ROOTED IN RESILIENCE:
THE POWER OF COMMUNITIES TO CHANGE THE HIV NARRATIVE

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FEATURING THE CRITICAL THINKING AND CULTURAL AFFIRMATION (CTCA) FRAMEWORK

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CONTEXT:
WHY DOES THIS MATTER

- HIV has disproportionately impacted Black communities from the start.
- Narratives pathologized Black people instead of addressing cultural and historical context.
- Mainstream (white-led) responses ignored Black histories, challenges with racism/white supremacy mythology and related realities.
- White gay communities mobilized—reclaiming the pink triangle, launching ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). (modeled on the 1960s Black civil rights movement).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PINK TRIANGLE

SILENCE=DEATH
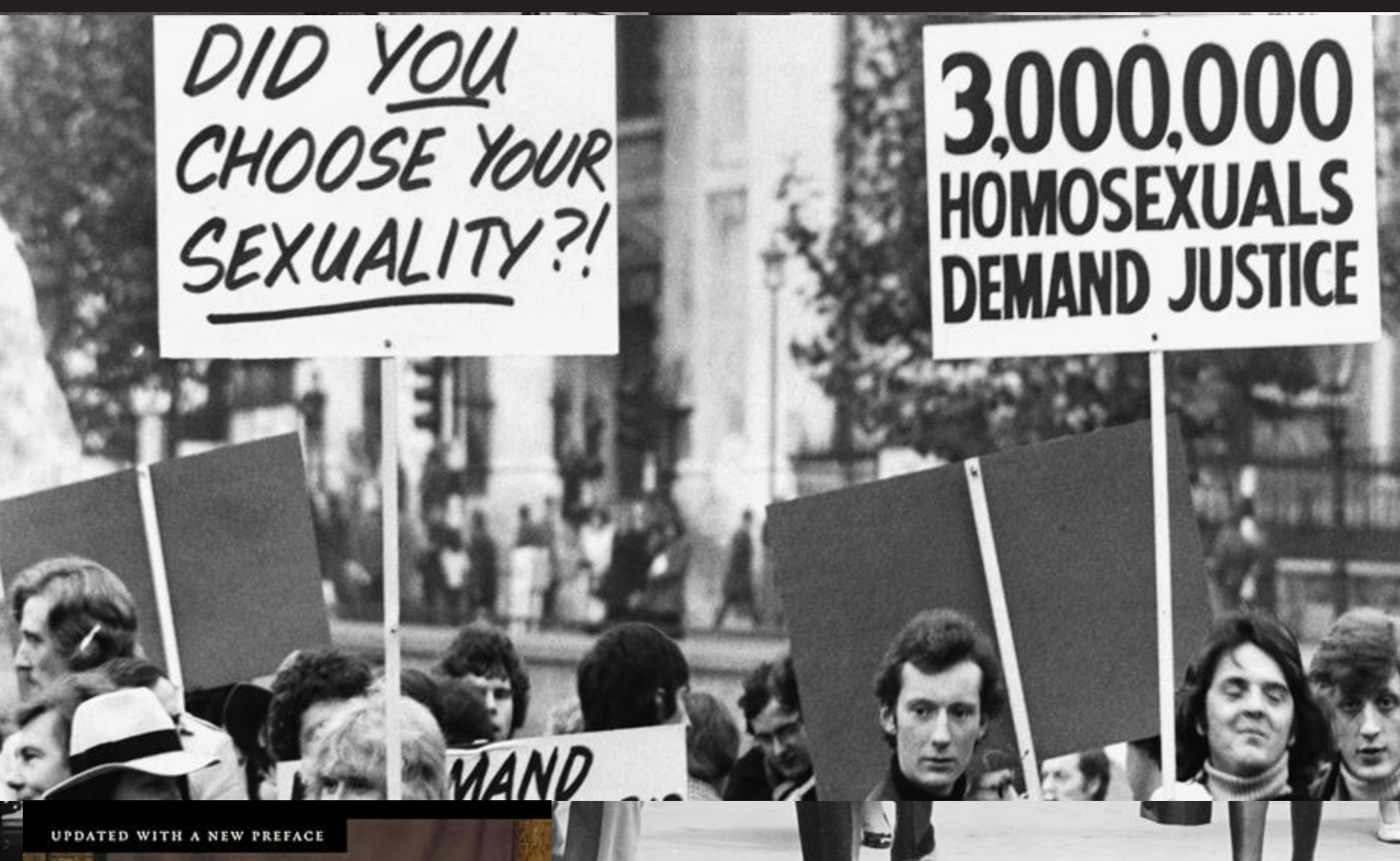
CONTEXT: WHY DOES THIS MATTER

- Black communities were denied similar platforms; Haitians and others of African descent were falsely blamed as the 'source' of HIV.
- This deepened stigma unique to Black people, undermining motivation for prevention, care, and self-preservation.
- Key Point: White gay communities gained visibility and victories; Black communities faced blame, erasure, and systemic neglect.
- Yet resilience endures: Black communities hold cultural knowledge and strength to reclaim—and surpass—the HIV narrative.
