WE-REMEMBER's EXPLORATION GUIDE

Introduction

Purpose

We Re-Member (WR) recognizes events and practices that have traumatized Black people in the western world as a result of the Middle Passage, enslavement, and the legacies of these institutions. WR also understands that culture, Spirit, generational wisdom, and community have played an integral part in the collective ability of Black people to survive the trauma and atrocities inflicted. WR's guides are designed to 1) assist the user with identifying how the legacies of enslavement and colonization covered in the materials have impacted the user on an individual level, and 2) to assist the user with examining how culture, Spirit, generational wisdom, and community have shaped the users' and their ancestors' ability to survive, thrive, and self-actualize under the circumstances. Furthermore, WR hopes that the guides will assist the user with thinking through how culture, Spirit, generational wisdom, and community will support the user with shaping their future and the future of the collective Black community.

WR's guide is a tool intended to support Black people in the western world explore how enslavement and its legacies have influenced their predecessors and their own individual lived experiences. The guide is broken into two segments. The first segment reviews *general approaches and techniques* founders used to explore their ancestral lineages and the sites visited. The second segment is focused on *specific events, locations and themes*. The second segment is designed to provide a framework to support the exploration of the users' personal, as well as the communities' collective, experiences.

Disclaimer

WR's Exploration Guide may trigger strong emotions and thoughts. We recommend that users of this guide connect with a mental health professional if this journey triggers anxiety, depression, or any mental or emotional health concerns.

Background

WR launched in 2019 with the purpose of developing a framework for assisting the descendants of chattel slavery[1] in the western world process their communal, ancestral and individual experiences to promote re-membering[2] and progress among these descendants. To do this founders intended to 1) explore locations that represent over-arching themes and experiences in the lives of enslaved people and their descendants, 2) track key learnings from explorations, and 3) create a framework through the production of a documentary, guides, programming and

[1] From here on "the descendants of enslaved people" and "descendants" will refer to the descendants of African and Black Indigenous people who experienced chattel enslavement and/or its legacies of anti-Blackness in the western world.

[2] Re-membering in this guide is used to mean "the act of restoring what has been dismembered by chattel slavery and its legacies."

technical assistance to support descendants with understanding their own lineages and identify opportunities for re-membering, celebrating, progressing and/or healing.

Acknowledgements

WR recognizes that this initial rendition of Segment 1 of our framework reflects founders' personal lineages as this was the starting point for the research. WR's hope is to grow into a body of research that touches the myriad of points throughout the African-Diaspora in which our ancestors traveled and landed. WR aims to create a central hub that other descendants can access, contribute to, learn from, and exchange their own "re-membering" guides and experiences.

WR acknowledges (fa real fa real) and honors that founders' journey has been a Spirit led one. Founders not only leaned into the spiritual practices that they had at the time they started their journey, but it is important to note that founders' spiritual practices also expanded throughout their experiences researching for WR. If you have a spiritual practice, founders highly encourage you to incorporate that into your personal WR journey.

Framework for Exploration

Themes WR explores in Segment 1 of this guide:

A. Getting started
B. Getting your elders to talk
C. Accessing culture spaces
D. Finding people to interview
E. Processing the information you learned
F. Addressing affordability and/or flexibility to travel

Themes WR explores in Segment 2 of this guide include:

1. Chattel Enslavement
    - Various experiences of enslaved people
    - Conditions of enslavement

2. Rebellions and Resistant Efforts
    - Haitian Revolution
    - Christmas Day Rebellion
    - Nat Turner's Rebellion
    - Denmark Vessey's Rebellion
    - The German Coast Rebellion
    - Harper's Fairy Rebellion
    - Jamaican Maroons Resistance
    - Saint Maroon/Louisiana Maroons
    - Civil Rights Movement
    - Walter Rodney Riots
    - Rastafarian Repression at Pinnacle

