

00:00:28 Ama-Robin

Welcome to Espresso Talk today. This is a space where we have uncommon conversations about the chaos of living black in predominantly white spaces, and we discuss how to curb, control and calm that chaos.

00:00:48 Ama-Robin

I'm your host, Ama-Robin, and I'm having my turmeric coffin today for this informative and powerful show. Just so you know, I'm a Black empowerment educator and a resilient coach, so I am ready to dive deep into this.

00:01:05 Ama-Robin

Today we are going further into the theme of making a way out of No way. In our last episode, we celebrated Black resilience and highlighted the remarkable achievements of Black people who defied the odds to carve paths to success.

00:01:29 Ama-Robin

But today we're shifting our focus to examine the broader effects of this phenomenon and its impact on our health and well-being. Last week was all about Black resilience and resourcefulness and determination, and that was fantastic.

00:01:50 Ama-Robin

We're going to go there a bit this week too, but before we dive in, hit that subscribe button if you haven't already. And if you're feeling this show, share it with your fam, your crew, your circle, everyone in your community.

00:02:07 Ama-Robin

Now grab that espresso or tea. Tea drinkers are welcome here too.

00:02:13 Ama-Robin

And close the door behind you. We're going to get deep and we're going to get real.

00:02:18 Ama-Robin

And I hope that y'all are ready for this aquaba, my dear brothers and sisters in my beloved gender neutral and gender nonconforming folks, we're back and we'll let's get started. There's a lot to cover, a lot of chaos to talk about.

00:02:42 Ama-Robin

So let's begin. The last time I was here, I was talking about, you know, making a way out of no way.

00:02:51 Ama-Robin

And I talked about the foundation of making a way out of no way, how we as black Americans have built so much and accomplished so much and done so much and changed, I'm going to say changed the country, uplifted the country. And we did this.

00:03:10 Ama-Robin

How we did it with resilience. We did it with resourcefulness, and we did it with determination.

00:03:20 Ama-Robin

And you know, this is often kept from us. So once we really feel what we have done and what we've accomplished, we carry those words around like a badge of honor.

00:03:32 Ama-Robin

And I can tell you it is honorable and there's no reason why we shouldn't. But I do have to say, as I was thinking about they're making a way out of no way and all that we've accomplished, I also realized that there is more to the story.

00:03:53 Ama-Robin

There always is. And Speaking of stories, I got one for you.

00:03:59 Ama-Robin

I've discussed this story before, maybe about a year ago, but I think about it a

lot because, well, I used to think it was a legend. It wasn't true, but it absolutely is, and there's a lot to learn from it.

00:04:13 Ama-Robin

It is the story of John Henry. Well, John Henry, and it's a true legend because it's a legend because it really, John Henry was bigger than life.

00:04:24 Ama-Robin

I'll go to the story. John Henry was a former enslaved person, I believe in West Virginia.

00:04:30 Ama-Robin

Anyway, he was, he was a digger. He would actually, you know, a miner.

00:04:37 Ama-Robin

He would dig through mountains and he had his two spikes and his two pickaxes and he would push through, he would dig through mountains. He and the other people working around him.

00:04:49 Ama-Robin

Well, you know, as time went on, you know, and innovations developed and industrial industrialization happened, they, a new machine was developed and that was the steam engine. So the owners of the of the mountain of the mining agency, they were thinking it's actually better for us to use the steam engine than to use, you know, humans to dig through mountains.

00:05:15 Ama-Robin

But everyone said, well, look, John Henry, he's big, he is strong, he's stronger than any steam engine. Well, the owners of the company didn't, didn't believe that.

00:05:27 Ama-Robin

So they did a test it more like a race. And so they got up one day and they said, OK, John, you're going to we need people.

00:05:36 Ama-Robin

We need to dig through this mountain. And John Henry was going to race the machine, the steam engine.

00:05:45 Ama-Robin

And so that morning they got up and, you know, they fired the the gun and the race began. Who was stronger?