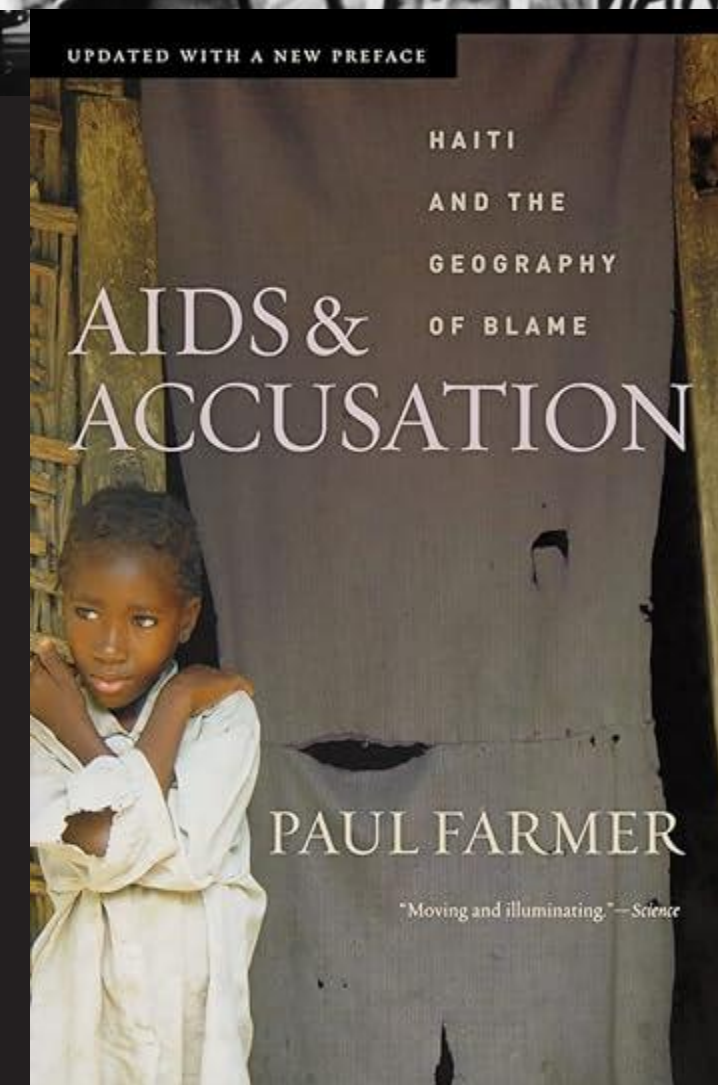
Discussion: How have HIV narratives in your experience centered or excluded Black communities? |
What impact does stigma have on prevention and care in your community?

CHALLENGES WE FACE

STRUCTURAL RACISM

Shows up through inequities in leadership, healthcare trust, and resource stability. These systemic barriers limit access to care, weaken community confidence in institutions, and create cycles of disadvantage. The impact is especially harmful for Black communities, where racism compounds issues like HIV stigma, health disparities, and economic insecurity.

INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

Internalized oppression manifests as stigma, silence, self-hate, and what some call a "trauma trance." These patterns are the result of systemic racism being absorbed and turned inward, shaping how people see themselves and their worth. For Black communities, this internal struggle deepens the harm of external oppression, making healing and empowerment even more urgent.

FAILURE OF THE "ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL"

One-size-fits-all messaging often relies on gay-identified messengers, which has alienated many Black men. When messages don't reflect diverse identities, experiences, and cultural realities, they can miss their intended audience. This disconnect reinforces mistrust and limits the reach of vital health and social resources.

