



Akoma

# #HistoricalWellness

**Conceptualizing Historical Wellness:  
Notes for the Seminar in Africana Women's Studies<sup>1</sup>**  
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What? Defining Historical Wellness  
So What? Historical Wellness as a Threshold Concept in Africana Women's Studies  
Now What? Autobiographical Research and Black Women's Wellness as Applied History

**What? Defining Historical Wellness**

“...the goal of Black women's studies is to save Black women's lives...”  
Barbara Smith, co-editor, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*

*I define historical wellness as Black women's tradition of self-care despite generations of violence and oppression.* The healing traditions of Black women—particularly the enduring practices of prayer and spiritual engagement, yoga, music (listening, singing, or dancing), exercise, and meditation—continue in popularity into the twenty-first century but have identifiable roots in narratives by nonagenarians and centenarians dating back at least to the early nineteenth-century. Historical wellness focuses on behavioral aspects of healing self in order to sustain mental health regardless of time, location, or circumstance. These self-healing practices have worked to improve individual and communal quality of life despite personal, social, or structural violence that operated to thwart optimal health. This idea is grounded in Black

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<sup>1</sup> These lecture notes are excerpts from a forthcoming book on Black women's wellness. **CITATION:** Evans, Stephanie. “Conceptualizing Historical Wellness: Notes for the Seminar in Africana Women's Studies.” Lecture at Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, GA, September 26, 2018. CAWS 600, Graduate Seminar on Africana Women's Studies: Black Women's Mental Health & Wellness. Parts of this lecture were also presented in AWS 491, Introduction to Women's Studies at CAU on 25 September 2018.

women's intellectual history and narratives of women like Harriet Tubman who lived into her 90s. Narratives of long-living women like Tubman (90+), Sadie and Bessie Delany (109 and 104), Marian Anderson (96), Ida Keeling (102+), and Dona Irvin (92—[Nell Irvin Painter's](#) mother!), show historical wellness is an act of mental, physical, and spiritual resistance.

Frustrated by several personal and professional challenges, I began to study mental health in early 2013. When faced with personal loss from health issues and increasing stress from a challenging career, I did what I have routinely done in the past two decades: query Black women's memoirs to find solutions to problems I was facing or questions I needed addressed. In 2014, I published two articles on inner peace: "Healing Traditions in Black Women's Writing: Resources for Poetry Therapy," in *Journal of Poetry Therapy* and "Inner Lions: Definitions of Peace in Black Women's Memoirs, A Strength-based Model for Mental Health" in the *Peace Studies Journal*. My inquiries seeped into discussions with a colleague, Kanika Bell, as I wanted to learn more about the relationship of intellectual history to mental health. Those discussions spawned a fruitful collaboration that nurtured work in our respective areas.

I teamed up with [Kanika Bell](#), a psychology professor at Clark Atlanta University and psychologist who owns her own practice, and [Nsenga Burton](#), a media scholar and founder of *The Burton Wire*, now at Emory University, to develop a research collaborative in 2015. We established a working group to codify existing literature on mental health and to expand discussion around stressors Black women face. I investigated Black women's wellness in historical and contemporary narratives of health and freedom, particularly relating to self-worth in survivors of sexual violence. Since then, we edited a book published by SUNY Press, created a resource website, and have convened panel discussions at several conferences. I initiated the collaborative in order to expand my own knowledge of mental health, and to create an

interdisciplinary network for greater access to information sharing. I was interested in applying intellectual history to real world issues and mental health was a logical area of exploration in applied history. The book, [\*Black Women's Mental Health: Balancing Strength and Vulnerability\*](#) (2017) offers a framework to positively impact Black women's wellness and Kanika Bell's chapter, "Sisters on Sisters," a survey of fifty Black women mental health professionals anchored the volume. [Linda Goler Blount](#) of the Black Women's Health Imperative penned the Foreword and emphasized strategies for moving wellness discussions forward. Future research will expand on this collection by investigating Black women's public health history.

