition of the meaning of that choice in order to adhere to what would be an acceptable "official story" by social standards (Maparyan, 300). Instead she opted to embrace a spiritually, open-ended interpretation which lead to a much more enlightening approach than to simply assign blame and sink in to desperation or despair. Maparyan's exploration of peace results in a commitment to vigilant spiritual activism, which includes employing a "radical forgiveness" in order to emerge from whatever disaster we face as humans (and especially as Black female humans). Maparyan's candid recollection of her daughter's joy is clouded by her palpable sorrow, but the beautiful portrait of her daughter's soaring spirit forces readers to question the realm of mind and spiritual understanding in which we choose to operate. Simply put, Maparyan supposes that Aliyah's experience is an opportunity to question what we think we know about the universe. Her profound peace does not come from ignoring realities of suffering, but seeking to expand her understanding of life's possible meanings.

Finding and fostering peace is not a Black woman's struggle alone; everyone is faced with this human challenge. But here, I focus on Africana women who offer intriguing definitions of peace in order to provide much-needed tools for health. Institutions from the Center for Disease Control to the World Health Organization document the impact of race, nationality, and gender on health. *"Inner Lions"* facilitates the spread of ideas which can positively impact how Black women perceive, discuss, and act in peaceful ways. This dialogue is essential at a time when violence against Black girls all over the world continues unabated, Black women's health issues

remain preventable but deadly, and Black girls increasingly initiate interpersonal violence, especially in the United States.

Black women in every nation face challenges directly attributable to socially constructed racist, sexist, and capitalist environments. Women's memoirs document ways in which Black women have created disruptions to violent circumstances. Authors write about interventions made on their own behalf and intercessions they have made on behalf of others. The lessons that Black women have conveyed in their autobiographies offer guidance to those on the journey to a more holistic life and balanced world.

Symbol of Womanist Peace

Peace is a simple concept with many complicated precepts. Defining radical peace requires context and raises interesting questions: Does peace mean non-violence? Is there room for self-defense in peace activism? Can a boxer be a peace advocate? What does it mean when someone commits acts of violence against herself? Is inner peace an act necessary to bring about world peace? What compromises are required when managing peace and international politics? Whether a self-pronounced survivor or a peace activist, these women's voices offer insight, meditation, solace, and direction to those seeking peace in this generation and the next.

Angela Davis began and ended her 1987 speech with a reference to Audre Lorde, a lesbian feminist activist poet who battled cancer. Citing work conditions that contributed to Lorde's illness, Davis connected the individual health of Black women to the environmental and economic stressors that impact our condition. Davis wrote, "Politics do not stand in polar opposition to our lives. Whether we desire it or not, they permeate our existence, insinuating themselves into the most private spaces of our lives" (Davis, 1990). In sum, an Africana womanist foundation for analysis of peace assumes two premises: 1) Black women's ideas are directly related to their social location and experiences and 2) Black women's ideas contain perspectives that can affect change in the pathological or violent environments that negatively impact our lives. Womanist peace allows us to simultaneously reach back into history and mindfully prepare for the future.

Accordingly, the concept of womanist peace is best depicted by the combined symbol of the ancient ankh and the modern peace sign:

Figure 2 - Womanist peace sign (design by S. Evans, 2014)

While the "nuclear disarmament" social and political component of peace is imperative, cultural, physical and spiritual definitions of life and value for both women's and African diaspora perspectives is also paramount.

The symbol of a peace sign within an ankh, has seemingly been present in popular culture since the 1960s. Soon after British artist Gerald Holtom developed the 1958 peace sign which first appeared to advance activism around nuclear disarmament, jewelry and art began to circulate, though never enjoying wide use.

Figure 3 - Womanist peace sign ("vintage" jewelry, dated "1960s")[23]

[23] Necklace description: Very Rare Authentic peace sign from the 1960s. This Ankh pendent Has always been one of my favorites. The Ankh is an ancient Egyptian character that means "Life", a symbol for Eternal life. The Peace symbol was designed by British artist Gerald Holtom for a Nuclear Disarmament protest in 1958. He combined the Semaphore signals for the letters N & D. The peace sign soon became the universal symbol for Peace. Together the message is clear and a powerful statement of the 60s decade. Accessed July 7, 2014 https://www.etsy.com/listing/166897877/vintage-1960s-authentic-handmade-ankh.

The womanist peace symbol addresses multidimensional areas of Black women's micro, meso, macro, and global social location. It also provides a creative and culturally relevant approach to conceptualizing the meaning of peace in line with Black women's intellectual history.