Results:Disengagement, Poor outcomes, Sustained disparities

Discussion: What examples of structural racism do you see in healthcare today? | How does internalized oppression show up in our families, schools, or communities? Where do we see one-size messaging failing to connect with diverse Black men?

Trauma Trance = unhealed historical & present attacks (racism, violence, neglect) → cycles of trauma

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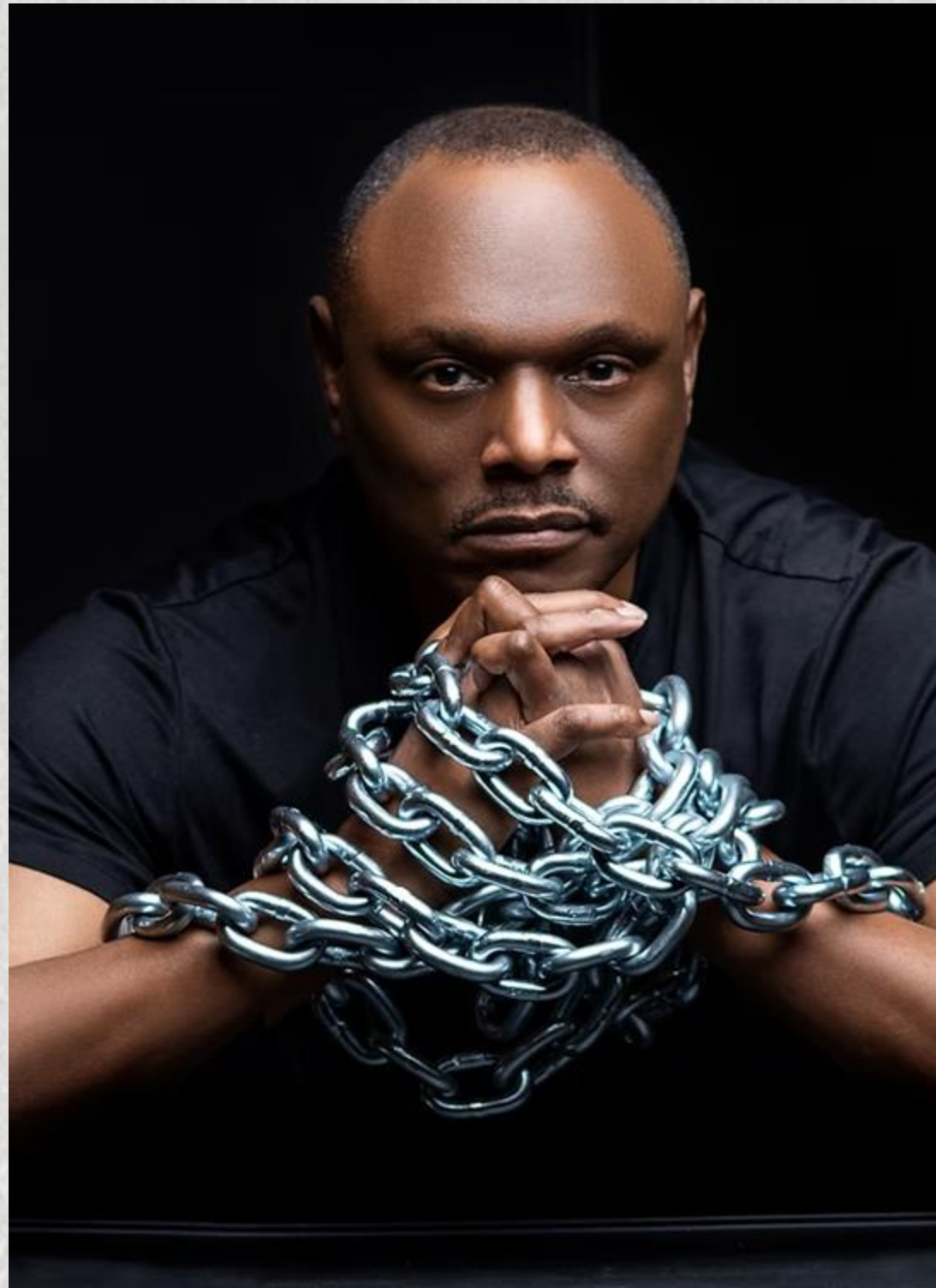
"A trance is an altered state where people operate on autopilot, shaped by habit or conditioning."

