

The Stress of Political Consciousness, Holistic Lifestyle and African American Development

guest editorial
by

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Abstract

Political Consciousness is essential and vital in the development of African American men and women. Yet, it can be stressful. The self-imposed set of social and political responsibilities along with new awareness of historical and political realities may leave one temporarily paralyzed by euphoria, anger, fear, depression, and anxiety. To prevent and alleviate this, a holistic lifestyle grounded in political activism is recommended that offers positive outlets for expression along with personal practices for effective stress reduction.

Introduction

While there are many books and studies on the political and social ramifications of the Civil Rights, Black Power/Liberation movement, and other movements of the past, there are few if any studies that chronicle the effects of the stress that derived from political involvement in those movements. The stress was and is a hidden factor and if constantly acknowledged, would siphon off much of the drive and energy to make social change happen. But it is there, and there is a price to be paid for being politically conscious, radical, and African American. For those of us born in the fifties and earlier, it was understood that political activism, even of a conservative kind like voter registration, could cost one their life. Therefore, the issue of stress or at least, 'lesser stressors,' have not been the burning issue. Staying alive was the burning issue.

But for the ones who have survived, how did the stress of political consciousness and activism impact them? How many lost jobs at different times? Did that cause any stress in the family? How did that affect family member's health? Did people have to move and relocate because of their activities? Did one ever have to go 'underground?' How long? For how many years did one have to "bite their tongue" at work and where did that frustrated anger go? Or if they were of the sort that "didn't bite their tongue," did the resultant conflicts prevent them from advancing?

Were there careers that one would have gone into had they not been politically conscious of certain things and took certain actions? *Of course, the larger question of how different our lives would have been had not millions stood up and demanded justice has an obvious answer. And in every struggle there are numerous sacrifices to be made and each generation has to step up to the need of the times.* Yet, we seldom discuss the collateral damage of lives lost, years in prison, or sapped potential sucked away by sometimes misguided actions, racist police, courts and criminal justice systems, federally instigated internecine battles, and ideological wars. In many ways, the people making the sacrifices did not know they were making sacrifices at the time and could not foresee the outcomes. And neither could people foresee the lasting effects of stress on their and their family's nervous systems and how that would affect them, years later.

These are hard realities and questions. But ultimately, if we cannot assure an individual that they will be taken care of when they get old, their loved ones cared for if something happens to them or they will be nursed when they are sick, why should they choose to join our struggle? It is now acknowledged that it will take generations to fully usher in any kind of advanced society, and nothing short of catastrophic disasters will make people change instantly, *so it comes down to how well an individual can hold up and possibly thrive under an assortment of pressures over a very long period of time.* The Communist Party and Progressive Movement of the teens, twenties, and thirties, the Civil Rights movement of the forties and fifties, and the Black Power/Liberation, student and Black Arts Movements of the sixties and seventies were accompanied by support systems that were created within those movements. This helped mitigate and insulate the frontline activists from some of the stressors, particularly financial. The Civil Rights workers also had broad-based support within the African American community. But there is another reality. Many individuals who chose a life of political activism, especially radical African American political activism, lived lonely existences, particularly as they got older. They could not find work. They made a lot of sacrifices personally and professionally while incurring tremendous stress to their nervous systems. Many have poor health. Few offer any regrets as to their choices politically, but many feel the pain of isolation, lack of appreciation, and the toll the movement has taken on their bodies, psyches and spirits.

The happiest ones seemed to have found a balance, an internal peace knowing that they gave it their all and have a lifetime of achievements and accomplishments, big and small, to show for the path they took. They also have had a certain measure of good fortune and luck, as most express the fact that many at times, were in very dangerous situations that could have gone 'either way.' They have healthy pursuits, activities, and relationships and live within a community. And they are still politically active and vibrant. Despite political victories being few and far between, they know it was the correct path. But how did they get to this point? How did they find equilibrium? How did they balance out the stress of being aware and politically active, with working and paying bills, or raising families? The mainstream perspective, one that teaches us that America is a just nation, has altruistic motives with regards the peoples, nations and resources of the planet, and is a real democracy where legal, economic, and political justice prevails, is not the reality for the majority. So, what happens when those blinders are removed? And then, how well does one manage those stressors once they 'see the light?'

More specifically, what are some of the powerful emotional states triggered by becoming politically aware and how do they produce unhealthy situations and symptoms for individuals if not identified and remedied? That is the purpose of this essay; to identify several distinct emotional states that often arise within the political consciousness-raising phase that if identified, could possibly be mitigated and managed in a healthy, holistic way.

