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Patriarchy, usually defined as Law of the Father, has had a strange influence on Western civilization. The ancient Greeks held that Athena sprang wholly formed from the forehead of Zeus; Judaic and Christian teaching claimed Eve was created from Adam's rib. These myths furthered male dominance.

If patriarchy's impacts on culture and society had been benign, I would say, "Ok, women may oppose male dominance, but it's all for the greater good." Unfortunately, no good has come from patriarchal rule; on the contrary, it has caused family feuds, murders and wars. Let us begin at the beginning.

The Judeo-Christian tradition introduces us to "first brothers" Cain and Abel, sons of Adam and Eve. The Great Patriarch in the Sky played favorites and smiled kindly on one of the boys to the exclusion of the other. The injustice of it so infuriated the shunned brother, he murdered the favored one.

A couple of chapters later in the Book of Genesis, we encounter the law of primogeniture via the twins Esau and Jacob. Esau, by virtue of emerging from the womb a few moments before Jacob, established himself as their father's sole heir. The second-born twin, however, cheated Esau of his birthright with a dish of lentils. Later, with the help of his mother, Jacob duped his dying father to ensure his succession over his brother. The Great Patriarch in the Sky rewarded the treachery by making Jacob the founder of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Primogeniture was used in the United States as well; it migrated to the American colonies from England. American "estate common law" required that a deceased person's property go to

his oldest living son to the exclusion of the spouse, female descendants, or, for that matter, younger living males. Primogeniture ensured that wealth remained concentrated in the hands of a few. As such it gave rise to capitalism's worst excesses, including the owning of slaves. It created lasting enmities among close kin.

In Europe the Catholic church enforced patriarchy for its own advantage. Church representatives would exhort a dying patriarch who, to save himself from eternal damnation, agreed to bequeath his estate to the Church. On his death his penniless spouse and descendants were told their poverty was God's punishment and, hence, their own fault. They were remanded to the Poor House, where they toiled in slave labor while the Church, fabulously wealthy, held sway over politicians and heads of states.

In the Germany of 1517, Martin Luther attempted to reform the Church. When the Church excommunicated him, feudal supporters, anxious to limit the Church's power, initiated the reform movement. It was only after devastating religious wars—the thirty years' war, the hundred years' war—that Europe split into two dominant faiths alongside Judaism. Luther, having learned from his days as Catholic monk to adopt a virulently anti-Semitic stance, brought his prejudices into the new faith. Eventually Germany begat the Nazi horror of the 1930s and later. In the US, Nazism continues today via right-wing Christians.

In Europe, the deadly enmities known as "sibling rivalries" gave rise to numerous family feuds-turned-war before the "war to end all wars" reared its ugly head, inaccurately known today as World War One. It, too, began as a family squabble: Czar Nicholas II vowed to avenge the 1914 assassination of his cousin, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria. By the time the war ended in 1918, more than 16 million, soldiers and civilians, lay dead.

In the United States, Georgia became the first U.S. state to abolish primogeniture. The year was 1777. Did that legislature lead to a more just society? Did Georgia free its slaves and distribute plantation owners' wealth more equitably? It did not.

What of today's patriarchal laws? Their ripple effects linger, the bitterness and fear provoked in numerous generations exist today in childhood trauma and in our conflicts with fellow humans—spouse, siblings, children, co-workers. It's time we examined the stories that gave rise to the national enmities into which our ancestors were recruited without will or choice.

It's the conflicts within, the wars of family history which, at first blush we may not recognize, but if we are to come to terms with the past, we must examine those family histories that, more often than not, gave rise to national enmities. The unexamined life is not worth living, an ancient philosopher said, which essentially means we need to make peace with the past.

No better argument exists for examining our conflicts within than Joy DeGruy's *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome.* Black Americans, writes DeGruy, suffer post-traumatic stress for the evils of chattel slavery of generations ago; in addition, African Americans suffer ostracism and the so-called culture wars of today. In my native country, the Nazi claim that an "Aryan" race was destined to lord it over all of Europe and Russia destroyed unwary countries and took the lives of millions. I know from personal experience the devastating aftereffects of Nazism.

The Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke, after enumerating some of the fears that haunt him daily, writes in a diary entry, per Stephen Mitchell's translation, "I prayed to rediscover my childhood, and it has come back, and I feel that it is just as difficult as it used to be, and that growing older has served no purpose at all." Rilke, unable to free himself of his mother's bitterness and his father's rigidity, died at fifty-one. His birthname, René Maria, which he later

changed to Rainer Maria, is unmistakably androgynous. That was not the worst of it in Rilke's unhappy childhood. His mother used to dress him in girls' clothing and forced hm to choose different girls' names, telling him "That nasty René is dead."

The American country singer Merle Haggard describes his childhood with, "I was born the running kind," saying he needed to flee any relationship as soon as it was initiated. "Every front door found me hopin'/I would find the backdoor open." Haggard married five times. What was life like for his spouses and children, to whom he remained forever the absentee? His father died when young Merle was nine.

In the song referenced above—"The Running Kind"—Haggard confesses to a prison within, "as real as any dungeon with its walls of stone." He recognizes his conflicts but has no clue what to do about them.

I'll give an example from my own life. Mother once told me her mother wanted to become an opera singer. Her parents wouldn't hear of it; only loose women took to the stage, they said; their daughter would marry. Marry she did, two different husbands, the first having perished in the War to End all Wars. She gave birth to four children, then called it quits at forty-two. My mother imitated her mother by dying at 43, also of cancer. I was eighteen when she passed; my brothers were sixteen, eight, and four. Karl died at 45, also of cancer; our youngest brothers died by their own hands. From childhood on, without will or choice, each of us were locked inside a prison of unresolved grief and guilt.

The first step is knowing what needs healing, writes DeGruy. "Knowledge of your history is a key to establishing good mental, emotional, and physical health."

Our injuries resulted from intergenerational trauma. They exist on multiple levels, writes DeGruy; hence, we need to heal on multiple levels. It took me years, decades, to get to know my history, unlock the prison within, and travel the road to healing. It takes time, but it can be done.