My use of historical wellness as a concept is original; searches in books, journal articles, and social media turn up only one reference prior to today: A Twitter post about the value of essential oils by Angie Goderich in March 2017. I am establishing and developing the concept as an academic guidepost. Though I came to this idea independently, the idea is a culmination of decades of studying Black women's memoirs and the term is a direct beneficiary of existing scholarship by Black women academics in history, African American studies, women's studies, and, certainly, Africana women's studies.

This idea is in harmony with trends cited in the Sasha Turner's [\*Black Perspectives\*](#) blog post for African American Intellectual History Society, titled "New Directions in Black Women's History." Turner conveyed details of a session at the 2018 American Historical Association conference titled, "New Directions in Female Bondage," which featured Lisa Ze Winters, Marisa J. Fuentes, Sasha Turner, and Deirdre Cooper Owens. The panel "produced generative discussions around slavery, violence, intimacy, pleasure, reproduction, archival disappearance, and historical methods." These scholars' work, particularly the exemplary book *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* by Clark Atlanta

University alumna [Deirdre Cooper Owens](#), demonstrates the vibrancy of Black women's history and history's centrality to Africana women's studies.

In [Medical Bondage](#), Deirdre Cooper Owens writes about the development of women's medical practice in the United States—literally—on the bodies of enslaved Black women. Cooper Owens develops language to discuss the horrific treatment of African women on U.S. plantations and the dehumanizing situation of Black bodies in the name of profit and science. She unveils the process of developing new language in order to encompass the complexity of the historical situation and the need to more adequately interpret the evolution of gynecology:

Since coining and defining the term “medical superboddy,” I have wrestled with its use because it is a fraught denominator. Other than the problematic descriptor “degraded,” which was broadly used to label disempowered women, no historic label from the antebellum era encapsulates the complexities and contradictions that were part and parcel of enslaved women's socio-medical experiences. Consequently, my use of medical superboddy is intentionally messy, ambiguous, and contentious because black women's entrance into gynecology proved complex for white doctors, who viewed them through an optical microscope, using only two lenses, simplicity and complication. (pp. 6-7)

Like Owens, my definition of historical wellness came from an awareness of the inaccuracy and minimality of existing terms to define the historical phenomenon of healing traditions I observed in Black women's narratives. Too, the term historical wellness is “fraught, messy, ambiguous, and contentious” precisely because it is dependent on an understanding of historical violence and abuse detailed by works like *Medical Bondage*. Without the library of essential historical interventions (mainly by Black women) scholars who painstakingly research all horrifying and disheartening aspects of Black women's lives, historical wellness makes no sense. Further, it is imperative to not diminish those, like [Fannie Lou Hamer](#), who sacrificed their lives and well-being for the cause of justice. Joy and pain are inextricably linked. You cannot understand Black

women's healing without understanding Black women's historical oppression and diverse means of resistance.

Paying tribute to foundational concepts is an opportunity to [#CiteBlackWomen](#), as anthropologist [Christen A. Smith](#) advises. Like #CiteBlackWomen and many community-based campaigns (i.e. [#ProfessionalBlackGirl](#) celebrating Black women's creativity, [Black Women's Blueprint](#) advocating for justice, and the [#MeToo](#) and [#MuteRKelly](#) activists fighting sexual violence) this work is designed to benefit local, national, and international communities, particularly partnerships with organizations like [Center for Black Women's Wellness](#) and [Black Women's Health Imperative](#), both seeded by scholar-activist [Byllye Avery](#). Working at Clark Atlanta University in the Atlanta University Center, I am particularly mindful of Atlanta as a locale for the Black Women's Health Project and the multitude of healing work produced since the original conference in June 1983. This knowledge fuels my urge to institutionalize historical wellness as a threshold concept in the field of Africana women's studies. My work is certainly built on decades of extant publications, but seeks to expand the discussion to "add my voice to the chorus" by defining a nuance yet unnamed in analyzing Black women's experience.

