

United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Report

The Psychological Impact of Racism on People of African Descent in the United States of America

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I. Introduction

Racism in the United States continues to inflict profound psychological, social, and physical harm on African Americans. State and vigilante violence disproportionately target Black communities, leading to widespread trauma and distress.

The U.S. government's reluctance to fully recognize and implement the **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)**, the **Convention Against Torture (CAT)**, and the **Genocide Convention** exacerbates these harms. Additionally, the **American Medical Association (AMA)** has formally recognized racism as a public health crisis, reinforcing the need for urgent action.

The psychological impact of racial violence extends beyond the immediate victims. Black communities endure secondary trauma by witnessing these events firsthand or through their constant negative portrayal in the media. The fear, anxiety, and powerlessness resulting from systemic racism contribute to severe mental health issues, creating a cycle of generational trauma.

II. Psychological Impact of Racism

The cumulative impact of racism manifests as **chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** among African Americans. The effects are compounded by structural inequities, including over-policing, economic disenfranchisement, and disparities in healthcare, education, and employment. Studies show that these factors contribute to **higher mortality rates, increased suicide risk, and disproportionate health disparities** in Black communities.

Impact of Witnessing Racial Violence

The psychological toll of racial violence extends beyond the direct victims. The **constant exposure to police brutality, state violence, and vigilante attacks—whether in person or through viral media coverage—creates a collective trauma among Black Americans**. Repeated exposure to such brutality reinforces the belief that their lives are not valued by

society or the justice system.

- **Racial Battle Fatigue:** African Americans experience **chronic emotional distress** due to daily encounters with racism and its violent manifestations.
- **Hypervigilance and Fear:** Seeing Black individuals killed or brutalized by police reinforces a **state of heightened alertness**, making routine activities—such as driving, jogging, or calling for help—potentially dangerous.
- **Desensitization and Numbness:** A persistent exposure to racial violence, particularly through social media, leads to emotional exhaustion and **feelings of helplessness**, making activism and civic engagement more difficult.

For Black children and adolescents, **witnessing racial violence contributes to severe emotional distress, academic struggles, and difficulty trusting institutions** that are supposed to protect them. Black parents often engage in "The Talk" with their children—preparing them for encounters with law enforcement—instilling a **fear-based survival strategy rather than a sense of safety and trust in the system**.

III. Impact of State and Vigilante Violence

High-profile incidents of **state-sanctioned and vigilante violence** continue to reinforce the psychological burden of racism:

- **Michael Brown (2014)** – Killed by police in Ferguson, Missouri, sparking national protests against police militarization and racial profiling.
- **Walter Scott (2015)** – Shot in the back while fleeing a police officer in South Carolina, exposing systemic racial bias in law enforcement.
- **Sandra Bland (2015)** – Arrested after a traffic stop and later found dead in police custody, highlighting the criminalization of Black women.
- **Ahmaud Arbery (2020)** – Hunted and killed while jogging in Georgia, demonstrating the continued reality of racial lynching.
- **Breonna Taylor (2020)** – Shot in her home by police executing a botched raid, underscoring the deadly consequences of "no-knock" warrants.
- **George Floyd (2020)** – Publicly executed by a police officer kneeling on his neck for over nine minutes, sparking global protests against systemic racism.
- **Darius Holcombe, Spartanburg, SC (2023)** – Killed by police while fending himself from a K-9 officer.
- **Jordan Neely (2023)** – Choked to death on a New York subway by a white vigilante, reflecting the devaluation of Black life in public spaces.
- **Kesha Luwan Lucille Tate in Gaffney, SC (2024)** – A reminder that Black women's deaths are often overlooked or underreported. A 42-year-old mother of nine children murdered while cooking dinner in her kitchen.

Children killed by racism:

- **Aiyana Stanley-Jones (2010):**
 - A 7-year old girl was shot by police during a raid on her home.
- **Trayvon Martin (2012):**
 - A 17-year old unarmed teenager shot by a neighborhood watch volunteer in Sanford, Florida.
- **Tamir Rice (2014):**
 - A 12-year old boy shot by a Cleveland police officer while playing with a toy gun in a park.
- **Ma'Khia Bryant (2021):**
 - A 16-year old girl shot by police in Columbus , Ohio during an altercation.
- **Cyrus Carmack-Belton (2023):**
 - A 14-year-old was fatally shot in the back by a South Carolina convenience store owner who wrongly accused him of shoplifting and chased him after a confrontation.

The deaths of these children highlight the **danger Black youth face simply for existing in public spaces.**

Each of these cases represents **a pattern of state-sanctioned and racially motivated violence.** The repeated failure to hold perpetrators accountable reinforces **a culture of impunity** that deepens Black Americans' psychological distress. While these are the more high profile cases, there are many cases that go unreported across the United States. Black children are not viewed like other children. Some have been labeled “super predators.” Racism impacts black youth in the education systems, and also a gathering of black youth is suspected of being gangs.