Stressful Stages of Political Consciousness

The states outlined below are not always experienced in a linear fashion. Neither is this a scientific study or analysis based on research. Those are still needed. These are ideas based on forty-five years of direct participation and observation, talking with numerous contacts and conversations with hundreds of activists, some who have lived nine decades or more, and personal experiences spanning more than fifty years.

Euphoria

In many cases, euphoria or euphoria-like feelings are the first strong emotions that arise when one first becomes politically conscious. This is because one feels as if their consciousness has been liberated. Whether the awareness centers from consciousness around race, class, gender, the environment, poverty, hunger, sexuality, capitalism, science and technology, or indigenous rights, it does not matter, there is often an elation and exhilaration that comes from understanding something anew or phenomena becoming illumined from a new perspective. When an influential book, event, film, lecture, class, or large scale demonstrations, police or national guard attacks, overseas wars, epiphanies about life, or an accumulation of all the above in an instant or over a period of time, grabs one's attention-one's consciousness expands and one sees things as if for the first time.

And this is just politics, not a spiritual or religious experience. New political awareness heightens one's observation skills and one begins to think more critically, analyze more effectively, and in many respects, feel more alive. People feel excited. Even children of long-time activists who grew up with politically conscious dialogue often have their own awakening based on their unique life experiences. This euphoria gives a great deal of energy and fuels a passion for reading, discussing, creating, organizing, and living out new political realities.

Yet, it can be destabilizing as well. If one is not careful, one can begin to view all of life and relationships through the newfound political lens and depending on one's personal skills and personality, or lack thereof, and make a real nuisance of oneself. One can become overbearing in the beginning because one may have a tendency to try to teach every person one encounters while being prone to long political discourses. Sometimes there is self-righteousness during this time that if magnified, can erupt into political turf battles. Some of this was witnessed during battles between revolutionary groups of the sixties, although much of that was instigated by COINTELPRO (a FBI counterintelligence program that began in 1956 to disrupt the activities of political organizations, ending in 1971), as fictitious notes were given for example, to both Black Panther Party and Us members by the U.S. government to have them eliminate each other (1). Sometimes these political transformations are accompanied with diet and other changes and experimentation that leave the young person additionally imbalanced. It is better to have a gradual shift, or at least a well thought out transition in lifestyles, diets, and political beliefs and affiliations.

The idea is to channel this initial euphoria into an integrative plan of how political awareness and knowledge can be woven effectively and smoothly into one's life. In this way, it can be part and parcel of one's being for an entire lifetime. Turn euphoria into productive enthusiasm, excitement and work.

Anger

Anger is a logical emotional response to becoming politically conscious. This process often involves historical study, and depending on one's entry point, i.e. African American, Native, Latino, or Asian American, women, LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex), the environment, workers, indigenous rights or other ways to view political reality, the historical picture is filled with horror, pain, and vast devastation. When one reads how enslaved African people were marched through hundreds of miles of dense, disease ridden vegetation and swamps in Africa and beaten while barely being fed, watching their loved ones die, one's stomach turns in sympathetic grief and agony, and one gets angry.

When one reads of how Pizarro tricked the Incan ruler and mercilessly killed him and all of his family and massacred his people, one gets angry. When one reads or sees a film depicting slavery in all of its brutality, like, *“Twelve Years a Slave,”* for example, one cannot help but ache and commiserate, at least in some small way, with the suffering of African enslaved women, children, and men.

Something like this makes a person angry and when one begins to understand the systematic nature and economic/religious underpinnings of racism, slavery, and today’s white supremacy, one gets angry. When one hears about the mutilated fingers, hands, and arms of present-day Latino migrant workers without insurance or legal rights in U.S. meatpacking houses and the conditions of both immigrant and migrant workers in general, one gets angry. Reading *The Wretched of the Earth* by Franz Fanon many years ago made people angry and they become more aware of how anger could be translated into power through revolutionary struggle (2). When people see images of dogs brutally attacking African American marchers, or worse, read about the Wounded Knee Massacre in South Dakota where over 300 Lakota men, women, and children were gunned down by U.S. soldiers in 1894, they get angry, and want to fight back.