### **So What? Historical Wellness as a Threshold Concept in Africana Women's Studies**

How do you take care of yourself?... Through practicing self-care you can empower yourself to become ...a woman who is an informed master of her own health, both for her own sake and for her community. This healthy self-possession can take many different forms...

~Hillary Beard, *Health First!: The Black Woman's Wellness Guide*

Primarily, the historical healing traditions I discuss in my research relate to the practice of meditation, one of today's most popular and fastest growing means of stress management. Meditation practice often seamlessly interacts with prayer, yoga, listening to music, and exercise which, according to the 2017 American Psychological Association's *Stress in America: The*

*State of Our Nation* report, are the most common self-care practices used to maintain wellness or to actively fight illness. Given the health dilemmas Black women face, I write about historical wellness, meditation, mindfulness, and consciousness as a form of social justice education.

[Toni Morrison's](#) “How Can Values Be Taught in the University” provides a structural framework for my forthcoming book *Breathing Life into Myself: Historical Wellness in Black Women's Memoirs* (Lever Press, expected 2019), just as it provided the superstructure for my recent edited collection, [Black Women and Social Justice Education: Legacies and Lessons](#) (SUNY, 2019). Morrison's essay on teaching values in university settings in *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Non-Fiction*, (edited by [Carolyn Denard](#), 2008) explains how wellness as an educational value can contribute to discussions about the goals of a university, particularly in African women's studies (AWS). Revisiting higher education history, Morrison writes:

Certain disciplines pride themselves on the value-free nature of their intellectual inquiries, and the pursuit of “objectivity” is at the heart of their claims, claims which are understood to place the stature of these disciplines far above interpretive ones. Nevertheless, explicitly or implicitly, the university has always taught (by which I mean examined, evaluated, posited, reinforced) values, and I should think it will always follow or circle the track of its origins. . . . What I think and do I already inscribed on my teaching, my work. And so should it be. We teach values by having them. . . . (191–197)

My work examines, evaluates, posits, and reinforces Black women's values of wellness as an imperative of social justice in education at all levels. While AWS is not wedded to “objectivity” as are more conventional university disciplines, the definition nonetheless emphasizes the need to be explicit about values: as Morrison makes plain, we teach values of wellness by having—and practicing—values of wellness.

In [Health First!: The Black Women's Wellness Guide](#), a required text for this seminar, the entire closing third of the book focuses on the imperative of self-care. In the closing pages, authors identify strategies for self-care, from awareness to maintenance. These cyclical processes

are part of what Byllye Avery calls the lifelong journey to health. While much of the conventional focus of healing traditions has been care for families and communities, this project is necessarily focused on self-healing of individual Black women's bodies, minds, and spirits. As such, the focus on stress management strategies emerges not from nouveau trends in American culture of individualism (as opposed to African cultural communalism), but self-care as a result of the very foundation of Black women's wellness history. In the introduction to her [\*Altar of Words: Wisdom, Comfort, and Inspiration\*](#), Avery identified the main goal as to increase self-love, self-respect, and self-care. Historical wellness, an investigation into self-healing in Africana history is a foundational concept to conducting research into Black women's memoir.

As with all of my work, the purpose of this research is to empower Black women and girls, but this project began out of a dire personal need to manage stress in my own life. I have found inspiration in Black women's life stories and seek to share the details in order to expand historiography, but also to enhance quality of life for myself and others.