3. Legacies of Enslavement
    - Displacement (Enslavement; Trench Town; Katrina; Gentrification)
    - Prison Industrial Complex (Angola Prison)
    - Extrajudicial Killings (We Charge Genocide Again- curriculum)
    - Eugenics and Reproductive Rights (Sterilization)
    - Proximity to Whiteness as a Means of Survival

4. Culture Preservations
    - Maroons (Nanny Town)
    - Mardi Gras Indians (House of Dance and Feathers)
    - Life Yard (Kingston Jamaica)

5. Reparations
    - University of the West Indies- Center for Reparations Research
    - Sterilizations
    - Federal Reparation Hearings
    - California Reparations Recommendations
    - San Francisco Reparation Hearings and Recommendations

WR explores these themes across a timeline which spans the 1600's to present day to understand the intersectionality and metamorphosis of the aforementioned themes. While movements to end chattel enslavement were successful throughout the late 1700's and the 1800's, WR knows that discriminatory and assimilative practices are a legacy of chattel slavery that continue. WR hopes this guide assists users with identifying and addressing how these legacies perpetuate in their personal lives, familial ties, and communal ties. Moreover, WR hopes that this project creates a space for us to collectively work to deconstruct these legacies and collectively Re-Member.

Segment 1: Approaches and Techniques

Between 2019 and 2022 WR hosted several events and exhibits to showcase findings. At each event WR created space for discussion and during each discussion someone always asked at least one of the following questions: *How did you*…..

A. Get started?
B. Get your elders to talk?
C. Access the culture spaces?
D. Find People to interview?
E. Process the information you learned?
   and…….
F. What if I can't afford or have the flexibility to travel?

This section reviews founders' findings on techniques and practices that supported their exploration efforts.

A. What founders did to get started:

1. **Founders approached their research like a puzzle- We hope you like puzzles!**
   Founders' WR journey has been comparable to putting together a puzzle. They collected pieces, in no particular order, and as they continued to collect pieces, the storyboard started to reveal itself. They started identifying trends, developing more substantive and narrowly tailored questions, and having epiphanies which led founders' to embark on this project with more intention.

   Examples include:
   - Learning about Mary Ellen Pleasant's life and legacy (a local San Francisco historical activist and Mother of Civil Rights in California) led to learning about Marie Laveau's life and legacy, which led to learning about Louisiana Maroons.
   - Learning about the Haitian Rebellion and Jamaican Christmas Day Rebellion, gave insights into the strategies used to implement Denmark Vesey's rebellion, which influenced Nat Turner's rebellion, which also had commonalities with the German Coast rebellion and Harper's Ferry rebellion. Harper's Ferry Rebellion was financially supported by Mary Ellen Pleasant.
   - While these rebellions are often discussed as individual and disconnected efforts, and some even being described as "failures", they are all interconnected and can be described as fruitful efforts given that they all contributed towards the push for emancipation.

2. **DNA Testing**
   WR acknowledges that doing a DNA test is a personal, layered, and possibly controversial decision. WR does not hold a specific stance on whether it is important to complete or forgo a DNA test, however it is the first task founders completed to begin their WR journey. Founders' tests revealed information that they found useful, and they imagine that when they complete the final leg of their journey (Going to West Africa), knowing something about their African ancestry may be helpful.

3. **It's okay to start where you are at…. even if it's not part of your ancestry…. it's still part of your story.**
   Founders did not begin their research at their parents' or grandparents' home. Nor did they trace back to the furthest known ancestor and start there. When they started their research they started where they live- in the Bay Area. While neither of them had historical or generational ties to the Bay Area, as Black people who were raised in the Bay Area they are clear that Black[3] trailblazers and changemakers in the Bay Area

[3] We use "Black" and "Black people here and throughout this guide to reference the descendants of African and Black Indigenous people who experienced chattel enslavement in the western world, and to refer to Black people who migrated to the America's and experience anti-Blackness a result of chattel enslavement and its legacies. We acknowledge that this a narrow definition, and that many Indigenous and melanated people identify as Black who do not share in this historical experience. This definition is not meant to undermine their identity.

significantly shaped their life experiences and ability to thrive in that specific geographic location. Here are some suggestions for unpacking Black history right where you are:

- **Talk to professors, librarians, and others' who study Black history for a living.** There are people whose profession is to preserve and discuss Black history. There are programs where these professionals are waiting for you to show up so that they can share what they already know. As an example, when founders began this journey one of the first places they visited was a library at the African American Art and Culture Complex in San Francisco. There, they were able to chat with a staff member and identify a wealth of resources the space held on Black activists and entrepreneurs who contributed to the development of the city. WR encourages you to show up with questions in spaces designed to educate.