The point is-learning about injustice naturally strikes a light of sympathy, particularly among young adults, and this sympathy can produce anger that can at times, backfire. It can make the person feel a sense of urgency that is not based in reality. They may feel that a particular moment or political act is worth “risking everything” and that this is the only time they can do this in their life. In reality, there are very few of those moments. What there is, is the oft-times dull reality of daily life, and the less glamorous aspects of struggle, like organizing, distributing information, direct action disruptions and demonstrations, addressing issues, teaching, facilitating, fundraising, and or supporting progressive candidates. The idea is to “live to fight another day” and aim for victory through participatory democracy.

For example, since the Police are shooting young African American males, some young activists, might feel justified in randomly shooting police. There are several arguments and ways to approach this issue and one basically asks: *“can you defeat an enemy using the same tactics they are using against you?”* And *“are police really the enemy?”* Some say, *“Fight fire with fire,”* others say, *“that to fully evolve, one must use political tactics and strategies and put them ahead of military ones because military ones are extremely costly in terms of human life”* (3). Yet, *“where does that put self-defense when one is defending oneself against the police or the “state?”* Or, *“what are the ramifications of openly declaring warfare against the police? What political purpose does it serve?”*

This is an example of the kind of dialogue a newly politically conscious person needs to hear early on and participate so that he or she can have an intellectual context to analyze anger before acting on it out of haste. Of course, many events happen so quickly at times, there is not a lot of time for deliberation. But today, if people joining organizations, movements, study groups, or political classes are informed beforehand that the material and issues being discussed might bring up various emotions, including anger, and they are informed that these emotions are normal responses, people would more easily be able to integrate the information, their new political views, and extreme feelings and emotions generated by this new endeavor. Ultimately, this will make for more productive individuals and long term activists that choose their actions carefully.

Depression

The depression that can accompany political consciousness and activity is more than likely not actual clinical depression, in most cases, unless it tips the person in a direction that unmask a predisposition. But there is, at times, the possibility of feeling like having an extra weight on one's shoulders, that is, the 'weight of the world,' in addition to the ups and downs of everyday life itself. The individual may suddenly feel emotionally overwhelmed by all of the new information and appalled at the brutality exhibited in past situations. In social struggles, particularly in the past, the issues were very clear in terms of voting, equal rights, removal of Jim Crow, ending the war and women and gay rights. They did not have to address or acknowledge huge overarching problems such as global pandemics, species extinction, climate change and environmental degradation looming forever in the background like today. This is in addition to social/political struggles of immense proportions. With more being on the table and people having conjoined issues and perspectives, it seems like there is more to get depressed about today. Of course, in the past, people were depressed about economic collapse, getting lynched or being assassinated.

It is vital that each person stays connected with their community or form new ones, and be proactive. Live communally, if possible. By living communally or in the context of community, one is around people to converse and laugh with. Human beings are very social creatures and interaction produces a wide range of emotional states. Rarely would an entire group be depressed all at the same time.

Another remedy is staying focused on doing things, no matter how small, to alleviate the identified social problems to one's capacity. Putting forth positive solutions keeps one preoccupied with the work rather than personal problems and small successes encourage a more hopeful outlook. This eventually becomes a pattern that can lift one's mood. It is similar to Morita Therapy in Japan, the individual focuses on 'doing what needs doing' by staying 'present in the moment' (4). In this way, the new activist is encouraged and stimulated to cultivate a more positive outlook and approach, based on immediately positive experiences, despite global circumstances. This is in line with the current idea of living the alternative in the present.

Anxiety

Often, newfound political consciousness, particularly of a radical kind questioning the economic, racial, gender, and environmental foundation of Western civilization while incorporating Indigenous Rights is about challenging the "status quo." Challenging the status quo can make one, at times, anxious, or have anxiety, which is defined as, "*uneasiness and apprehension, as about future uncertainties*" (5). Anxiety causes one to worry as it is normal to feel anxious when one is about to embark on a road of uncertainty in unexplored territory. At least today's activists have a historical roadmap that can be used to alert present-day and future activists about possible pitfalls and ways to avoid obvious mistakes. Yet, each era or movement has its own unique set of historical circumstances that must be respected, assessed and studied. Once one realizes the immensity of the task, and the tremendous amount of attention the state or "powers that be" can bring to bear to prosecute and or destroy a targeted activist or movement, one might become anxious.

Much of this anxiety, however, is experienced as long as one feels alone and isolated. If one views their situation collectively and avoids the individualism so prevalent today, the anxiety or worry created by thinking one is taking on huge corporations, prison-industrial complexes, and global entities by oneself, is lessened (6). Also, planning one's career such that it incorporates aspects of one's political work could relieve additional anxiety. In this way, the political work is embedded in life's work, since a great deal of the anxiety comes from not knowing how one's future success will be affected by taking and acting on one's political beliefs. Today's non-profits partially help by providing income for doing organizational and political work.

