

Q & A



Healing Racial Trauma *The Road to Resilience*

January 7, 2020 | \$17, 192 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4588-0

Sheila Wise Rowe, a professional counselor, exposes the symptoms of racial trauma to lead readers to a place of freedom from the past and new life for the future. In each chapter, she includes an interview with a person of color to explore how we experience and resolve racial trauma. With Rowe as a reliable guide who has both been on the journey and shown others the way forward, you will find a safe pathway to resilience.

Treating the Unhealed Wounds of Racial Oppression

What experiences led you to write *Healing Racial Trauma*?

Sheila Wise Rowe: In 2016 my family and I moved back home to America from South Africa. We weren't prepared for what would greet us. The social climate had changed; there was a coldness and callousness that permeated the mood of the country. Six months later there were times I wondered: Could true racial reconciliation even be possible with all the anger and venom spewing out of TV and social media? A week after the shootings of African American men and police officers in St. Paul, Dallas, and Baton Rouge, I felt as if I was constantly on the verge of tears. A year after the election the racial tension in the country continued to escalate and each day insults and assaults were coming from the White House.

The signs of unprocessed trauma were evident in my responses, which ranged from silence to oversharing, survivor guilt to being easily triggered by the latest news cycle. It became evident that many people of color were similarly hurting and in need of healing from the racial trauma from these and other acts of racism.

People of color know that racism and racial oppression is real. We've felt the sting of each racist incident, whether it was overt, covert, intentional, or unintentional. A Quinnipiac University poll in 2017 found 66 percent of nonwhites—Black, Latino, Asian, Native, Pacific Islander, and other races—believed prejudice to be a “very serious” problem in America. Researchers have also noted a spike in the number of people of color who regularly experience racism, racial and vicarious trauma, microaggression, and gaslighting.

While there are books that address racial reconciliation, few help people of color to heal from the effects of racism and racial trauma or help them navigate current events that can be retraumatizing. Christians of color need to know that they are not alone. They need to hear the stories of other believers of color who have struggled with racism and racial trauma, yet have found hope and healing in Christ. People of color need books that share practical strategies to heal and walk forward—reconciled to their white sisters and brothers in Christ.

Describe what readers will find in your book.

Sheila: *Healing Racial Trauma: The Road to Resilience* offers a new take on reconciliation that is not all about crossing racial divisions. The book addresses a neglected area in the Christian market and is an answer to the felt need of people of color who experience racial trauma and its devastating effects. Unhealed wounds, traumatic racial histories, microaggression, and daily assaults on dignity and character, over time the effects of racism accrue, hampering any movement toward racial reconciliation.



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Sheila Wise Rowe (Tufts University, Cambridge College, M.Ed.) is a truth-teller who writes about faith and emotional healing. She advocates for the dignity, rights, and healing of abuse and racial trauma survivors and offers training and support to them and also emerging and established leaders. Sheila has lived in the United States, Paris, France, and Johannesburg, South Africa. For over twenty-five years she's been a counselor, educator, writer, spiritual director, and speaker. She's a member of the Community Ethics Committee of Harvard Medical School, a resource for its teaching hospitals. Sheila is a member of Entrusted Women, Spiritual Directors of Color, and Redbud Writers Guild. Her book *Healing Racial Trauma* was awarded a 2020 Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Award, Christianity Today Book Award, and a *Publishers Weekly* starred review. Her other books include *Young, Gifted, and Black*; *Healing Leadership Trauma* (co-authored with her husband, Nicholas Rowe); and *Seeds of Racial Healing*.

"They have treated the wound of my people carelessly," writes Jeremiah, "saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace." In *Healing Racial Trauma*, I offer a challenge to white Christians: their rush toward peace and reconciliation has ignored the emotional burden carried by their sisters and brothers of color. *Healing Racial Trauma* will help people of color to heal from racial trauma by sharing real-life stories, lamenting the harm, mining the resources of prayer and Scripture, and gaining practical tools to grow in resilience and navigate ongoing racism. The book will also help white Christians understand the extensive damage that racism causes and how they can be better allies and activists.

What do you hope readers take away from your book?