00:05:53 Ama-Robin

And there was John, John Henry with his two pickaxes. He was pushing, pushing, pushing.

00:05:57 Ama-Robin

He was chopping through. He was pushing.

00:05:59 Ama-Robin

He didn't stop for water. He didn't stop even to rest.

00:06:02 Ama-Robin

And the steam engine was right beside him going digging, digging, digging through. Well, you know, then all of a sudden, everyone's at the other end of the mountain, side of the mountain, and there's all this dust and there were rocks flying everywhere.

00:06:16 Ama-Robin

And what happened? John Henry stepped out of that mountain.

00:06:21 Ama-Robin

He had beat the steam engine. John Henry had beat the machine.

00:06:28 Ama-Robin

And that's actually one of the ways he became a legend. And he raised his hands up in victory because he knew he was stronger and faster than any

kind of machine.

00:06:38 Ama-Robin

And then what happened? Well, John Henry dropped dead right there.

00:06:45 Ama-Robin

He had pushed himself and his body so hard, even for that short time that it had taken us its toll. And his body just couldn't take it anymore.

00:06:54 Ama-Robin

And he collapsed and he, he died right there. Well, there's a lot to learn and a lot to unpack there in that story, because John Henry showed that he could work and and put out an extra effort, an extraordinary effort, and he could beat any machine and he beat the machinery in that machinery I see as racism.

00:07:19 Ama-Robin

And that's something a machine that many of us face every single day. And what do we do?

00:07:27 Ama-Robin

Well, we work twice as hard, we stay up twice as long. We work on weekends, we don't get any sleep, we skip meals.

00:07:36 Ama-Robin

We push harder and harder and harder so that we can't also beat the machine. Now, what does this do?

00:07:46 Ama-Robin

What does this do? This also causes problems for us.

00:07:53 Ama-Robin

And that's what John Henry the the lesson that we can get from John Henry now fighting the machinery of racism and white supremacy is something that

we just do all the time. We do it without thinking of it.

00:08:11 Ama-Robin

We make that way where there is no way. And at the end, you know, we also do have problems.

00:08:21 Ama-Robin

And people say that, well, everybody has problems. Well, the machinery of white supremacy, white supremacy and racism are different than most people.

00:08:33 Ama-Robin

Most non black people or non people of color face face and they don't understand what it is like to face that machinery and even to beat the machinery has a has a consequence. So here's my question to you.

00:08:51 Ama-Robin

Is making a way out of no way damaging your health? Is fighting the machine hurting your health?

00:09:02 Ama-Robin

I am so glad you asked that. And now is a good time to, I think, to take our first break.

00:09:10 Ama-Robin

Let's take our first breather break here. Kind of give us some time to think about and digest the story of John Henry.

00:09:16 Ama-Robin

This gives us a chance to breathe also. And when things get intense, I like to breathe.

00:09:21 Ama-Robin

I hope you do too and I'll see you in a minute. And I know y'all know that I love

this song so I'm going to listen to that.

00:09:32 Ama-Robin

But I'm going to think about what does it take to beat the machine. I'll see you in a minute.

00:09:40 SPK_2

{ Song Break }

00:10:05 Ama-Robin

Asante Sana for staying with me. I hope you all did a little breathing and maybe a little thinking.

00:10:12 Ama-Robin

I did a bit of both. Now let's get back to it.

00:10:17 Ama-Robin

John Henry beat the machine. John Henry made a way out of no way, but in the end, he died.

00:10:28 Ama-Robin

And let's think about this. The constant stress and pressure have contributed in many ways to high levels of chronic illness, early mortality, and mental health struggles.

00:10:39 Ama-Robin

Within our community. This phenomenon is known as John Henry ISM, and it reflects the physical and emotional toll of striving for success in a system that denies us opportunities, in a system that wasn't made for us, and then a system that is basically just a white supremacist system.