- **Visit local sites and pick someone you are drawn to.** As locals to the Bay Area founders started their journey choosing a figurehead, Mary Ellen Pleasant (MEP), who was a historical figure in the Bay Area. It wasn't important that MEP was not related to them. What was important was that MEP did work that they honor and respect, and her legacy continued and continues to serendipitously reveal itself as they do their research. MEP's impact reveals how inter-connected Black history is irrespective of where in the African Diaspora one has their roots. MEP's legacy ultimately ended up teaching founders about the underground railroad, movements for equity, the intersectionality of race, sex, class, and movement work, efforts to support emancipation, African spiritual practices- all in context of California yet intersecting with the larger diaspora.

B. <u>Getting your elders to talk:</u>

Founders discovered that approaching elders with narrowly tailored questions about the struggle was not as productive as 1) spending time with elders and allowing them to lead the conversations, 2) asking them about *their* lives as opposed to historical trends and events, and 3) inquiring about their achievements- going to school, meeting a partner, raising children, creating a home, overcoming obstacles, etc. It can be tempting to approach elders with narrowly tailored questions involving struggle and trauma; for example, questions like "do you remember the civil rights movement?," or "what happened to the family land?," or "did you experience segregation?" These type of questions may evoke trauma and the reality is that it's human to want to escape your trauma. Consider that as people get older they tend to think about their legacies and want to share the good. If you inquire about the good, like most attention grabbing narratives, there will likely be an antagonist and/or conflict referenced that will present an opportunity for you to probe more. Further, this inquiry structure can be beneficial for the listener because the listener is not only learning about the struggles, but they are also learning techniques and methods to manage comparable struggles. Tips founders found helpful include:

- **Offer to drive an elder to an appointment**, do yardwork with them, do chores for them, or bring them lunch. A lot of the information founders gathered was gathered during *long* car rides, preparing and/or sharing meals, and running errands. They found that during car rides they frequently passed places that jogged memories and opened conversation which *naturally* invited them to ask narrowly tailored follow-up questions. Learning to cook something encouraged stories about how "so and so" used to make this, and then there were more opportunities to ask about "so and so." These opportunities helped founders discover things as simple as names and as complex as to why decisions were made to leave children with relatives.

- If you want to ask specific questions, **frame questions so that they evoke joy** such as:
  - What was your favorite game as kid?
  - Where did you go to school?
  - How did you learn to make your famous poundcake?

  Soft questions allow elders to control how deep they want to go.

- **It's ok to sit in silence**. Silence can be a mode for relationship building. Further, awkward silences tend to eventually turn into conversation opportunities if you sit long enough. Sometimes elders are thinking about what they want to share and rushing the process may undermine your outcome.

- **It's ok to sit with people when they are sick/delirious/in another space.** Sometimes it seems awkward to visit people when they are sick- we suspect we may be bothering them and/or that they wouldn't realize that we are there. You'd be surprised how often the silence turns into a space where an elder begins to channel, share dreams, or share random memories. In short, be with people when they are sick. It can be comforting to them and it may teach you something insightful.

C. <u>Accessing Cultural Spaces:</u>

1. **Visit your ancestral land in person, if you can. And visit with an elder or a local, if you can.**

   Founders went to visit Marion, Alabama (where Cairo's maternal grandmother is from) and Manchester, Jamaica (where Natasha's father and paternal grandparents are from). When planning their visits founders were intentional about visiting with people who were still there. Visits allowed them to gain a broad understanding about the lives of past generations, and allowed them to better understand intergenerational connections.