Sheila: Readers will

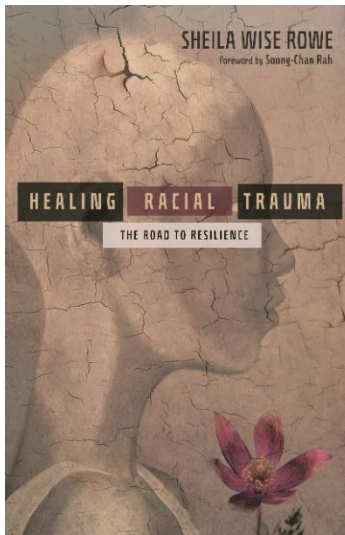
- learn how historical, generational, and personal racial trauma has affected the lives of people of color,
- learn how lament, grieving, and releasing anger and bitterness are a necessary part of the healing process,
- learn about God's heart for people of color, and how to release unforgiveness and find healing and our hope and future in Christ,
- acquire new skills to deal with future racism, microaggression, and vicarious trauma,
- give white Christians and nonbelievers insight into the experiences of people of color to grow in empathy and obtain tools to be a better allies and stand in solidarity, and
- learn how to press in to deeper community, fellowship, and true racial reconciliation.



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“I Felt Seen, Understood, and Empowered”

“*Healing Racial Trauma* is outstanding. This book forced me to pull back the makeshift Band-Aids, which on the surface hid some deep-seated wounds from the racial trauma I had experienced. Reading this book reminded me of the stories my Black grandparents would share of racial tension and outright hatred with my siblings and me at a very young age. Tears filled my eyes while I was holding on to every written word. I pressed beyond the immediate feelings that welled up within me to find solace and embrace authentic healing. This book is a must-read if you are serious about healing racial trauma. I give Sheila Wise Rowe a standing ovation for this life-altering book!”

Gail Dudley, author and speaker

“*Healing Racial Trauma* is one of the most revelatory, fiercely honest, and hope-filled books that I’ve ever read. My dear friend Sheila Wise Rowe performs open-heart surgery on those wounded by racial trauma by acknowledging their stories, validating their pain, and offering the only holistic solution: Christ-centered healing. Regardless of your ethnic background, if you read this book, you will be changed.”

Dorothy Littell Greco, author of *Making Marriage Beautiful*

“*Healing Racial Trauma* is a magisterial gift for those who have suffered harm as persons of color, and it is also a revelation for those whose whiteness has served as a pair of blinders from racial trauma. Sheila Wise Rowe brilliantly exposes, narrates, honors, and calls forth from Scripture, clients, and her own life, the stories of violation and the power of hope. There are few books I have read where I wept and raged and was humbled and offered a vision of what it might be like to fulfill the Lord’s prayer: ‘Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’ This is a must-read for all who hunger for righteousness.”

Dan B. Allender, professor of counseling psychology, founding president of The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology

“With a Christian’s worldview, a counselor’s expertise, and a survivor’s personal perspective, Sheila Wise Rowe weaves together her personal memoir with history, social science, and a biblical framework to offer a pathway for healing to those who have experienced racial trauma. She also brings a Galatians 6:2–like advocacy for all who pray for healing and restoration of our brothers and sisters.”

Kristie Anyabwile, Bible teacher and author, editor of *His Testimonies, My Heritage: Women of Color on the Word of God*

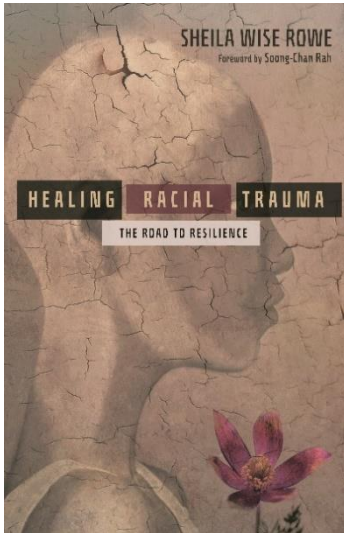


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"I hope that Black Christians, all Christians of color, and their families will use this book as an inspiration, affirmation, and a guide to addressing the bitter pieces of our stories. I expect White Christians to find a resource of patient assistance on their own road to resilience and deliverance from the vestiges of whiteness and its demonic grip on the global household of God."

Michelle Higgins, cohost of *Truth's Table* and executive director of Faith for Justice

"With honesty, truth, wisdom, and grace, Sheila Wise Rowe brings a fresh and distinct perspective in our conversation on race. The reality of trauma on a social psychological level has been missed in this dialogue, and Sheila is the necessary corrective voice, offering heartbreaking and gut-wrenching stories that still manage to offer hope and healing. I have had the personal gift of sitting under Sheila's teaching, and now you also have that opportunity."