00:11:02 Ama-Robin

So I remember speaking, I had several conversations, very interesting conversations with Professor Sherman James. And he was an epidemiologist

from Duke University.

00:11:13 Ama-Robin

And he actually coined the term John Henry ISM because he saw that black people were doing so much, working so hard to buy land to, to get an education to, you know, be upwardly mobile to get to they, they're working very, very hard at various different their occupations because they wanted to succeed. And he saw that there was, they were also dying younger and they were having suffering from chronic illness.

00:11:40 Ama-Robin

So he actually studied this and he used John Henry, the John Henry legend, John Henry story, as you know, as an example. So John Sherman James defined John Henry ISM, and I'm going to not use my words because I mean, he's done this for years.

00:12:00 Ama-Robin

We'll use his and John Henry ISM. He defines it as a coping strategy where people put in extreme effort to overcome challenges and racism, often leading to significant physical and mental health issues due to the constant stress.

00:12:21 Ama-Robin

Now he says that there's this high effort coping that we use to navigate the system of white supremacy. To we, like I said, we work twice, 3 * 4 times as hard.

00:12:31 Ama-Robin

We work on weekends, we work late into the night. We struggle, struggle and toil and push through in order to beat the machine, in order to be successful in our quest for success.

00:12:43 Ama-Robin

And it causes us health problems. Professor Smith identified, you know,

cardiovascular disease as being a major, major, major problem in the Black community.

00:12:54 Ama-Robin

Hypertension a leading, it's a leading, leading cause of disability and premature death among Black Americans. Now we're often blamed for other things, you know, saying that, oh, we don't exercise enough, we don't eat right.

00:13:09 Ama-Robin

OK, there's some of that too. But but there's also this driving the constant striving for success.

00:13:18 Ama-Robin

John Henry ISM You know, this kind of stress, these stress related illnesses can also cause anxiety and depression, even diabetes. All of these are very prevalent within the black community and particularly among African Americans who are at a professional level because there's so much that we have to take.

00:13:40 Ama-Robin

There's so many obstacles we have to get around to maneuver and so many microaggressions and anxieties and, and you know, obstacles put in our way and these cause stress related health problems. So this making a way out of no way is fantastic.

00:13:58 Ama-Robin

The course, the resilience, the resourcefulness, the determination, those are all fantastic things, But let's remember that's not the end of the story. There's also the stress, the health related problems, the stress related health problems that can't come along with it if we don't do something about it, if we ignore it, if we just keep pushing, pushing, pushing through.

00:14:23 Ama-Robin

And that's what Professor James worked so hard to show that it isn't all about,

you know, these other the other issues of, of health and nutrition. I mean, nutrition, which is important.

00:14:36 Ama-Robin

He says that it's important. But there's also the beating the machine, the cost of beating the machine that we work so hard and invest so much in doing that is take wearing down our bodies, wearing down our minds, wearing down our families, you know, so, So what are we going to do about this?

00:15:00 Ama-Robin

And I'm so glad you asked that, or at least you let me ask it because that is our next, next stop. And that's going to be where we go after this next break.

00:15:11 Ama-Robin

I hope that you see too, that making a way out of no way is fantastic. It's important.

00:15:18 Ama-Robin

It's something that we have have done and we have to do, but we have more to do than that. Well, let's take one last breathing break here and then we're going to wind it down.

00:15:33 Ama-Robin

But I've got some information here. We're going to focus on what kind of strategies and coping tools you can use that are healthy, that can help you to avoid, you know, this early mortality and the chronic illnesses and these, the high stress levels.

00:15:50 Ama-Robin

We're going to talk about that and I'm pretty sure you're going to want to hear it because there are tools that you can use today and I know that y'all are ready for this. Hey fam, it's AMA Robin here.

00:16:20 Ama-Robin

I'm still here. I'm so glad you're still here.

00:16:23 Ama-Robin

Let's get to it. So making a way out of no way, you know, that has gotten us so far.