   When visiting Manchester Natasha was able to visit the land her grandmother was raised on by her grandmother's great-aunt and great-great grandmother. When visiting this land she heard stories of extended family members such as her grandmother's Uncle Matthew who was known for quoting King Solomon and was unapologetically

cultured and Black. She also learned that the family had a maypole which was considered a big deal. Natasha couldn't help but wonder if her family's use of the maypole on her family land had any relation to a "center pole," often associated with spiritual work in belief systems like Voodoo. Further, while talking to an elder Natasha also learned of African practices that her family sustained on that land such as 1) referring to the head woman of the family as "Muma", and 2) sending the oldest grandson of each family to live with Muma so that those children could be reared as leaders. Natasha also learned that her family stories allege that, 1) one parcel of land she visited is the land her family inhabited after being emancipated in Jamaica, and 2) Natasha's grandmother's, grandmother's, mother or father (one of those ancestors) came to Jamaica from Africa. This information taken together helped Natasha understand the African and matriarchal influences within her family.

Black history is a history that is deeply embedded in oral traditions. Walking the land with and galvanizing the memories of your elders can be a soul-nourishing and insightful experience. If you cannot make a visit with an elder, show up anyway. You may be surprised who you meet- neighbors, shopkeepers, church folk who can tell you information about your family and/or communal practices that you recognize. The ancestors are at work- ask them to guide your journey!

2. **Visit museums and research centers with curiosity.**
   While founders are usually goal-oriented people with clear objectives, for the purpose of *this* research they found it more beneficial to arrive to locations with loose objectives, and instead opted to allow questions to arise from the exhibits, speakers, curators, and conversations with staff they met.
   For example, when they started their research outside of the Bay Area their first visit was to a museum in Birmingham. They entered the museum with the intent to observe and be present. Yes- they were moved by the exhibits, but they were most intrigued by a woman who worked at the museum. This woman initiated interaction with founders by asking several questions about them and the purpose of their visit. Eventually this woman opened up about her experience growing up and living in Alabama. She shared with them how she lived through the civil rights movement, the intersectionality of racism and classism within the Black community at the time of specific atrocities like a local church bombing in Birmingham- aka "Bombingham", how folks went to Tuskegee "Brown" and came out "Black", and the post-traumatic stress she experiences today evidenced by how she just doesn't quite trust the "progress" and still fears for her children in the 21st century.
   When founders visited the House of Dance and Feathers they went with the intention to learn more about Mardi Gras Indians. However, they left with an understanding that culture is integral to survival and that they needed to do more direct research on how "culture" has been just as important to the survival of Black people as economics, organizing, and community.

3. **Invest in Tours**

   People often don't know what they don't know, therefore they do not know what questions to ask or how to frame questions. Curated tours are a really great way to allow yourself to be a sponge and soak up information. When visiting family in South Carolina, Natasha decided to go on a Gullah-Geechee tour. She knew nothing about the community prior to the tour except that there was a shared a common oppression as a result of being Black in the western world. On the tour she learned about Denmark Vesey's rebellion (whose rebellion in South Carolina we will discuss later in our materials), she was able to identify how some of the Gullah-Geechee languages used the exact same terminology as Jamaican Patois (a language she grew up hearing), she learned how much of the iron work throughout the American South have Adinkra symbols embedded in them, and how Black and Indigenous people had a practice of painting porch ceilings blue to keep negative spirits away- all facts that connected with other aspects of founders' research.

   During a WR exploratory journey in Alabama founders visited Dr. King's home in Montgomery. They studied the life of Dr. King at SJSU (shout out to Dr. Millner who had an entire course on Dr. King), but they still learned several new matters of interest. Nevertheless, a highlight of that tour was that they met Dr. King's friend and neighbor, Mrs. Vera Harris. Mrs. Harris and her daughter, Dr. Valda Montogomery, invited founders to sit and talk with them. They were able to absorb first hand testimony of people who organized with and lived next to Dr. King.