Narratives by contemporary Black women reveal terms like, clarity, hope, choice, joy, salvation, and justice. However, many of these themes are also found in ancient African philosophy and can be easily connected to the root of Africana history that date back to concepts like Maat (justice). The ankh, from which the symbol of women's studies derives, symbolizes life, so womanist peace brings together racial and gender history in significant ways. Yet, a symbol is nothing without action. As Bethune insisted in a 1934 speech delivered at Hampton University, we must "translate scholarship into the language of the street," so practical application of these ideas must necessarily be addressed (Bethune, in McCluskey and Smith, 2002).

Practical Peace

> "Unless we are able to go inside of ourselves and touch and breath fire, breathe life into ourselves, of course, we [can't] be healthy."
>
> ~ Byllye Avery, "Breathing Life into Ourselves: The Evolution of the National Black Women's Health Project."

Wangari Maathai, one of the Africana autobiographers listed in this research, set a lasting example with her work in the Green Belt Movement. At the close of her narrative *Unbowed* (2007), she wrote, "I have joined with other women Nobel Peace laureates…to address and prevent the root causes of violence by spotlighting and promoting the efforts of women's rights activists, researchers, and organizations advancing, peace, justice, and equality" (Maathai, 2007, p. 305). Fittingly, it is important to find a way to impact the world through practical service and to "do the best I can," through practical service. My chosen means to "improve the quality of life" have been through higher education and by creating youth mentoring curriculum. My focus on publishing research to improve Black women's mental health is a natural extension of my work in Black women's intellectual history. Like Maathai, I understand that collaboration with like-minded scholar-activists is essential for effective work, and hope to share and exchange resources with those in many areas.

Black Women's Memoirs as a Tool for Mental Health

Dr. Kankia Bell, a psychologist who combines research and practice around Black women's mental health, is one such colleague who exemplifies women practitioners deeply situated in community work. Dr. Bell is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Clark Atlanta University who teaches courses in forensic psychology, cross-cultural psychology, and psychological testing. She is also a co-founder of ATL Psychotherapy and Consulting Services, LLC, where she specializes in several types of therapies, including work with youth facing charges in the Fulton County Juvenile Court. Her location in Atlanta, Georgia and work at an HBCU (Historically Black College or University) situates her at the heart of southern Black women's United States demographics. In her research, she has explored Black college women's identity development and in her practice, she specializes in race and gender as well. Her range of assessment areas shows the large number of mental health issues in need of attention:

> …I have extensive experience providing evaluations related to ADHD, bariatric surgery and organ transplant hopefuls, parental fitness, psychosexual issues, vocational and career exploration, autism spectrum disorder screenings, and general intellectual, academic and personality testing. I specialize in an eclectic mix of cognitive behavioral therapy and *insight-oriented therapy* geared toward assisting the client in discovering his or her own answers and taking control of his or her own life. I treat children, adolescents and adults and particularly specialize in young children with attachment disorders, abuse histories, and foster care placement, teens negotiating identity issues and coping with chronic oppositional behavior, adults coping with occupational or relationship stress, chronic medical problems, and women's issues, and older adults confronting life's changes. Sometimes the support of others with similar experiences is therapeutic. I also lead revolving therapy groups for specific populations such as adolescent girls, parents caring for children with behavioral problems, or socially anxious adults (italics added). (Bell, 2011)

Dr. Bell's approach to therapy mirrors a collaborative, collective, strength-based, problem solving approach indicative of Africana womanist values. Her "insight-oriented therapy" does not reduce Black women's lives to a deficit model; she assumes her clients have the answers they need and her job is to simply guide them to available resources.

When asked her definition of peace, Dr. Bell answered, "balance." In a magazine feature, she commented on the importance of professional mentoring for Black women in all areas, but especially in higher education and in fields of social and behavioral sciences, given the disproportionate impact of public health issues. Her professional training extends our understanding of the topic of mental health and how it relates to broader policy implications (Stevens, 2011).

Black women's intellectual history (theory) is a natural partner with mental health work (practice): together text and therapy form an invigorating, critical, and interdisciplinary praxis that "honors Black women's ways of knowing." Dr. Bell's and others who work in the area of Black women's psychology can provide research to facilitate answers to pressing questions. Using the wealth of intellectual history resources, like the Sesheta database, we can learn more about Black women mental health. We also need more research about practitioners' approaches, particularly relating to spiritual, mental, spiritual, social, economic, and political peace.

There are a multitude of topics to consider when thinking about women's mental health. *The Psychology of Women* textbook outlines basic topics that impact how we look at women's lives: gender stereotypes, gender bias, childhood, adolescence, attitudes, personality, work, love, sexuality, motherhood, physical health, psychosocial disorders, violence against women, race and gender perspectives, and activism (Matlin, 2007). These topics can easily be seen in women's narratives who use "peace of mind" to situate their stories. Black women's definitions of peace will be of interest in several arenas, including policy studies and social science, psychology, humanities, religious studies, higher education and youth development. Though my work clearly incorporates several of my interdisciplinary interests, at base, my interest in the topic is deeply personal.