Yet, there still may be sacrifices to be made. In the twenties and thirties, the sacrifices were extreme. The Communist Party hierarchy would accuse an individual of "careerism" if they put their careers before the work of the Party. Members were made to feel that the only really important work was the political work of the Party, and their personal lives were secondary. This same tendency could be seen in Black Nationalist groups in the sixties and seventies as well.

Today's movements would benefit from a more inclusive platform and holistic critique. Knowing that the objectives of a just, progressive, and sustainable/durable society might take many years to implement, it is now recognized, even within radical political circles, that people need personal and inner fulfillment too. Young activist's anxiety might be reduced greatly if they could see a vision of themselves participating in meaningful political work and rewarding careers at the same time.

Fear

Taking on and challenging, in anyway, the foundations of power in America as represented by the huge financial interests of Wall Street and its military, scientific, and philanthropic tentacles worldwide, is an awesome task. Even thinking about it can produce feelings of immense fear. If forces of power are making huge sums of money, be they private or governmental, and another group is saying that the way they are handling business, particularly in how they are evaluating and determining worth and distributing wealth, are not sustainable and equitable, they are at odds. Anyone who is at odds with capitalism, is in the way, and should be fearful. In looking at the past, one can immediately see the stream of bodies of people who have gotten in its way. History has shown that the risks of life and limb are real, with variations of intensity and tension at different periods.

People who get involved in political work are not just fearful for themselves, but their families too. During the McCarthy era of Communist witch-hunts, many family members lost government and other jobs because of hearsay and innuendo. So, depending on the circumstances and historical situation, one might find oneself in a frightening circumstance, what is one to do?

Paul Robeson, was in such a situation in June 1956 when he was asked to testify in front of the House of Un-American Affairs or HUAC. He was a world famous actor, singer, lawyer, and activist and the United States government took his passport; he had frequently traveled to the Soviet Union and many other countries around the world and explained to audiences the plight and struggle of the American Negro. For someone of Robeson's stature to openly embrace radical politics, communism, and befriend the Soviet Union was extraordinary and threatening. And furthermore, William L. Patterson, and several others had written a searing history of lynching and racially based murder titled, *We Charge Genocide*, which Robeson helped personally deliver to the United Nations in 1951 (7). This incredible document, which outlined by name hundreds who had been lynched with a complete breakdown by state, indicted the U.S. government in entirety.

So, Robeson knew and worked with many communists. And although he knew many in the Communist Party, he was not himself, a member. But he refused to ‘give up his friends,’ or name names. In fact, he was combative, defiant, and memorably angry in his response at the hearings. Robeson, when asked why he didn’t stay in the Soviet Union, said,

“Because my father was a slave, and my people died to build this country, and I am going to stay here, and have a part of it just like you. And no fascist-minded people will drive me from it, is that clear?” (8)

Robeson exhibited courage in the face of fear and adversity, and it inspired generations. His pointed, direct comments given in his deep, baritone voice rang out like a scorching hymnal of indictment of this nation’s treatment of his people. Whereas many others, including Langston Hughes, had withered under the pressure, he took the opportunity to show, in a David versus Goliath way, how one person can overcome their fear and face adversity.

It is very similar to confronting a bully-sometimes, one has to overcome their fear and fight. Once fought, bullies often turn out not to be as tough as expected. In the early 19th century, abolishing slavery seemed impossible. The institution appeared invincible and the task insurmountable, yet, with much sacrifice and struggle, it was abolished. It took many years, and things are still not equal, but women did receive the right to vote. Although it took an additional seventy-five years, many assassinations and lynchings, court cases, and wars, Jim Crow was defeated and crushed. The LGBTI community has suffered many indignities and cruelty, yet their rights are increasingly being recognized, and in many states, same sex couples can get legally married (9). The environment was being destroyed by capitalist greed, but millions are now involved in preserving it and devising sustainable solutions.

People can make things change if they overcome their fear. Fear does not mean stop. It means, *‘proceed with caution,’* but one must keep moving forward. The best way to deal with fear is to acknowledge it and still proceed to do what one has set out to do. The fear is recognized as a normal component, even healthy component at times, that will make one careful. That is the key-turn fear into careful optimism that is decisive. The optimism and courage developed in the face of political oppression is the kind of hard earned strength and tenacity that serves one in all life endeavors.