For me, using history as a healing tool has worked. In my conclusion to *Black Women and Social Justice Education* (2019), I wrote,

Dr. Evans, Heal Thyself: Healing History for Sustainable Struggle. I have found that history, particularly intellectual history, can be a source of healing. My motivation for initiating this project was similar to the reasons I have begun all of my writing projects: I am seeking answers from my Ancestors, elders, and colleagues on how best to survive as a Black woman in this world. The answers I have found along the way to publishing books and articles about Black women's life writing have been satisfying and helpful. These projects have also produced more questions about the nature, values, and strategies of Black women's survival. In the face of the social justice work that is imperative for our basic functionality in the world, freedom is daunting. Given what we have come up against, as Nannie Helen Burroughs indicated, "we specialize in the wholly impossible." Black women's inner peace seems illusive, but the more I read memoirs by Black women in history, the more I know that health and wellness are, in fact, possible. (346)

Historical wellness is a concept that conveys the opportunity to not only learn about the ugliness of human history, but to also reach back for the beautiful and, especially useful for Black women, the healing lessons that life narratives have to offer. Historical wellness is about learning, teaching, and applying healing traditions.

Like healing traditions, I envision historical wellness as a “[threshold concept](#),” a transformative idea that seeks to fundamentally alter the way scholars and students think about a topic. Initially begun as a pedagogical concept in economics, scholars discuss “threshold concept” to address major questions students have about the reliability, relevance, and applicability of a concept in their own lives. Originators of the term write, “A threshold concept can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress. As a consequence of comprehending a threshold concept there may thus be a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even world view.”

A “threshold concept” is

- *transformative*—causes the learner to experience a shift in perspective;
- *integrative*—brings together separate concepts (often identified as learning objectives or competencies) into a unified whole;
- *irreversible*—once grasped, cannot be un-grasped;
- *troublesome*—often counter-intuitive, the place where students stumble or get stuck;
- *bounded*—may help define the boundaries of a particular discipline, are perhaps unique to the discipline.

Historical wellness, as a concept and as it operates in Black women’s lives, expands the understanding of healing traditions found in several areas of folklore and cultural studies.

There are many threshold concepts in Black women’s studies that inform my work; most connect to Anna Julia Cooper’s [A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South](#) (1892).



These Black women's studies threshold concepts include radical Black feminism of the groundbreaking [Combahee River Collective](#); [Gloria Hull](#) and [Barbara Smith's](#) creative survival, [Patricia Bell-Scott's](#) flat-footed truths, [Juanita Johnson-Bailey's](#) narativism; [Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's](#) politics of respectability, [Beverly Guy-Sheftall's](#) words of fire; [Delores Aldridge's](#) gender in the revolutionary role of Africana studies; [Patricia Hill-Collins'](#) Black feminist thought; [Kimberlé Crenshaw's](#) intersectionality, [Darlene Clark Hine's](#) culture of dissemblance, [Farah Jasmine Griffin's](#) textual healing, [Carol Anderson's](#) struggle for human rights; and [Brittany Cooper's](#) Crunk feminism and eloquent rage. Many of these concepts were developed collaboratively and this is only a beginning list of the ideas that inform historical wellness.

Womanist scholar [Layli Maparyan](#) coined the term Luxocracy, meaning “rule by Light” where light represents one's inner “higher soul.” Maparyan's womanist work emanates from the founders of womanist knowledge ([Alice Walker](#), [Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi](#), and [Clenora Hudson-Weems](#)), several of whom also have Atlanta and AUC roots. [Shelby Lewis](#), an unsung foundational scholar and first director of the Africana Women's Studies program at CAU, provides an essential concept in her “[Career Path Essay](#)” in the *Journal of Black Political Science*—required reading for all of my classes. Lewis institutionalizes the term “applied research” in her work as a cornerstone of Africana women's studies. Though her disciplinary lens is political science and her work focuses on “women and development,” gender mainstreaming, and intersectional policy studies in several African nations, the mandate to apply research in ways that directly benefit Black women is clear and universal.

These concepts are complex and many ideas clash against each other, indicating a fruitful engagement in the field. Each of these concepts imply what John Hope Franklin identifies as the

“presence, oppression, and resistance” central to the African American historical lens and all reflect the scholar-activist tradition of W. E. B. Du Bois of Atlanta University. As I am in the throes of my eighth and final year as Chair of the Department of African American Studies, Africana Women’s Studies, and History (AWH) here at CAU, I’m aware of the responsibility to leave something behind of intellectual additive value to honor the work of others before me.