00:16:31 Ama-Robin

We have the resilience, the resourcefulness, the determination, and those have taken us so far. And I think all of my ancestors and all the people who worked so hard for us to get this far.

00:16:45 Ama-Robin

But then we discovered there was something more going on. And thanks to the incredible work and research by Sherman James, we discovered that the wear and tear, you know, beating the machine, you know, to try to be successful, our quest for success has also taken a toll on our health.

00:17:07 Ama-Robin

It wears a stand. It's wearing down our health.

00:17:09 Ama-Robin

It's wearing, it's causing more stress. And it means, like wear and tear on any machine, it's going to eventually breakdown.

00:17:16 Ama-Robin

And it's been causing, you know, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, heart disease, diabetes, you know, anxiety, depression. These are rampant within the black community.

00:17:28 Ama-Robin

And a lot of it is because we are living within the we are working against the machine to try to succeed. And we are meeting obstacles and we are keep.

00:17:41 Ama-Robin

But we keep pushing through them. And yeah, many ways we do succeed.

00:17:45 Ama-Robin

But we don't want our story to be like John Henry, who came to the mountain before the steam engine but then drop dead right there. He became a legend.

00:17:55 Ama-Robin

We have other ways that we want to become a legend. So what are we going to do?

00:17:59 Ama-Robin

What do we do about this? Should we just say, OK, you know what?

00:18:03 Ama-Robin

We're not going to work hard. We're not going to struggle or strive, and we're not going to be resourceful or resilient.

00:18:09 Ama-Robin

No, that is not the answer. That is absolutely not the answer.

00:18:13 Ama-Robin

And I asked Doctor, Doctor James about this and he specifically said that is not the answer. The answer is that you have to take, we have to take affirmative steps to protect our health.

00:18:25 Ama-Robin

We have to adopt healthy coping strategies against the machinery, against the racism, against the chaos. And I have a few that I use and that make make a big difference for me.

00:18:39 Ama-Robin

But I'm going to mention the ones that doctor that you know, Sherman James brought up because he knows that these work and he's seen that they're effective. But I'm going to throw in my first because I have this and I know that

you probably don't want to hear this, but I won't say it.

00:18:52 Ama-Robin

Anyway, the first thing to do is to do our checkups and our check insurance.
Now, what do I mean by that?

00:19:00 Ama-Robin

Our checkups. Hey, we got to go to the doctor.

00:19:02 Ama-Robin

You know, we, we have to, to know our cholesterol numbers, we have to know our A1C. We, we have to know our weight, we have to know our blood pressure.

00:19:11 Ama-Robin

You know, we have to get the checkups done. We have to know where we're starting from and what's going on with us.

00:19:17 Ama-Robin

And that's only one part of it. I know going to the doctor isn't fun and, and sometimes hearing those numbers are not, is not fun, but it is important.

00:19:27 Ama-Robin

The other one, the next one are the check insurance. Now that's me checking in with yourself, taking a moment to stop and think, what do I need today?

00:19:37 Ama-Robin

How am I feeling? You know what's going on with me.

00:19:40 Ama-Robin

Just take a moment to breathe, look within, feel and know. And then try to figure out what it is you may need to get out of that day to get from that day.

00:19:52 Ama-Robin

Check in with yourself. And then you check in with others.

00:19:56 Ama-Robin

You check in with your with your family, your friends, your coworkers. How ask, how are you today?

00:20:02 Ama-Robin

You know, are you, are you doing OK? You know, have you been getting enough sleep?

00:20:07 Ama-Robin

Have you been taking a walk? Are you spending time in nature?

00:20:10 Ama-Robin

Ask check in with yourself. Check in with others.

00:20:14 Ama-Robin

And that makes a huge, huge difference. Now, this isn't about judging anyone.

00:20:19 Ama-Robin

This is about letting people know that you care, that someone out there cares. OK, so the check up and the check in.

00:20:29 Ama-Robin

Now we're going to get to what doctor. Doctor James said.