Balancing it All Out

These stages are not in any way fixed or linearly experienced. And there are possibly many more emotions that are experienced as well. The point is to recognize and acknowledge that each process or transformation causes a cascade of changes, internally and externally, that can be overwhelming and difficult to manage at times. If grassroots organizers were equipped with this type of perspective, they could plan training workshops that address these types of issues head on. That way, the participant would be spared some growing pains and eased into various roles and responsibilities for which they have a higher capacity to carry out successfully. Hopefully, this could be done while engaged in activities that aid their personal and professional development at the same time.

So, how is all of this balanced out or integrated into the working life of an individual? What are some additional tools that could help soften the edge and jolt of new political consciousness and activity and lessen stress?

Become a Student of History

By studying History and revolutions, as well as the life stories of ordinary people who lived during extraordinary times, one can learn of the personal sacrifices and inner struggle certain individuals made during different time periods. This information is important because it shows historical patterns and cycles as well as individual responses to different stressful situations. Biographies in particular, as well as autobiographies are very helpful in understanding how historical events swept people up and how these otherwise ordinary people responded in extraordinary ways.

Read Tom Paine and the early American Revolutionary ideals. Read about Toussaint L'Overture and Dessalines in Haiti in 1804, Louise Michel and the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolution of 1917, Spain in 1937, The Mau Mau in Kenya, the African National Congress and Pan Africanist Congress in South Africa, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Fidel, Che', and the Cuban Revolution, Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, Amilcar Cabral in Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, Mao in China, Ho in Vietnam, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and John Brown fighting against slavery in the U.S. and the struggles of the fifties, sixties, and seventies. Read the stories of the Black Liberation Movement's rank and file. Read about Bayard Rustin and the ideas of Audre Lorde and June Jordan. Read about Angela Davis. These stories are instructive and inspiring at the same time.

One book that covers revolutions of the 20th century is *Evolution and Revolution in the 20th Century* by James and Grace Lee Boggs. Written over forty years ago, it critiqued each twentieth century revolution from the point of view that humanity was at a crossroads in terms of revolutionary approaches and the time had come for an approach that was looking at the whole human being, not just material needs. Whereas former revolutions were trying to ‘get something,’ the second American Revolution may actually entail giving up some things. (10) From this humanistic critique, they arrived at advanced theoretical positions on struggle that involve not only action, but also philosophically re-imagining the entire society. Many facets of this work are taking place in Detroit, Michigan. Learning of these various struggles allows one to see historical patterns as well as assess different strategies in the present day.

Another helpful book is *Movement of Movements* by Tom Mertes. Mertes enlists personal accounts on various modern-day struggles and creative approaches from the ‘global south.’ Whether it is fighting water privatization in South Africa, or land reform in Bolivia or the attempts at ‘horizontalism’ in Argentina to lessen hierarchy and class division, Mertes identifies several examples of fluid, non-centralized forms of struggle. One example that has combined some aspects of traditional revolutionary struggle with the more egalitarian forms of today is the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. Sub-comandante Marcos, the Zapatista leader who has since stepped down, has articulated a far more inclusive ideology of struggle in a series of lectures titled, “*Them and Us*” (11). In these set of prose poem/letters, he draws lines of differentiation between the small numbers of people actually in power and their acquisitive, exclusive desire to sequester wealth and power regardless of the price the earth has to pay-and everyone else. This new paradigm draws a great deal from indigenous cultural concepts of egalitarianism, respect for the earth and its creatures, emphasis on spiritual connectedness, and cooperative political and economic systems.

Young activists with historical awareness might not feel so alone at times if they understood the struggles of those preceding them. Furthermore, if they understood that they were also part of a global movement that is building momentum daily they could feel more secure knowing they are actively participating to make a difference.

Be Proactive Politically

Find causes, big or small that one can be consistent with and in which small, periodic victories can be had. Choose issues that are doable and attainable, even as one incubates large visions of the future. This keeps one involved and continuously invigorated and revitalized. If one is a health professional, administer free health or spinal screenings, including blood pressure, glucose levels, cholesterol and others. The oil sands fracking issue in Canada is something worth one’s time as well. Cooperative housing to provide equitable shelter is an issue that is easy to rally around.

And of course, the question of homelessness, education, hunger, police brutality, community violence, and anti-militarist demonstrations are also important issues. By staying active in local issues, one can be more prepared to respond to national and global issues. In this way, the political activities are integrated into a lifestyle and as social remedies. For example, working among people on the street is, at times, a good remedy for depression. In most cases, the people the activists are serving or working with have had a much harder time making ends meet and surviving than the activist has ever had. Working with them can often put the activist's problems in proper perspective.