My use of historical wellness as a contribution to ongoing discussions is imbued with the fundamental knowledge of the role of healing traditions in Black women’s studies in general and Africana women’s studies in particular. Healing traditions, as a concept, is also essential as a tandem topic useful in AWS. Healing traditions makes interventions in several areas of historiography, including race and gender history, but also presents possibilities to reimagine applied history, particularly regarding wellness, healing, health, and inner peace.

The most widely-reviewed book on the topic, [\*Healing Traditions: Alternative Medicine and the Health Professions\*](#) by Bonnie Blair O’Connor, presents a comprehensive overview of how healing is understood outside of Western medicine practiced in the United States. As a folklorist employing ethnographic methods, O’Connor traces what she terms “vernacular healing systems” that encompass folk-based understanding as opposed to rigid scientific approaches of terms like knowledge, belief, illness, and harmony. While touching on various cultural communities including Indigenous, German-American, Afro-Cuban-American and others, her main focus in *Healing Traditions* is on the Hmong community in Philadelphia and culture-based approaches to HIV/AIDS that extend beyond traditional medicine. After decentering science as a “paradigm of knowledge” and debunking stereotypes about community health beliefs, she fractures the binary of “medicine” and “healing” by demonstrating how both work in tandem. Ultimately, she advocates for a “health care pluralism.”

In a section titled, “Self-Care and the Use of Multiple Resources,” O’Connor clarified how multiple cultural belief systems can effectively co-exist with modern medicine. In sum, she reasoned:

Oral tradition and scientific information learned through the media are parallel sources of knowledge in everyday life.... Far from being inherently contradictory to the pronouncements of science, folk belief and popular wisdom co-exist and intermingle with scientific explanations, and the two streams of tradition are often complimentary in individuals’ formulations and interpretations. Indeed, many vernacular health beliefs may be supported and reinforced by contacts with conventional medicine. In choosing to use vernacular health care systems, people of every educational and social group make considered decisions in putting together a multifaceted strategy for dealing with health and illness. (26)

Following in O’Connor’s line of reasoning my book-in-progress, *Breathing Life into Myself*, will offer a women-centered look at healing, health, and wellness, informed by hundreds of published life narratives and citing elders who have lived to be in their 70s, 80s, 90s, or 100s as experts on community-based health.

Entering narratives from the historical record as primary sources to be considered in health and wellness education significantly broadens potential for future research. It also demands that community voices from myriad locales be incorporated into research methods and data sets for research in several disciplinary inquires. This area of research suffers from typical challenges in Black women’s historical research—archival collections being one area. I have run into some usual challenges, for example, the papers of Sadie and Bessie Delany are held in private property and not available to the public. As women who began yoga practice in their 60s, those primary sources are invaluable, but out of reach. This focus on healing traditions has much room for growth and is certainly not new. Future studies that write health history “from the bottom up” will be of interest to a wide, interdisciplinary audience.

Many cultures write about healing traditions and a review of existing literature shows at least a dozen book-length studies on the topic. Studies include Caribbean mental health, Black American church and community uplift, Mexican herbs and rituals, Southern Appalachia cultures, Indian shaman work, Indian yoga, Asian whole foods, nutrition, Aboriginal people in Canada, world religions and healing, medieval and early modern medicine, medical anthropology, the Catholic mystic tradition, therapies in Zanzibar, ethnographic research from Japan to Papua New Guinea, parahuman spirituality in Zambia, and early nineteenth-century South African socio-cultural medicinal practices before and after colonization. Journal articles cover Siberian music, restorative justice in Fiji, and Navajo religion among other topics. There is a broad disciplinary approach to this work on healing traditions, ranging from medical anthropology and sociology to rhetoric and religion.