Breaking the Trance:

Breaking the trance requires:
• Awareness
• Healing
• Cultural affirmation
• Compassion

Victimization May Cause:

• Internalized oppression
• Live in mistrust
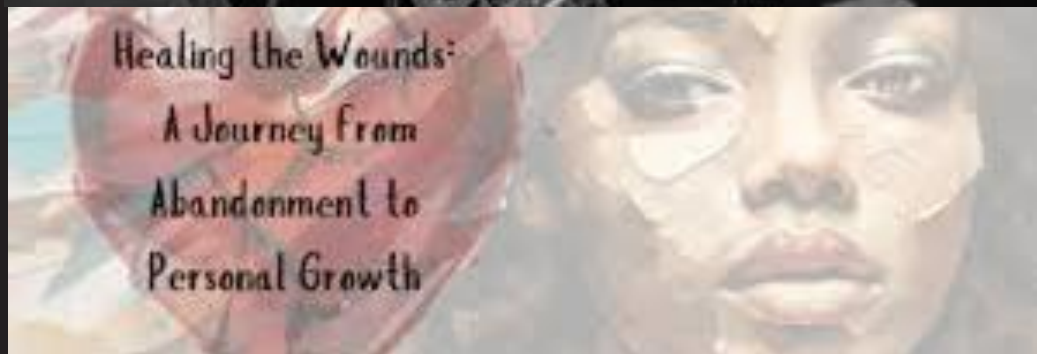• Become anti-Black violators themselves

TRAUMA CYCLE

HISTORICAL TRAUMA

Historical trauma is the collective pain passed down from slavery, segregation, and systemic racism. It shapes communities by embedding fear, loss, and mistrust into the social fabric.

PERSONAL WOUNDS

That collective trauma becomes personal through experiences of discrimination, neglect, or violence. Each wound reinforces feelings of isolation, shame, or unworthiness.

REPEATING PATTERNS

Unhealed wounds often lead to repeating harmful behaviors in families and communities. These patterns keep cycles of mistrust, conflict, and survival-based responses alive.

INTERNALIZATION

Over time, oppression is turned inward as stigma, silence, and self-hate. This internalization deepens the damage, making people believe the lies of inferiority.

VIOLATION

Eventually, pain spills outward and becomes violation, where those harmed unconsciously harm others. This perpetuates the same traumas we are trying to escape, continuing the cycle until healing interrupts it.

BREAKING THE TRAUMA TRANCE

AWARENESS

Awareness is the first step in breaking the cycle of trauma — recognizing how history and lived experiences shape behavior today. It creates space for honest reflection and opens the door to change.