In addition to state violence and extrajudicial killings, white supremacist groups, including those responsible for domestic terrorism, continue to operate with minimal legal consequences. These groups actively spread hate and fear, often targeting African American communities, and they persist in organizing public demonstrations of racial violence. Despite their involvement in violent acts and widespread intimidation, these groups remain largely unaddressed by U.S. authorities, further contributing to the culture of impunity for racial violence.

- White nationalist groups in Ohio have recently grown increasingly brazen in expressing hateful rhetoric and racist ideologies. Last November, Hate Club, a newly formed White supremacist organization, paraded through a Columbus neighborhood, waving swastika flags and shouting racist slurs.
- The ADL Center on Extremism (COE) documented 64 white supremacist events across 25 states between May 27 and September 2, 2024.

These incidents, among countless others, contribute to a culture of fear, distrust, and psychological trauma within Black communities. The continual witnessing of these violent events through media exposure leads to a collective sense of grief, trauma, and hypervigilance. Many African Americans report experiencing anxiety when interacting with law enforcement, fearing for their safety in routine encounters. The normalization of racial violence fosters a

sense of powerlessness and mistrust in the justice system, further exacerbating mental health struggles.

Statistics that Highlight the Impact of Racism in the U.S.

1. Criminal Justice System

- **Incarceration Rate:** Black Americans are incarcerated at **nearly 5 times** the rate of white Americans. They make up **38%** of the U.S. prison population but only **13.6%** of the general population. (Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics)
- **Police Killings:** Black Americans are **2.5 times more likely** to be killed by police than white Americans. Unarmed Black people are killed at a rate of **3.5 times** more than unarmed white people. (Source: Mapping Police Violence)
- **Wrongful Convictions:** Black people account for **53%** of exonerations due to wrongful convictions, despite being a minority of the population. (Source: National Registry of Exonerations)

2. Economic Inequality

- **Wealth Gap:** The median wealth of white households is about **7.8 times** higher than that of Black households (\$188,200 vs. \$24,100). (Source: Federal Reserve)
- **Unemployment Rate:** Black workers consistently face unemployment rates **twice as high** as white workers, regardless of economic conditions. (Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)
- **Homeownership:** Black homeownership is **30 percentage points** lower than white homeownership (44% vs. 74%), largely due to redlining, discrimination, and unequal access to credit. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)

3. Health Disparities

- **Maternal Mortality:** Black women are **3 times more likely** to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women. (Source: CDC)
- **Life Expectancy:** Black Americans have a **lower life expectancy** than white Americans due to systemic health disparities. (Source: National Center for Health Statistics)
- **Medical Discrimination:** Studies show Black patients are **less likely** to receive pain medication, even when reporting the same levels of pain as white patients. (Source: National Institutes of Health)

4. Education Disparities

- **School Punishment:** Black students are **3.5 times more likely** to be suspended or expelled than white students, contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline. (Source: U.S. Department of Education)
- **School Funding:** Predominantly Black school districts receive **\$23 billion less** in funding compared to predominantly white districts, despite serving the same number of students. (Source: EdBuild)
- **Higher Education:** Only **26%** of Black adults hold a bachelor's degree, compared to **40%** of white adults, largely due to economic barriers and systemic inequalities. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)

5. Representation & Stereotypes in Media

- **Criminalization in News Media:** Studies show that Black crime suspects are **4 times more likely** to be shown in mugshots than white suspects in news coverage. (Source: Color of Change & Media Matters)
- **Film & TV:** Despite being 13% of the population, Black people represent only **5% of lead roles** in Hollywood films and are often cast in negative or stereotypical roles. (Source: UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report)

IV. U.S. Government's Reluctance to Address Racism Through International Law

Despite claiming to champion human rights, the **United States has actively resisted accountability for its racial injustices** under international law:

- **Failure to Implement CERD** – Despite ratifying the convention in 1994, the U.S. has not fully addressed **racial discrimination in policing, housing, healthcare, or economic opportunity**.
- **Reluctance to Uphold CAT** – Police brutality, mass incarceration, and abusive detention practices reflect a broader failure to **prevent and punish torture** within the criminal justice system.
- **Denial of Genocide Convention Claims** – Systemic racial violence, mass incarceration, and targeted state neglect **meet international criteria for acts of genocide**, yet the U.S. refuses to recognize these claims.
- **Dismissal of Reparations for the Tulsa Massacre** – The U.S. government continues to reject demands for reparations for the living descendants of the 1921 **Tulsa Massacre**, where an entire Black community was destroyed through racial violence.

While we debate justice, our communities sink further into a metaphorical “sunken place,” as portrayed in the movie, *Get Out*. The question is: **how deep does this go, and is there a point of no return?**

We must also reject the dismissal of our demands as “woke culture.” Such rhetoric seeks to delegitimize justice movements while perpetuating a psychological and systemic Stockholm Syndrome, trapping us in cycles of compliance and survival.

V. Stereotyping and the Global Depiction of People of African Descent

People of African descent face **global stereotyping** that depicts them primarily through **poverty, violence, and instability**. International media representations of Black people often reinforce negative imagery, influencing **global perceptions and domestic policies**.

For African Americans, these portrayals contribute to **internalized oppression, cultural erasure, and the dehumanization of Black lives**. The **psychological toll of seeing their identity consistently misrepresented** adds to the cumulative stress of racism, further exacerbating mental health disparities.