Black women writers have addressed healing, most notably [Tamika Carey's](#) *Rhetorical Healing: The Reeducation of Contemporary Black Womanhood* and [Ruth King's](#) *Healing Rage: Women Making Inner Peace Possible*. Scholars like Farah Jasmine Griffin have written about healing as resistance. In her article, "Textual Healing: Claiming Black Women's Bodies, the Erotic and Resistance in Contemporary Novels of Slavery," she writes:

Contemporary Black women writers of fiction, criticism, theory and popular self-help books, along with black women theologians and a burgeoning grass roots movement spearheaded by the Black Women's Health Project are all participating in this communal project of textual healing. The most popular pop-spiritual / psycholog- ical books by black women are books that celebrate black women's bodies in an effort to counter the destructive effects of racialized hierarchies of beauty. (522)

As Griffin acknowledges, Black women fiction writers (re)locate the body to (re)claim feeling, sexuality, and wholeness. She closes by saying, "These writers demonstrate that black women's bodies are historical and not essential" (533). Advancing this line of thought, memoir and

autobiography provide a rich site from which to study Black women's body as, the Center for Black Women's Wellness articulates, "whole, healed, and well."

Wellness, then, represents an act of resistance to the waves of oppressive economic enslavement and mass rape, social segregation, political dispossession, and cultural distortion. In short, Black women's wellness and healing traditions are sites of resistance. However, the complete narrative is not one of simple victory; as Beverly Guy-Sheftall wrote in her conclusion to [\*Words of Fire\*](#), the struggle continues.

Memoirs, as a form of intellectual history, are a testimony to preserve our experience, to document our own time, to provide inspiration, and to suggest direction for next generations. Finding ways to heal, women like Harriet Tubman had the conviction to live deliberately and the consciousness to record, in detail, life stories. There are multitudes of others who have lived similarly extraordinary/ordinary lives; thankfully, some have taken the time to orate or write them down as a contribution to the historical record.

**Now What? Autobiographical Research: Exploring Patricia Bell-Scott's notion of "the beautiful, the ugly, and the healing."**

The idea of a wellness-centered Black women's history does indeed expand current mainstream patterns. Historical wellness is certainly "troublesome." Though it contributes to a more holistic view of history, there may be a tendency to simplify or co-opt the positive focus in order to create "shiny happy history"—clearing away more unsavory or disturbing aspects of Black women's actual experiences. This is not my intent. I anticipate some may misuse the term, as seen with Crenshaw's intersectionality. But the term, as intended, gels with a current historiography and also advances Black women's autobiographical studies.

Autobiography and memoir rest at the crossroads of literature and history. A tradition of Black women scholars that explore autobiography includes [Nellie McKay](#) (1998), [bell hooks](#) (1998), Patricia Bell Scott and Juanita Johnson-Bailey (1998), [Joanne Braxton](#) (1989), [Margo Perkins](#) (2000), [Rosetta Haynes](#) (2011), [Layli Maparyan](#) (2012), and [Angela Ards](#) (2016). These literary critics outline general themes in Black women’s narratives, such as reclamation and self-creation, while others highlight memoirs written as activism or explicitly to mentor future generations. Life narratives—whether memoir, autobiography, interview, or other forms related to the epistolary tradition—give voice to many marginalized populations. It is no wonder, then, that one of the foundational scholars of Black women’s studies is also a pioneer scholar in autobiography studies.

In [\*Flat Footed Truths: Telling Black Women’s Lives\*](#), a volume co-edited with Juanita Johnson-Bailey, Patricia Bell-Scott wrote about a photograph of her mother and recalled how, “...she has taught me that truth—sometimes beautiful, sometimes ugly—is ultimately healing.” Black women’s voices have been routinely silenced, ignored, or disbelieved. Bell-Scott, in the first anthology of Black women’s autobiographical studies, created space for those voices to use whatever genre desired to speak their truth. Black women’s autobiographical studies has a rich array of approaches, each advancing discussion about the power in expressing truth as one experiences it. The framework of Bell-Scott’s “beautiful, ugly, and healing” lives permeates elder memoirs and I incorporate this multifaceted way of analyzing life stories as a primary method of content analysis.