HEALING

Healing involves addressing wounds both individually and collectively. Through therapy, community care, and spiritual grounding, healing rebuilds trust and restores balance.
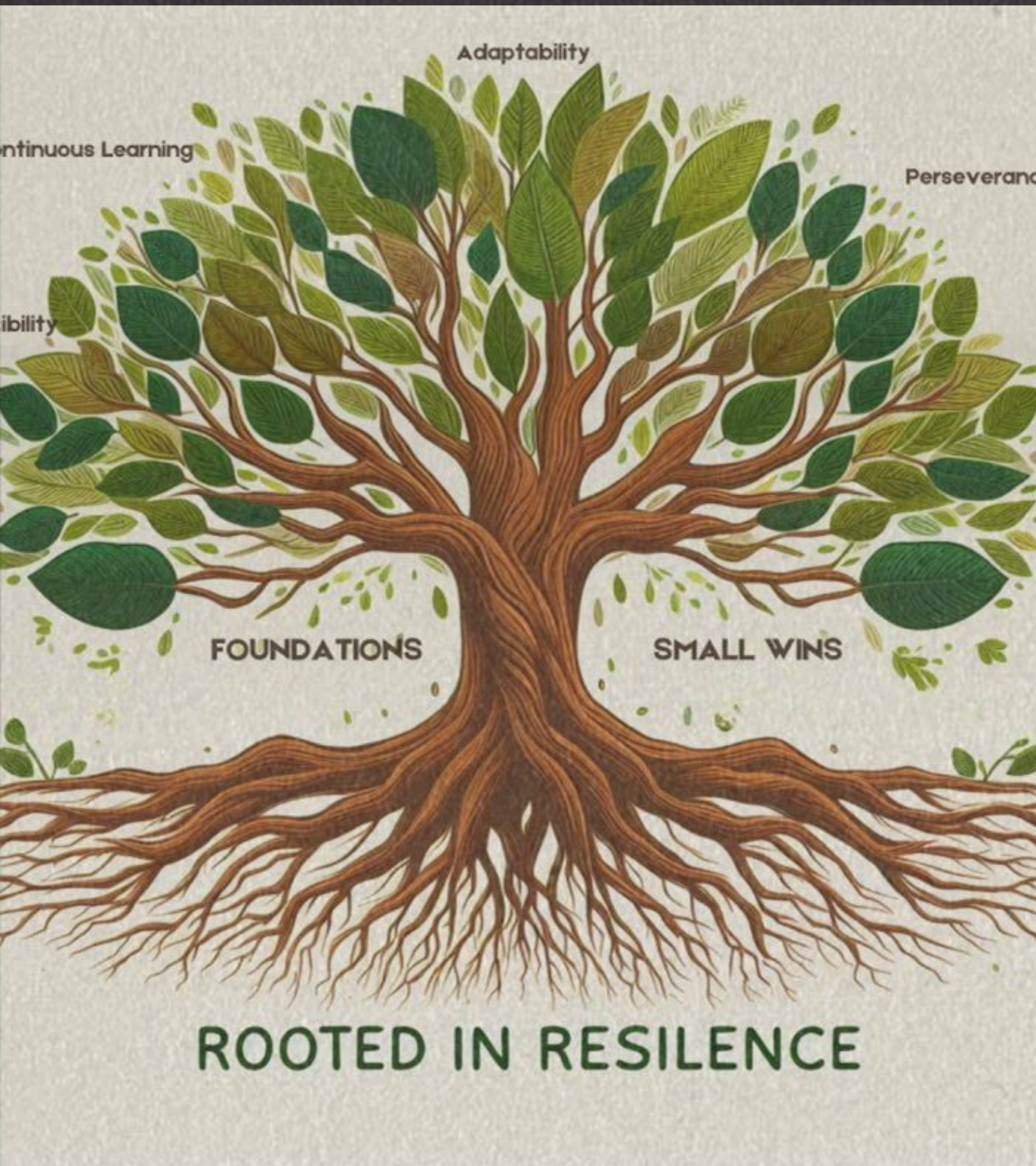

CULTURAL AFFIRMATION

Cultural affirmation counters internalized oppression by reclaiming pride, identity, and heritage. It reminds Black communities that strength and wisdom are rooted in our culture, not erased by oppression.

COMPASSION

Compassion allows us to extend understanding to ourselves and others who are also navigating pain. It transforms cycles of harm into cycles of support, creating room for collective liberation.

ROOTED IN RESILIENCE

- Black communities have always created survival and healing strategies.
- Resilience = creativity, affirmation, critical consciousness, and collective care.
- Real HIV prevention and broader health equity must be rooted in this cultural power.

Discussion: What cultural strategies of resilience do you see in your community today? |
How can these practices be better supported or amplified?

CTCA FRAMEWORK

- **Critical Thinking & Cultural Affirmation (CTCA):**

- Proven effective.

  - Field-tested, evaluated model with proven efficacy.
  - Breaks cycles of internalized oppression and trauma trance.

- Equips participants to:

  - Decode systemic racism and anti-Black messaging.
  - Address Black anxieties about sexuality and gender nuance.
  - Critically self-evaluate, unlearn oppression, and problem-solve.
  - Affirm cultural intelligence and agency.

Discussion: How does critical thinking help us decode systemic racism? | Why is cultural affirmation just as important as medical treatment in prevention? | Where could this framework be applied outside of HIV (schools, workplaces, mental health)?

CALL TO ACTION

- Funders: Invest in culturally rooted, community-led solutions.
- Policymakers: Recognize CTCA as a proven public health strategy.
- Communities: Reclaim the power to unlearn dysfunction and shape new narratives.

CLOSING REMARKS

- Rooted in Resilience. Powered by Community. Driven by Truth.
- Together, we can change the HIV narrative for generations to come.