

I Can't Breathe!

by Patrick Dankwa John

CRUPELLECHROM:

1. (noun) the ideology which teaches that it's morally permissible to torture Blacks for just being Black—merely because of the color of their skin, because Blacks are thought to be inherently inferior to Whites by possessing seven specific traits: dirtiness, stupidity, laziness, dishonesty, sexual insatiability, superhuman physical strength and a lust for violence.
2. (verb) the act of torturing a Black person merely because of the color of their skin.

History and Etymology of Crupellechrom:

First used by Patrick Dankwa John (a Chicago area attorney) in the weeks following the death of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man who was killed by a White police officer in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, as Floyd lay handcuffed and helpless on the ground, pleading for his life, begging a cop to take his knee off his neck because he couldn't breathe.

Crupellechrom is a combination of three words:

Cru (from the Latin word *cruciate*, which means torture) + pelle (from the Italian word *pelle*, which means skin) + chrom (from the Greek word *chroma*, which means color)

As the late Black literary giant James Baldwin noted many years ago, to be Black in America and to be relatively conscious, is to be in a state of constant rage. In the wake of another Black man being killed by a White cop, large American cities are now kindling with racial unrest. That's a nice way of saying that Black people in America are so furious that riots have begun—again. Blacks need to accept the harsh reality that (though there are notable exceptions), what Dr. King said about Whites in the 1960's is still true today: when Blacks say "equality," that's exactly what we mean, but when most Whites say "equality" all they really mean is no more lynching. This linguistic dissonance happens with other words too. When Blacks complain about slavery, discrimination, and oppression, most Whites compare our slavery, discrimination and oppression, to their European ancestors' slavery, discrimination and oppression. That's like comparing a paper cut to a slit wrist, by characterizing them both as "injuries."

So let us use a word that describes the unique Black experience. Better still, a word that not only describes our experiences, but that also clearly distinguishes our experiences from the experiences of other groups. No longer should we be limited to using words like slavery, discrimination, and oppression. I propose a new word: crupellechrom. I created the word by combining three other words from Latin, Italian and Greek. Crupellechrom is something that only Black people have experienced. No other people in the world were ever enslaved for life, for hundreds of years, because of the color of their skin. No other people.

We rioted in the 1960's over crupellechrom, but yet here we are again—50 years later—and still rioting. In 50 years, so much has changed, yet so much has stayed the same. We know what has remained constant is White supremacy. So what has really changed? Perhaps understanding what has changed will immunize us from being so surprised when we see another demonstration of what has stayed the same. Let's be honest about what has actually changed in the last 50 years for Blacks in America: mostly rhetoric and press releases. Prior to the civil rights movement, Whites were shamelessly racist—racist and proud of it. After the civil rights movement, Whites have combined racism with gaslighting. They continue to engage in acts that perpetuate institutional racism, fail to take remedial action, yet vehemently maintain that they are not racist. The riots, as counterproductive as they are, are a product not only of justifiable Black rage, but also of our unmet expectations. We are shocked and outraged (as are many Whites) that after being here for 400 years, we still have to contend with racism, including racially motivated violence. We have, naively, taken White folks at their word—that they are not racist, that they believe in and desire "equality." However, their audio doesn't match their video. We'd be better off putting the audio on mute and basing our coping strategy on solely what we see in their video. While everyone is busy selectively quoting Dr. King—cherry picking his most conciliatory words, and ignoring his strident condemnations of White recalcitrance—the truth remains that America has never addressed White supremacy squarely, much less honestly. Neither have Blacks. So many of us worship Whiteness. We worship Whiteness in the literal sense by bowing down to a White Jesus. We worship Whiteness in the metaphorical sense by expecting Whites to treat us fairly, despite their 400-year track record of crupellechrom. In other words, Blacks have *faith in White virtue*. Faith is belief without evidence, or belief despite evidence to the contrary. We have internalized crupellechrom. Of significant importance is what makes crupellechrom's lasting effects so different from the slavery, discrimination and oppression that many other groups have suffered. Crupellechrom developed a whole new ideology to justify itself, and that ideology is White supremacy. Crupellechrom maintains that Blacks are inherently inferior to Whites in seven very specific ways. Ways that for crupellechroms, justify the US Supreme Court's declaration in the infamous Dred Scott case, that "the Black man has no rights that the White man is bound to respect."

Crupellechrom maintains that Blacks are inherently: dirty, stupid, lazy, dishonest, sexually insatiable, and in the case of Black men—physically super strong with a lust for violence. If we bear in mind that these are the seven specific beliefs of crupellechrom, we can easily understand how Whites justified enslaving us for life, raping us, killing us, arresting us for sitting in a Starbucks without buying coffee, shooting us in the back while we flee unarmed, calling the cops on us while we're bird watching in a park, and yes, kneeling on our neck for over 8 minutes in broad daylight while anguished citizens watch on in horror and disbelief.

We can also understand why there are some Whites (even after seeing the video of George Floyd being killed by a White cop in Minneapolis as he lay handcuffed and defenseless on the ground) who see nothing wrong with what the police did. I'm not surprised about that. Because I've accepted the harsh reality that most Whites are crupellechroms, even if unconsciously so. Imagine if you sincerely (and perhaps unconsciously) believed that someone had the seven qualities that crupellechrom ascribes to Blacks, how would you think such a person should be treated? How would the public perceive such a person? How would such a person be treated by the police, by potential employers, by educational institutions, by the criminal justice system, by the mortgage industry, by the health care industry, by major media, by corporate America? Aren't Blacks being treated in a way that is consistent with crupellechrom beliefs? There is no such thing as undemonstrated understanding. Our actions—not our rhetoric—are the most accurate measure of our beliefs. Despite White protests to the contrary, (i.e. "I'm not a racist," "I'm color blind" etc.), our behavior reveals our true thoughts. Crupellechrom couldn't have survived for 400 years if only a small minority of Whites were adherents of it. Institutional crupellechrom wouldn't still be around absent the tacit approval of most Whites.

For those interested in hearing the feelings of Black America put to song, I offer this music video, created by a young man, James Borishade, who attends my church. James expresses so poignantly, that which I can communicate only intellectually: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esTv7Sv_a5s

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