00:20:32 Ama-Robin

OK, connect with others, connect with your community, connect with your culture. He said studies shows that when you are connected with your culture and your culture is an active part of your, of your life, it reduces stress and it builds resilience and it builds empowerment and it builds self esteem.

00:20:54 Ama-Robin

Connect with your culture, your community, your family, your friends. Don't do this alone.

00:21:01 Ama-Robin

Life is not meant to go to go through alone. You know, that's what I said.

00:21:05 Ama-Robin

We're checking in on yourself, checking in on on each other, you know, get your little group, get your group together. I have my sisters gathering and we ask each other, how's it going at work?

00:21:16 Ama-Robin

Wow, OK, when you can talk to people who you don't have to explain things to, it makes a big difference when you can say, man, you know, my coworker was looking over my, my, my shoulder and always watching my, my work and what I'm doing and have people just nodding their heads and sit and understanding instead of people who are going to say, Oh, I'm sure it was nothing. Oh, I'm sure you're overreacting.

00:21:43 Ama-Robin

It is so important to have your own circle, people that you can trust and people that can trust you. You know, in this day and age, we are often very isolated from people and white Western society really kind of pushes us doing things, being individuals and, you know, doing everything on your own and not sharing your feelings and not sharing your experiences because they see that as weak while they're wrong, wrong, wrong.

00:22:15 Ama-Robin

So connect with others. Do not do this alone.

00:22:20 Ama-Robin

So that's very, very, very important. The next one is something that's probably not going to be unusual, but it has to be repeated.

00:22:30 Ama-Robin

Use stress management techniques, mindfulness. There are so many different

ways that you can manage stress and control stress and and live mindfully.

00:22:43 Ama-Robin

You know, one of my favorites is journaling. I am only I journal every single day and it makes such a difference to me.

00:22:51 Ama-Robin

If I'm really angry about something, really stressed about something, I can go to my journal and I can write, write in it and I can spend time with it. And it's a, I feel like I go deeper in an understanding and I release things onto the page and it makes such a difference.

00:23:07 Ama-Robin

Well, Jolene is 1 technique. There's meditation, there's deep breathing, there's exercise, there's walking in nature, there's while spending time outside, there's dancing, you know, there's writing poetry, it's listening to music.

00:23:19 Ama-Robin

I mean, the list is, is absolutely. And I mean it's literally endless.

00:23:25 Ama-Robin

So find the thing that you connect with and then do that because it will relieve your stress and it will bring down those cortisol levels and it will make a difference to, it'll make a difference physically, it'll make a difference mentally. Look, we all want to be successful.

00:23:45 Ama-Robin

We all are working hard to be successful and that is so admirable. But we also ought to work hard and taking care of ourselves and taking care of each other.

00:23:58 Ama-Robin

So I think those are really good techniques. I just want to mention to you, because want to let you know, want to to remind you that the resilience, resourcefulness and determination are not the end of the story.

00:24:10 Ama-Robin

Please don't, you know, say, OK, I don't need to do anything else but that. Now you need to deep breathe, You need to spend time in nature, you take a walk.

00:24:17 Ama-Robin

You need to spend time with your, with, with your community and your, your sisters gathering or your spirit circle, whoever it is that helps to uplift you, a place where you belong and that's also finding your soul space. You know that soul space can be a city, a country, a, a, a bookstore.

00:24:37 Ama-Robin

You know, it's that soul space where your soul just feels free and feels like it's like it belongs and, and just uplifts you and fills you up. The all of these things make a huge, huge difference.

00:24:54 Ama-Robin

So I think this is a good place to wind it down. I hope you found that helpful.

00:24:59 Ama-Robin

There are many more techniques listed on the website youknow@espressotalktoday.com in the section on Habari and in the blog section too. Habari means knowledge in Swahili and in the blog section you'll find this information.

00:25:15 Ama-Robin

Please use it and please reach out to no one does this alone. No one was meant to do this alone.