In [\*Reading Autobiography\*](#), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson identify at least two dozen ways to read life narrative. These methods include viewing writing as agency, body and embodiment, collective autobiography, identity, memory, space and place, and temporality as

well as many others. Though each of these types of narrative study offer potential inroads into viewing elder narratives, I have selected the lens of “experience” as I want to investigate the myriad ways elders have experienced wellness, regardless of the other factors of time, place, and particularities of identities. In this way, I create a narrative study of the beautiful, ugly, and healing ways Black women centenarians and nonagenarians have written about their wellness experience.

### **Conclusion: Black Women’s Wellness as Applied History**

I can attest to the power of Africana women’s studies to actually “save Black women’s lives.” Reading the women who have come before me has saved me from despair, guilt, shame, and unnecessary self-sacrifice. In my meditation workshops held over the past year at academic conferences, faculty retreats, student wellness sessions, and community-based staff trainings, I have offered stress management tools to students, faculty, and staff who are overworked, underpaid, and burnt out. This is a tiny intervention, but necessary for those struggling with their day-to-day. It is a common sentiment that self-care is imperative especially for those engaged in social justice work (shout to [No More Martyrs](#) and [Social Justice Café for Girls](#)).

I am a survivor of numerous instances of sexual violence. As a Black woman, the daily triggers on today’s news and social media feeds are overwhelming. But the generations of Black women’s voices in my head keep me balanced and enable me to raise my voice—and pen—for, in the words of [Mia Bay](#), [Farah Griffin](#), [Martha Jones](#), and [Barbara Savage](#), editors of *Toward a Black Women’s Intellectual History*, “race, gender, and justice.” Survivors of violence are legion and wellness workers are part of the critical mass of resistance to fundamentally alter the function of families, societies, and institutions.

Several institutions of higher education are already on board with wellness, most notably [Spelman College](#) and [Bennett College](#)—the two colleges that serve African American women. They offer several wellness activities as part of their regular curriculum and each campus has very active yoginis, [Chelsea Loves Yoga](#) at Spelman and [Tamara Jeffries](#) at Bennett. The wisdom of wellness dates back to antiquity, when Makeda was doing her morning sun solutions. We cannot lose this traditional knowledge. We must use this knowledge to, in the words of Mary McLeod Bethune, “build a better world.” And to build a better academy.

Many academics conflate intellect with ego and too often institutions normalize stress. I join others, including [Maudry-Beverly Lashley](#) and [Rhonda Williams](#) who are writing critically and creatively about self-care. This research has helped me to manage stressors in my career and has helped me convince others to not create unnecessary drama for ourselves or for our students. My struggle for wellness and wellness for struggle continues. As Miriam Makeba sang, *A Luta Continua*.

#### **Authors Note:**

This lecture is an excerpt from a book, tentatively titled *Breathing Life into Myself: Historical Wellness in Black Women’s Memoirs*, forthcoming from Lever Press (expected 2019). I extend special appreciation to reviewer one of my first submitted draft. S/he ripped it to shreds and forced me to restructure the manuscript in such a way that my main point and controlling structure were clearer. My articulation of #HistoricalWellness is largely a result of the reviewer’s demand that I exert my own voice more distinctly and offer explicit evidence of my unique contribution.

Apologies to any Black women’s history/ studies scholars who were not singled out in this lecture; omission was not intentional—this is simply an abbreviated reference list. I look forward to sharing sections of this lecture at upcoming gatherings of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) in October 2018 and at the Association of Black Women Historians (ABWH) in December 2018. I will also reference this work in my African Heritage Studies Association (AHSAs) comments in October at CAU.

Finally, I am grateful for my students (current and former), network of colleagues, and the love of my life Curtis D. Byrd for encouraging this research every step of the way and tolerating my ups and downs as I take this wellness journey.