4. **Prepare Offerings**

   Bring an offering to show your respect for the work, the people doing the work, and the Spirits leading and protecting the work. This journey isn't just about you finding answers- it's also about you re-membering. Part of re-membering is engaging and relationship building with others that hold this work. Bringing an offering is spiritual universal principle 101- you must sow a seed to reap a harvest. If you want a blessed experience, you bring a blessing. Period. It doesn't have to be monetary or grandiose. It just needs to be intentional and thoughtful- fruit for an alter, beads of an orisha, flowers an elder likes, a desert, supporting a gift shop or craft that an artisan sells…… you get the idea.

D. <u>Finding People to Interview:</u>

When founders reached out to people, they had a mission- launching WR. If you are reading this guide, you probably have joined this mission. Take this guide and let people know that you are on a journey to unpack your story. Here are a few talking points:

1) I am on a journey to learn more about my familial history and the collective history of Black people, *or* I am working through this WR guide in an effort to unpack my own familial history,

2) By learning the history of other Black people, I suspect I will be able to find similarities and gain a better understanding my own families' journey,

3) I'd like to talk to you because I am particularly interested in knowing your thoughts on [fill in the blank].

By having the mission at the forefront of the work, founders were able to help speakers "get in where they fit in."

Places to begin:

- Local museums
- Culture spaces
- Libraries/Librarians
- Your elders or elders in the community
- Tour guides
- Local activists and community leaders
- Professors
- Ask your friends if they know anyone doing work you are interested in. Natasha told her aunt in Jamaica about WR, who told her neighbor who worked at the University of West Indies, who then took her to Trench Town, Life Yard, and the Center for Reparations Research. So much of this research would not have happened if her aunt didn't tell her neighbor.

E. What if I can't afford or have the flexibility to travel?

Start where you are! The African Diaspora is broad. If you are there, there were likely others' before you. Look into who some of the first Black people to arrive to your hometown were? What brought them there? How did they maintain? Founders' parents migrated to the Bay Area. By researching the history of Black people in the Bay Area founders were able to study the groundwork that was laid by others', and how that created opportunities for their families. WR started with exploring who Mary Ellen Pleasant was. This inquiry took us to the location of her home, her gravesite, to the African American Arts & Culture Complex, which intersected with several parts of their research (rebellions/resistance, the role of culture in preservation, connections to the Deep South and Caribbean, etc).

Digital libraries!!! Before going to Jamaica Natasha spent quite a bit of time on the National Library of Jamaica's website. She also visited other relevant sites and looked at videos on YouTube. Spending this time researching online was instrumental in forming questions and themes, identifying locations to explore, and thinking through who founders wanted to connect with and why before they arrived.

The "gems" are in the books! Founders paid attention to the literary resources available everywhere they went. At Mary Ellen's Pleasant's gravesite Cairo noticed the book, "From Marie Laveau to Mary Ellen Pleasant". This book revealed MEP's connections to the South, the reasons behind her work, and the connections she had to spirituality and culture. While at University of the West Indies Natasha learned about Walter Rodney and picked up his book- *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Founders also observed that so much of Black

culture and its connection to Africa is embedded in folklore so, Natasha also picked up Anancy stories. Cairo picked up the story "The Witch of Rose Hall" at the Rose Hall gift shop. While promoted as a fictional story, the story and tour provide a historical narrative for the quality of life enslaved people were living which led to the factual Christmas Day Rebellion in Jamaica. In short, founders encourage you to sit with the books and stories. Afterall, we are a people who historically honored Griots for a reason.