Develop a Holistic Philosophy and Spiritual Practice

Political reality is just one version or aspect of reality. There is nature. There is the vast spiritual realm of the unseen. There is indigenous shamanism where nature and the unseen come together; there are also emotional/psychological, gender, civilized versus non-civilized issues and paradigms as well. And of course, there is formal religion. A holistic worldview would have a compartment for all of these including science. Whereas one can only do one or two spiritual practices well, one's philosophy can be broad. With a broad holistic philosophy, one can understand that there is a spiritual component that undergirds life and it can possibly be approached and partly understood in various ways. The spiritual practice transforms the individual from the inside and allows them to experience the spiritual component for themselves and be tethered to something universal and cosmic, and less susceptible to constant change. Praying, meditating, singing, reciting, chanting, dhikr, dancing and ecstatic movement, affirming, even extreme exercise- all can serve as spiritual practices. In the context of political consciousness and activism, both the holistic philosophy, which recognizes outward and hidden forces, and spiritual practices, which anchor faith in direct experience and produces an inner light, are needed to turn the euphoria, anger, depression, anxiety, and fear into productive fuel for one's work.

Maintain Personal Relationships

Since the beginning of human evolution, relationships have been key. Whether in hunting and gathering societies or high-tech meeting rooms like today, the basic needs for humans to have positive interdependent interactions among each other has been 'hard wired,' so to speak by the fact that the vast bulk of our time on earth, more than several hundred thousand years, has been spent in small family based units strung together by kinship and mutual needs. Furthermore, Positive Psychology now lists personal relationships as one of its components for happiness. It is a sense of making a difference in the world along with having basic needs met that are the main ingredients outside of genetics in the transmission of genetic characters from parent to offspring (12).

Therefore, it is not surprising that activists who have strong interpersonal and intergenerational relationships with family or others appear happier, and are often healthier. They laugh more and laughter lowers stress hormones like cortisol. If one lives in a community, not only does one have their own eyes and ears noticing signs and symptoms, one has everyone else's who may see things one cannot see oneself. This becomes more important as activist gets older. Additionally, relationships encourage people to be more active because people use sophisticated and intricate body language while speaking face to face with each other. Interaction engenders movement, and thus, movement engenders health and life.

A Healthy Diet

The importance of proper diet cannot be overstated. The old adage, 'you are what you eat,' is real. Yet, the issue of diet sparks quite a bit of controversy. Many activists over the years have changed their diets, particularly from a heavy meat-based diet to one with less or no meat, with many variations in between. And activists have cut down on the amount they eat to incorporate fasting into their regime as well. This prevents excessive weight gain as well as toxic buildup of wastes in the body. The idea in diet change is simple; eat the foods that provide the most nutrients, energy, and protein for the least amount of energy to digest with the least toxicity (13). And most generally acknowledged it that the most harmful item in the American diet today is sugar in its many forms such as high fructose corn syrup, sucrose, dextrose, 'natural sweeteners' which over stimulates the pancreas to secrete insulin and its depletion causes diabetes. Sugar is also the main culprit in obesity and severely overweight individuals and combines with cholesterol in blood vessels causing plaque that can cause blood clots. Its elimination by itself would improve health greatly. Next are genetically modified organisms (an organism whose genetic material has been altered using genetic engineering techniques) or GMO's. More than ninety percent of the soybean and corn crops now have GMO's in them and their ingestion is causing 'leaky gut syndrome,' among other illnesses. These organisms have been ruled safe, but they are designed to make pests stomach's explode upon being eaten and are increasingly being linked to a host of new, strange digestive symptoms and complaints including autism, infertility, allergies, birth defects, and even cancer. The only way to completely avoid GMO's is to eat organic vegetables, particularly soybeans and corn (14).

But the issue of different diets is still controversial. Some activists have stated that vegetarian and vegan diets are elitist in that poor people often cannot afford organic vegetables or shop at expensive health food stores. The vegetarians counter that a meat-based diet uses more carbon based fuels and water, pollutes the earth and vegetarians eat less thus making it more affordable. Lierre Kieth adds a twist by writing in the *Vegetarian Myth*, that vegetarians are also guilty of destroying the earth because of their dependence on agriculture.

In her view, large scale agriculture has shifted the entire focus to clearing off of huge swaths of land, which itself disrupts the environment, and pollutes the water supply with chemicals (15). According to this view, even organic farming is disruptive. Those who advocate personal raised plot organic farming on very small family units or in collective backyards argue that their approach prevents the large-scale destruction of the agricultural process.