Soong-Chan Rah, Milton B. Engebretson Professor of Church Growth and Evangelism at North Park Theological Seminary, author of *Prophetic Lament*

"As a bicultural Indian American woman, I felt like this book was written for me. For far too long anti-Asian racism and racial trauma among Asian Americans like me have been dismissed as trivial and not worthy of serious address. But in Sheila Wise Rowe's *Healing Racial Trauma*, every person's story matters, and every racial wound is given equal attention. There is room here for people of every culture, ethnicity, and skin color to learn how to heal from racial trauma and navigate ongoing racism and systemic oppression in ways that can make us more resilient. I felt seen, understood, and empowered, and I know you will too."

Michelle Reyes, church planter, author, and founder-editor of the Art of Taleh website

"I facilitate conversations about race that often address the history and effects of racial trauma on people of color. There have been lots of books available as resources for the '101-level' conversations, but Sheila Wise Rowe has provided a much-needed resource for those who are ready to go further. As a Black woman living in the US, *Healing Racial Trauma* is a balm to my own wounds from racial trauma."

Nilwona Nowlin, author and speaker

"Sheila Wise Rowe taught me much in this well-written, vulnerable, and heart-shaping book. As the pastor of Sheila's multiethnic church, I've too often wanted to rush my Black and Brown brothers and sisters to forgiveness, ignorant of the process of healing that must surround and support them. Her work here helped me understand something that hadn't clicked for far too long, and I'm grateful. Shining a light without shaming, I read this book and learned from an author who loves her readers, whoever they happen to be."

Adam Mabry, lead pastor of Aletheia Church, Boston, and author of *The Art of Rest: Faith to Hit Pause in a World That Never Stops*

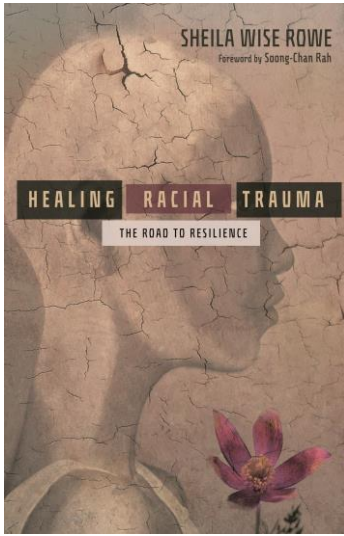


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A Definition of Racial Trauma

Racial trauma is real. Every day in the United States and across the world women, men, and children of color experience racism and witness lives and livelihoods devalued or lost as if they do not matter. The result is that people of color are carrying unhealed racial trauma.

Racial trauma can be defined as the physical and psychological symptoms that people of color often experience after a stressful racist incident. These personal or vicarious incidents happen repeatedly, causing our racial trauma to accumulate, which contributes to a more insidious, chronic stress. When we experience a threat, our brains are wired to prepare our bodies to fight or flight. This stress response causes our nervous system, hormones, mind, and body to be on high alert. We believe we need to take immediate action against an actual threat. However, if the risk or the traumatic stress is not dealt with, our brains and bodies don't fully stand down, and we get stuck in an endless loop. Our traumatic stress triggers a physical and emotional response that then feeds our traumatic stress.

According to the report titled *The Impact of Racial Trauma on African Americans*, the effects of racial trauma include fear, aggression, depression, anxiety, low self-image, shame, hypervigilance, pessimism, nightmares, difficulty concentrating, substance abuse, flashbacks, and relational dysfunction. People of color also carry unhealed racial trauma in their bodies. The physical symptoms include hyperactivity, heart disease, headaches, and poor concentration.

The sin of racism affects us severely and deeply, yet we remain silent or in denial, a response we learned from our ancestors for whom silence meant survival. While we continue to suffer in silence, bearing the wounds of racial trauma exacts a toll on us. There are various ways that people of color experience racial trauma: historical, transgenerational, personal, physical, vicariously, and through microaggression, gaslighting, and moral injury. Unpacking each of these will provide a window into how racial trauma has been transmitted in our own lives and the damage it does to our mind, body, soul, spirit, and communities.

Maybe you were raised to follow the rule that whatever happens in our house stays in our house. This message of secrets and silence was not limited to us and our household but seemed to also to refer to the history of our people. That message was like yeast that spreads and now affects how we live and move and have our being.

—Taken from chapter one, “Wounds”



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