Angry Black Women: Beyond the Art of War

Like many narratives in the Sesheta database, the seeds of my quest for inner peace were planted in soil of trauma. I am a survivor of several instances of sexual violence. As a result of several attacks in my childhood, I found myself harboring suicidal thoughts at the age of 11 years old. Fortunately, a compassionate teacher took a personal interest in nurturing my spirit. Because she taught dance, I was able to develop a healthy relationship with my body, despite the apparent lack of societal regard for Black girls' physical safety and well-being. Although I suffered several more attacks in my adult life, I have found much of the peace articulated in other women's narratives highlighted here. Black women are stereotyped as "angry"; in truth, given the amount of violence to which we have been routinely subjected, we have much to be angry about. The choices that I was forced to make as a young girl slowly evolved and solidified into a steadfast determination to be happy "in spite of." But if you are not angry about level of violence against women and girls, you simply are not paying attention.

I have observed how righteous anger has destroyed the joy and health of many Black women. In that observation, like Jan Willis, I have chosen to pursue peace through self-love and nurturing habits of non-violence. This is an interesting exercise for me because I love martial arts. Having survived, several attacks, I was drawn to Kenpo, Tae Kwon Do, and even cardio kick-boxing. Because I had been punched and kicked, I felt good punching and kicking things back. But over the years, I have been drawn to other therapeutic outlets like massage therapy, hypnotherapy, Feng Shui, and Qigong.

Finally entering college at the age of 25, I found my way to women's studies classes, where I learned the social, political, economic contexts in which male domination has developed. I enrolled in Black studies classes where I learned the role that the social construction of race played in interpersonal and structural violence. Black women's studies became the critical lens through which I could better understand what I had personally experienced. After reading Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences, I uncovered "intrapersonal" reflection as a main interest, which explains my attraction to mental health research.

Given a vital access to health care that came with my student status, I enjoyed several sessions with a Black woman therapist who helped me begin to walk through my past and find forgiveness, healing, and overcoming shame. I am grateful for the three counselors with whom I have had the privilege to work over the years and find solace knowing I have somewhere to turn for help if I need a relatively objective sounding board.

As a professor of Black women's studies over the past decade, I have enjoyed presenting materials for student consideration and guiding a new generation of researcher through interesting and deceptively simple topics such as Black womanhood, love, and community service. Much satisfaction also has come from exercising my creative energy, which has included penning *Chronicles of the Equator Woman: The Recipe for Justice Soup* (2013), a short story in which a time-traveling Black woman saves planet Earth. In *Chronicles* I wrote:

> I have always been an Equator Woman and peace has not come easily…. Because of my

> endless travels, I remember my lives only in vague vignettes, but my purpose has become increasingly clear: to affirm peace and serve as a mediator for justice. (Evans, 2013)

In college, graduate school, and as a faculty member, I found my voice and my research on social location has enabled me to help others find their voice as well.

I define peace as art. Of all the lessons Bethune taught in her school, one student remembered most her urging: 'In whatever you do, strive to be an artist" (Ihle, 1992, p. 91). One of my goals is to continue create art by weaving together ideas and action. Poet Sonia Sanchez embodies how powerful art can be, particularly when creating art about peace. Her *Peace is a Haiku Song* mural project reflects decades of her positive work and shows the beautiful impact that her kind energy has by bringing creative people together (Sanchez, 2012).[24] In my life, I have witnessed how art and creative energy can be an effective response to violence. As seen with some select martial arts, creative energy also can be used to confront, re-define, and re-direct negative energy. When handled by masters, art can stop violent attacks without resorting to violence.

Ultimately, I am still a fighter; I identify as both a Black feminist and a womanist and embrace the necessity of activism to directly impact ongoing inequities. Fittingly, I have found Morihei Ueshiba's *Art of Peace* a useful narrative text which to learn. Ueshiba founded the martial art Aikido, and though he was trained as a Japanese Samurai warrior, he created a system of self-defense predicated on love. Developed in direct opposition to Sun Tzu's much touted 6th century Chinese text *The Art of War*, Ueshiba transformed how he processed conflict into a positive and productive system that redirected violent energy of the attacker without internalizing negativity or returning the aggression. Mastering the art of peace, and embracing the warrior within is exactly what Jan Willis accomplished by researching her personal history, which included enslavement and rape which resulted in her light skin color. She embraced her African self-perception and penned her life story for the benefit of future generations. She wrote peace into her life.