The global depiction of people of African descent plays a significant role in shaping perceptions, reinforcing stereotypes, and impacting the psyche of African Americans.

- **Extreme Poverty Narrative:** African nations and communities are disproportionately shown as places of suffering, poverty, and dependency, rather than centers of culture, innovation, and economic potential. The frequent portrayal of starving children, war zones, and corrupt governments reinforces an image of Africa as a place of despair rather than resilience and development. (Source: Media Diversity Institute)
- **Violence & Criminalization:** Black communities worldwide are often associated with crime, instability, and lawlessness. In global media, African and Caribbean nations are frequently depicted as dangerous, reinforcing the stereotype that Black people are inherently violent. This aligns with how Black Americans are framed within U.S. media, contributing to racial profiling and harsher criminal justice policies.
- **Political & Social Instability:** African and Caribbean nations are often portrayed as perpetually corrupt, lacking governance, and dependent on Western aid. This stereotype fuels the idea that Black people lack the capacity for self-governance, justifying historical and modern forms of control and exploitation. (Source: Western Media Coverage Studies)

Impact on the Psyche of African-Americans

- **Inferiority Complex & Identity Crisis:** Constant exposure to negative portrayals of Africa and Blackness globally can lead to internalized racism and self-doubt. Some African Americans struggle with feelings of cultural disconnection, viewing Africa through a distorted colonial lens rather than as a source of pride and heritage.
- **Limited Aspirations & Racialized Expectations:** These stereotypes affect how African Americans are perceived in professional, academic, and social settings. Black children may grow up with limited representations of success outside of entertainment and sports, reinforcing structural barriers to economic mobility.
- **Justification for Racism & Discrimination:** If Blackness is globally linked with dysfunction and failure, then discrimination against African Americans can be easily rationalized. This perception fuels systemic racism in policing, employment, and political disenfranchisement.

- **Psychological Toll of Global Anti-Blackness:** African Americans, already battling domestic racism, also witness the mistreatment of Black people worldwide, reinforcing feelings of alienation, frustration, and hopelessness. This contributes to stress, racial battle fatigue, and collective trauma.

VI. Recommendations

To address these ongoing violations, the **United Nations must hold the United States accountable** and advocate for structural changes that promote justice, equity, and mental health support for African Americans.

1. **Full Implementation of CERD, CAT, and the Genocide Convention** – The U.S. must align domestic policies with its international commitments to **combat racial discrimination and systemic violence**.
2. **Recognition of Racism as a Public Health Crisis** – Following the AMA's declaration, national policy should include **funding for mental health services and trauma recovery programs in Black communities**.
3. **Reparations for Racial Injustices** – The federal government should establish a **Reparations Commission** to provide financial restitution, invest in Black communities, and **formally acknowledge historical crimes**.
4. **Stronger Protections Against Hate Crimes and Racial Profiling** – Strengthened hate crime laws and anti-racial profiling policies must be **enforced at the federal level to prevent continued racial violence**.
5. **Investment in Black Mental Health and Community Healing** – The government must fund **Black-led mental health initiatives** to address racial trauma and generational stress.
6. **Dismantle White Supremacist Groups and Domestic Terrorism Networks** – Strengthen federal regulations to classify and prosecute white supremacist organizations as domestic terrorist threats, ensuring the safety and security of Black communities.
7. **Human Rights & People-Centered Policing in the Black Community** – Given that policing in the Black community is historically rooted in slave patrols, fostering a legacy of racial control rather than public safety, the U.S. must shift from a punitive, militarized model to a community-centered public safety approach grounded in human rights, dignity, and restorative justice.

a. Recommendations:

- i. **Community-Based Public Safety Models** – Shift resources away from traditional policing and invest in violence prevention programs, mental health crisis responders, and community-led safety initiatives that do not rely on armed law enforcement.
- ii. **Independent Community Oversight** – Establish fully independent, community-controlled public safety commissions with the power to investigate, discipline, and set policies for law enforcement.
- iii. **Restorative Justice & Conflict Resolution** – Implement non-punitive, restorative justice practices that prioritize mediation and healing over incarceration, reducing unnecessary police interactions in Black

- communities.
- iv. Demilitarization of Law Enforcement – End the use of military-grade weapons and tactics in Black communities, ensuring that public safety does not equate to occupation and intimidation.
 - v. Reparative Justice for Harm Caused – Acknowledge and provide reparative justice for the historic and ongoing trauma caused by policing, including compensation and community reinvestment.
8. **Commit to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA)** – Formally acknowledge and implement the principles outlined in the DDPA, including reparative justice, affirmative action, and structural reforms to eliminate racial discrimination in all forms.

VII. Conclusion

The **psychological consequences of racism and racial violence in the United States are devastating** and impact every aspect of Black life. The **U.S. government's refusal to uphold international human rights conventions** perpetuates **structural racism, generational trauma, and state-sanctioned violence**. The United Nations and the global community must demand **concrete policy changes** and hold the United States accountable for its **failure to protect Black citizens from racial discrimination, state violence, and psychological harm**.

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