F. <u>Processing Information:</u>

While founders' WR experiences have been incredible, insightful, affirming, and soul edifying, they have also been emotionally tough and overwhelming. Sites visited like plantations/great houses, the Legacy Museum and Angola Penitentiary may evoke strong emotions. Moreover, topics discussed in our curriculum such as displacement, eugenics, and the killing of Black bodies are enraging. To help the user of this guide process these varying emotions founders suggest the following:

1. **Journal your reflections at the end of each day….. but if you are too exhausted to journal, voice record your reflections and email them to yourself.** Visiting sites suggested in this guide can leave a person with information and emotional overload. While journaling is a great way to process information and feelings, journaling may also require energy you don't have at the time you set aside to reflect. Because you don't want to forget your initial impressions, founders suggest recording your thoughts and revisiting them later. Get your thoughts out after your visits and expand and organize them at a later time.
2. **Process in cycles or in sub-parts.** The informational and emotional overload will likely need to be processed multiple times. The first reflection will likely be raw and emotional. The second reflection will likely be more personal. The third reflection may be intellectual and global. The fourth reflection may inspire an idea or a call to action. Founders encourage to you review your reflections multiple times in order to maximize the benefit of your experience.
3. **Partner with someone on your explorations so you have a processing partner**. Going on this journey with another person is invaluable. "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another (Proverbs 27:17)." Partnering can help with identifying connections, diversifying perspectives, normalizing feelings, confronting pain, and neutralize the awkwardness of entering new spaces.
4. **Engage in a therapeutic or self-care practice, or have one prepared in case you need it.** As founders went on their initial WR journey they quickly realized their experiences triggered and array of emotions that "sat" in their bodies. Soon after they began thinking about ways to process the information they were gathering. They discussed engaging in somatic therapy, created journal prompts and discussion questions, and engaged in alter work and spiritual practices. Founders encourage you to create a self-care plan prior to visiting suggested sites. The second segment of this guide will include suggested discussion and processing prompts to help guide the user process their experience. Note that suggested prompts are not intended to treat mental health needs or act as a therapeutic practice. If you find yourself

anxious, depressed, or experiencing strong emotions after visiting suggested sites, founders urge you to seek mental health support from a mental health professional.

G. <u>Additional Recommendations:</u>

1. **Alternate visiting intense and inspirational places**. The legacy of survival and resilience of Black people during and after the Middle Passage and enslavement is intense and inspirational. While founders' goals include highlighting the truth of the harm and injustices experienced by Black people, goals also include showcasing the legacies of culture, creativity, genius, joy, and "sauce" that Black people have inherited from generation to generation. Founders' hope is that this guide assists with empowering, healing, and feeding the souls of Black people harmed by generations of injustice. To do this, founders suggest alternating your visits between intense and joyful spaces. For example if you are visiting New Orleans, after visiting the Whitney Plantation and going on a "Katrina Tour", go visit the House of Dance and Feathers, follow a second-line, or go check out the Voodoo Spiritual Temple. If you are in Jamaica, after visiting Rose Hall and the Seville Estate, use the next day to go visit Maroon communities or go to Kingston and see the art and community at Life Yard. Or if you go on the Trench Town Culture Yard Museum Tour, ask for a guide that goes by Blackie; he was Natasha's tour guide her first visit and he makes the tour entertaining as well as informative (substantiated on gpsmycity.com).
2. **Research spaces ahead of time so that you can mentally prepare.** Several locations in this guide provide comprehensive exhibits- they do not simply share information, rather they organize exhibits and/or experiences in a way that assist the visitor with imagining that they have been transported back in time and/or facilitate direct interactions with people who can share experiences. If you arrive to the location unaware that the matter you are there to learn about provides an interactive experience, you may experience shock.
3. **Preplan activities that foster joy at the end of each day.** Whether you visit the sites discussed in the second segment of this guide or you read the books and/or watch the documentaries referenced in the materials, you are likely going to be left sitting with some hard-truths and raw feelings. Make sure that you plan to do something at the end of each day to foster joy. Generations of Black people survived because they practiced joy through dancing, music, art, cooking, worship, embracing nature, and so forth. WR suggests you have a plan to practice joy too!

Note: Segment 2 and its subparts will be released as we release the counterpart discussions in our podcast. Thank you for listening and following!