Inner peace alone is not enough. As Bethune wrote in her *1926* NCNW presidential address*, "*So today the peace of the world is a matter of concern…. Bear in mind, therefore, that the various units of our body are all linked together to form an engine of service far greater than that of any private or individual matter." Individual transcendence is not enough. Yet, ironically, without inner peace, world peace is unlikely. Texts like *Radical Peace: Refusing War (2010)*, written by Vietnam War conscientious objector William Hathaway is instructive. Hathaway shows that, unless we deal with our own individual negative attitudes, antagonistic behaviors, and choices of interpersonal violence, social and structural violence will not end.

As Black women, participation in violence is not always an option: war comes to us…on our bodies, minds, and communities. For many Black women, choosing peace is a radical act that involves negotiating non-violence despite a barrage of routine racist and sexist attacks. It is especially difficult to navigate peace when non-violence is coupled with a very necessary plan for self-defense. In his 1903 classic, *Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois penned a question

[24] Peace is a Haiku Song, Mural Project (2012) http://muralarts.org/peace. Accessed July 6, 2014). See also Sonia Sanchez, "Poem for July 4, 1994, For President Vaclav Havel," in Shake Loose My Skin: New and Selected Poems (2012), Random House.

piercing the heart of the dehumanization process of Black people: "how does it feel to be a problem?" To crack the fundamental threats to peace for Black women, the same question can be asked. And, like the point of Du Bois' essay, Black women ourselves, *cannot be defined as the problem to be solved*.

Whether in literal or spiritual sense, much of Black women's history has inherently involved solving the problem of moving through violent world in search for health and freedom. As Maparyan notes, "radical forgiveness" is a very real process for Black women who have been hurt so much, so often, by so many (2012). We must forgive others and also allow compassion for ourselves as we constantly undertake battles for our self-defense.

A commitment to radical peace means feeling, thinking and acting in ways that do not purposefully harm others but also in ways that acknowledges the specific challenges that Black women face. In essence, rejecting violence does not mean ignoring the realities of the existence of violence. In Black women's experiences world-wide, violence (psychological, domestic, interpersonal, environmental, or structural) is almost impossible to ignore.

The world is violent and has been so for all of recorded human history. People, animals, and elements bring death and destruction. But so much violence is unnecessary and preventable. Black women who articulate a commitment to personal, social, and universal harmony in their lives represent a "radical" act. For Black women to insist on inner peace and to create conditions that improve the quality of life for others is a radical act because it is a human act.

This article presents a study of self-definition and self-possession by women who are survivors of systematic racism, domestic violence, cultural genocide, public humiliation, heartbreak, political corruption, or self-doubt. We are constantly told to be silent but, like Jan Willis wrote, "every now and then, a lion must roar. It is part of her nature." Africana narratives help others find their voice. These voices holler back at a world that perpetually claims that Black females are irrelevant and that our pain should be tolerated without complaint. But we keep speaking, writing, creating, dreaming, and rising. And we have a fine roar. [25]

[25] Listed below are samples titles by Black woman authors who frequently cite "peace" (over 10 references) in their autobiographies. For the full list of 150 autobiographies, visit http://www.sesheta.net/.
Stephanie Covington Armstrong, *Not All Black Girls Know How to Eat: A Story of Bulimia* (2009)
Halima Bashir, *Tears of the Desert: A Memoir of Survival in Darfur* (2012)
Donna Brazile, *Cooking with Grease: Stirring the Pots in American Politics* (2012)
Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (1993)
Theresa Cameron, *Foster Care Odyssey: A Black Girl's Story* (2002)
Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South, By a Black Woman of the South* (1892)
Darlene Collier, *Married to Sin* (2013)
Dorothy Cotton, *If Your Back's Not Bent: The Role of the Citizenship Education Program in the Civil Rights Movement* (2012)
Celia Cruz, *Celia: My Life* (2005)
Ahuvah Gray, *Journey to the Land of My Soul: An African American Woman Tells the Story of Her Journey to Judaism and Jerusalem* (2010)
Shirlee Haizlip, *Finding Grace: Two Sisters and the Search for Meaning beyond the Color Line* (2007)
Mpho 'M'atsepo Nthunya, *Singing Away the Hunger: The Autobiography of an African Woman* (1997)
Faith Ringgold, *We Flew over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold* (2005)
Mary Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857)
Afeni Shakur, *Evolution of A Revolutionary* (2010)

The Song of Inner Lions
I paint sculptures, Black
My piano (keyboard) roars
Lighting lion prints
~ Stephanie Y. Evans, 2014

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Amanda Smith, *An Autobiography, the Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist: Containing an Account of Her Life Work of Faith, and Her Travels in America, England, Ireland, Scotland, India, and Africa as an Independent Missionary* (1893)
Alice Swafford, *Conquering Darkness Memoir of the Serial Killer's Wife* (2013)
Hilda Twongyeirwe, *I Dare to Say: African Women Share Their Stories of Hope and Survival* (2012)

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