Regardless of the differing point of views, the idea that proper eating and supplementation is essential for health is being increasingly accepted. Also, what is being accepted as well is the idea of under eating or limiting the caloric intake as a means of increasing the life span, as well as increasing vitality. Other tips include, use of Distilled water over tap water and the benefits of eating at least 50% or more raw foods daily. Eat foods with the highest water content first, with any and all liquids either 30 minutes before or 3 hours after. Chew food a minimum of twenty times before swallowing. Drink eight to twelve ounces of carrot juice a day unless diabetic, and take omega threes, turmeric, co enzyme q10, and wheatgrass juice. Fast on water or diluted carrot juice at least monthly, unless diabetic, and take a self-administered high enema with distilled water. Read classics on diet and nutrition by T. Colin Campbell, Max Warmbrand, Alvina Fulton, N.W. Walker, Rudy Ballentine, Paavo Airola, Max Gerson, RA Amen, Nana Kwaku Opare' and others.

A key concept around food and diet is eating according to one's activity. This means that if one is a professional athlete, one has to eat entirely different than an office worker. The protein needs and overall caloric intake would be different and attention would have to be paid to those details if maximum performance is to be achieved. This approach to diet is sensitive to body demands on a daily basis and fine tunes the food intake, and with that in mind, always staying mindful of eating food that digests quickly and has little to no toxicity. If there is less stress on the system in terms of toxic elements in the diet, the body is able to withstand more stress without negative effects on health.

Regular Exercise

As a reliever of stress as well as an overall boon to health, exercise is vital because it entails movement. Movement is essential for life. Exercise keeps the immune system working properly, blood pressure in check, and helps maintain lowered fat levels, preventing obesity and the host of problems associated with it. Exercise enables the mind to function better as increased oxygen levels help maintain alertness and ward off fatigue. The joints of the body function best when allowed to move properly and humans are 'wired' to walk and run very long distances without stopping (but not on concrete!). Humans have the most capacity to sweat of any creature and sweating seems to have a rejuvenating and cleansing affect.

Indigenous cultures worldwide include sweats, which are passive forms of exercise, to spiritually as well as physically cleanse the body, mind, and soul of impurities and toxicity of all kinds. Saunas inside modern gyms can serve a similar purpose. Even soaking in hot water is a form of passive exercise because the heat increases the heart rate while relaxing muscles and joints. The womb-like warmth of water is comforting and reassuring emotionally, which reduces stress.

Proper exercise also influences mood. Dopamine receptors (are a class of G protein-coupled receptors that are prominent in the vertebrate central nervous system) function better with exercise and dopamine is central to experiencing happiness. After twenty minutes or more of continuous exercise, the body produces its own cascade of powerful mood changing chemicals within the brain such as endorphins, enkephalins, endocannabinoids, and other endogenous opiate-like chemicals. These substances originally evolved to allow humans the pain free ability to walk vast distances and then track animals over days at a time. They prevent and or relieve depression-like symptoms too and could help with anxiety because they influence the part of the brain that controls feelings of happiness.

Weight training and martial arts training are good in tackling fear because the personal power of physical strength, confidence, and self-defense capability carries over and translates into intellectual, emotional, and spiritual strength and confidence. Exercise also improves memory and prevents memory loss. Learning new exercise routines or maneuvers create new synapses in the brain and these new connections keep the brain active and vibrant. Exercise further gives increased and continued physical control and the feeling of being able to do things for oneself, even into advanced age, is empowering. Feeling empowered obliterates feelings of fear, anxiety, depression, anger, and euphoria, or the stress of political consciousness.

Enjoying Nature

Experiencing nature firsthand calms individuals down because the body's master clock that controls the circadian rhythm, which in turn, controls sleep and many other unconscious functions, is reset. The rushing wind, running water, and cacophony of insect, bird, and animal sounds merge into a soothing symphony for the human nervous system. Slow, deep, abdominal breathing, while in nature, additionally adds vitality to an excursion in nature and makes one focus on the present moment as the increased Oxygen intake invigorates the mind and body. Long walks in the woods, along a beach, or even in the desert, are relaxing because they tap into our innate, nomadic instinct and encourage contemplation. It is very natural to think on the intricate and symbiotic nature of the world and universe while in nature. The immensity of that juxtaposition puts the stress of politics and life into proper perspective.