00:25:24 Ama-Robin

So I want to wish you a big Asante Sana and let's take time to wind this down. I hope you found this as helpful as I did.

00:25:35 Ama-Robin

Making a way out of no way is truly a badge of honor. It truly shows that we are indeed an amazing people.

00:25:44 Ama-Robin

When I think about what we have done, what we have brought to this, to the United States and to this planet, I am filled up with so much pride. And it's, it's not a, you know, arrogant pride.

00:25:58 Ama-Robin

It's a wow, look what we can do. Look what we have done and look at how everybody has been uplifted because of it.

00:26:07 Ama-Robin

I really appreciate your being a part of the Espresso Talk Today show, and I look forward to continuing these important and uncommon conversations with you as we strive for good health and success and liberation for all oppressed people. Not just for some, but for everyone.

00:26:29 Ama-Robin

And I gotta say, I just gotta bring this up. I am not dissing anyone who was working hard to succeed and uplift themselves and their family and their community.

00:26:40 Ama-Robin

I'm just saying that it's not the end of the story. It can't stop there.

00:26:46 Ama-Robin

You are important. Take care of yourself as you struggle against the machinery of racism.

00:26:54 Ama-Robin

Take care of your mental and physical health. Stay alive, stay healthy.

00:26:59 Ama-Robin

You deserve the best, and what you do uplifts all of us. You're important, and we thank you for what you do and for who you are.

00:27:11 Ama-Robin

And remember this, Black people are not the problem. We are not weak.

00:27:19 Ama-Robin

We are not overly sensitive. The problem is and always has been white supremacy.

00:27:28 Ama-Robin

The problem is the white supremacist, patriarchal system that is attacking black bodies, minds and hearts. That is what's causing the problem.

00:27:39 Ama-Robin

But we get distracted or our attention, our attention gets diverted and call it lots of other things like black on Black crime or weak black men or crazy black women or bad diets among black people. But they won't call it what it is, white supremacist systems.

00:27:59 Ama-Robin

But we are working hard. We Black people aren't working hard to make a way out of no way to strive for success, to support our families, to contribute to our communities and to the country, to live the American dream.

00:28:15 Ama-Robin

And since we are working hard against the machinery of racism and white supremacy, our extraordinary efforts are damaging our health and shortening our lives. But we are normal.

00:28:31 Ama-Robin

White supremacy is not Anti black racism is not. It's not you, it's them.

00:28:40 Ama-Robin

It really is. And I hope you got this because it really is true.

00:28:45 Ama-Robin

So remember, my fellow warriors, know this deep in your soul, you are powerful beyond measure and you are important. Together we are invincible.

00:29:01 Ama-Robin

And the problem, I'm going to say it again, the real scourge on society is white supremacy. We are not the problem.

00:29:11 Ama-Robin

Asante Sana to all people who are working to empower and uplift Black people. Asante's honor to you for being in the building and showing the courage to talk about these issues.

00:29:25 Ama-Robin

If you want to keep discussing or just reading about these issues, then you should definitely subscribe to my weekly Black empowerment newsletter, The Nomo Beat. We discuss lots of issues there.

00:29:38 Ama-Robin

You can get your dose of Black empowerment every week. There's never a dull moment, but there are lots of powerful, uplifting and liberating moments.

00:29:49 Ama-Robin

You can't subscribe, but the Espresso Talk Today website espressotalktoday.com or on Instagram at my name AMA Robin L. That's AMA_Robin ROBIN_the letter L.

00:30:07 Ama-Robin

You can also find us on Facebook in our newly opened Espresso Talk Today Black Liberation Lounge. And this is a this group is a safe space for us to hold discussions and share thoughts and ideas, feel joy, express sadness or just breathe.

00:30:26 Ama-Robin

Or you can join us on Instagram to discuss these issues again on Instagram.
I'm Ama-Robin for espresso talk today and remember now more than ever,
strength, soul and reparations.

00:30:46 Ama-Robin

Ashe Community.