Life is more important than political struggle, yet without political struggle, one is not able to experience life to the fullest. Furthermore, in today's world, appreciating and experiencing nature constitutes a political act. Wilderness and old growth forests all over the world are disappearing and must be protected. But people will not fight to protect them if they have not experienced their wonder, majesty, and awe-inspiring beauty for themselves.

Chiropractic, Acupuncture, Massage, Bodywork

Even though they are not as important as the things one can do for oneself, the services of professionals are sometimes helpful. Stressful emotions as well as events tend to store in 'muscle memory,' a physiological term used to describe the excess tone and firmness of muscle tissue as a result of the tightening, clinching, and shock of a traumatic event (16). The event can be emotional, physical, or even imagined as the body's response is the same: to tighten, spasm, and in time, become knotted up in distinct areas of muscular tissue denoted by extreme tenderness on palpation. Over time, these areas can become very painful and cause spinal joints to become 'fixed,' or immobile. Chiropractic adjustments are very effective in restoring joint motion and once the muscles are signaled that the joints are moving properly, they relax and go back to their normal length and tone. The massage work after the adjustment restores proper circulation and removes extra toxins that have built up in the tissue as a result of its function being disturbed by the traumatic event. Often, people will re-experience the trauma emotionally or at least be moved to reflect on it while receiving the bodywork, which has an energetic balancing and emotionally cleansing effect. It also relieves pain and removes stress.

Conclusion

Even though political consciousness and activity is stressful, not being politically conscious or active is even more stressful in the long run. The buildup of tension and anger, coupled with the denial of white supremacy, racism, sexism, and capitalism on a conscious level while internally seething is a recipe for disaster. The psychic stress and a bad diet and lack of exercise could result in a host of illnesses. Obviously, one does not have to espouse radical African American politics to be healthy or have effective avenues to deal with stress. But if one is a member of the huge majority of people who daily experience discrimination and oppression for any number of reasons (which most African American men and women experience) and refuse to connect the dots as to why things are the way they are, but have all the physical symptoms of stress and stress induced illnesses, their illusion is clouding reality. Life is stressful either way. At least being politically conscious and understanding what comes with it, an individual knows '*what they are signing up for.*'

Additionally, understanding the stress that accompanies both political consciousness and activity helps in managing what some might call ‘contradictions.’ Anyone who lives in a capitalist, market driven, technologically oriented, and scientifically and militarily obsessed nation like the United States and yet still has political consciousness and has not totally bought into the culture of ‘conspicuous consumption,’ and the idea of ‘American Exceptionalism,’ has to make decisions daily as to how much of that system they will participate in. To do political work long term, particularly while raising children, some financial and home stability is needed. Ironically, unless independently wealthy, the only way to have that measure of stability is through work that requires either training in a specific skill or a college education. The loans from Wall Street institutions incurred getting the training and education that often demand working so-called stable, middle class jobs or professions inside institutions one claims to want to totally transform. For some, this might be considered an unresolvable contradiction. For others, they realize that nothing is perfect, and “actions are according to intentions” (17). Many realize that having the dexterity to participate in some parts of a dominant culture sufficiently to survive while holding fast to one’s core principles and values allows them to work efficiently long term, and not get burned out.

Ultimately, it is about preventing cynicism and disillusionment. Understanding the stress of political consciousness could help prevent both because individuals would have a better sense of the multiple layers of adult responsibilities awaiting them and understand how those responsibilities could possibly wear them down. Hopefully, this knowledge could help them better manage and integrate all aspects of their life holistically while participating to their capacity. Sooner or later, everyone has to ask him or herself whether they did as much as possible to make the planet a better, more just, more livable place and were they willing to risk something for that. Many who were active in the struggles forty, fifty and sixty years ago or more were willing to risk a great deal and did. It is due to their sacrifices that we are as far along in our struggle, despite our obvious needs at this crisis time. They had no roadmap to wholeness. In many ways, we do.

Presently and increasingly in the future, we will have to approach political consciousness and activism like a yogi. In yoga, all the physical postures known as hatha yoga have one purpose-to strengthen the yogi’s body and nervous system to withstand the shock of an intense spiritual experience and endure up to eighteen hours a day of meditation (18). Likewise, the politically conscious and active person needs to prepare their body and nervous system as well, by having group support, a clear philosophical and political vision, personal health practices, and techniques of inner development. In this way, people are physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually prepared for the long haul.

Note

This commentary is an excerpt from the book, *Never Give Up: A Developmental Manual for African American Men* (Berkeley, California: Imhotep Publications, 2015) by K. Tutashinda.

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