



## Introducing the Linked Descendants Working Group Coming to the Table National Gathering June 2021

### Contents of the Handout

- How We Came to Be
- Who We Are
- The Journey We're On
- Writing Stories
- Our Black Ancestry
- What We Have Learned on the Journey





## Highlights from the Story of the Linked Descendants Working Group

In the 1980's, the Black Hairston family invited white linked descendants Waller and Will Hairston to their reunion.

In the early 200's, the Hemings family members met their cousins Susan Hutchison and Prinny Anderson at a reunion at Monticello.

Susan recognized that being in a relationship with people she was linked to through slavery was a unique platform from which to talk about slavery and its legacies.

The author, Henry Wiencek, introduced Susan to Will Hairston.

Will suggested they talk with people at the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, at Eastern Mennonite University, where he worked.

After a warm welcome from the CJP, a committee of linked descendants formed and developed the concept of Coming to the Table. In January 2006, the pilot gathering of CTTT was held at EMU. Most of the people attending were linked to one or more other people in the group, through slavery – they were linked descendants.

CTTT quickly expanded its membership beyond people linked to and through slavery, inviting all who wished to come to the table.





## Highlights from the Story of the Linked Descendants Working Group

At a CTTT National Gathering in Richmond in 2012, CTTT members who were descendants of enslaved people and descendants of enslavers formed a group that would support the needs and interests of their unique heritage as articulated in Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, that the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners would come to the table of brotherhood. They formed the Linked Descendants Working Group.

The LDWG was a dispersed, national group, not associated with a specific geographical location. Everyone in the group is linked to slavery or to its aftermath of brutality and violence, ranging from slave trading to convict leasing to lynching. Many members are researching their own family histories and looking for people they are connected to through slavery. However, having or finding a linked descendant is not a requirement for being in the group.

The very first project the LDWG took on was development of the blog, *BitterSweet: Linked Through Slavery*. The group gradually set up a program of regular conference call meetings and learning sessions along with periodic meetings with members of Our Black Ancestors.

The Linked Descendants Working Group exists to make Dr. King's dream a reality, supporting descendants of formerly enslaved people and descendants of enslavers to find and connect with one another when possible, and encouraging all members to learn and research so they can put themselves fully into the context of American history, understand the harms done and commit themselves to the work of repair.



## The Linked Descendants Working Group Universe

The universe in which the LDWG exists starts with the Coming to the Table national organization. CTTT National supports the LDWG and provides a platform for resources it wants to share. The LDWG presents programs from time to time for the whole CTTT community.

The CTTT affiliate groups (also known as local groups) are very important to the LDWG. They are the setting in which LDWG members can have difficult conversations about race and racism and learn important knowledge and concepts.

Another CTTT working group, the Reparations Working Group, provides a channel through which Linked Descendants can learn about doing reparative work and plan their own path along those lines.

Our Black Ancestry is a partner organization, run by one of the founding members of the LDWG, Sharon Morgan. Ms. Morgan and the OBA website and OBA Facebook group can help LDWG members with their family history research. OBA is also a site on which LDWG members can post research findings and relevant documents, to make them available to African American researchers.

The stars in the LDWG universe are the many linked descendants themselves, who live across the United States, and in Australia, Canada and the UK.

## Linked Descendants – Who We Are

People connected to one another through

- Slavery: descendants of formerly enslaved people, descendants of enslavers and slave traders
- Post-Civil War oppression and brutality: sharecropping, convict leasing, peonage, lynching, racial terror, violence

Black and brown members are typically doing family history research. They want to

- Research both enslaved and enslaver ancestors
- Access research findings and related documents
- Discover people they are linked to through slavery, often descendants of enslavers of their ancestors
- Process their histories and the journey of doing the research
- Take steps toward healing

White member of LDWG are typically doing family history research. Their ancestors are usually enslavers, so they want to

- Research their enslaver ancestors
- Post research findings and associated documents for the use of African American researchers
- Find people they are linked to through slavery and connect with them when possible
- Process their research experiences and their family histories
- Take steps toward healing on a personal, family and community level
- Do personal, family or community reparative work





## Linked Descendants – Who We Are

Linked descendants are people affirming our links to America's history and committing ourselves to telling an expanded story of America, a story that includes all the ugly parts, especially those related to enslavement and oppression.

We are people expanding our own identities through the new stories we tell about ourselves and our families.

We are people doing mutually supportive work, hoping to restore missing pieces of family and national history by sharing information and documents.

We are people who cherish the ways in which we are linked to one another, Black, brown and white.





## Linked Descendants – Who We Are

The mission of the LDWG is to provide

- Leadership and role models
- A supportive setting for conversations
- Learning tools and events
- Help with research and learning
- Reminders and resources to post research findings and documents
- Ways to process emotions, experiences and insights arising from learning family, community and regional history
- Forums for sharing and publishing writings





# Who We Are & What We Do:

# How We Use the CTTT Four Approaches

## Coming to the Table

### 1. Uncovering History

Research, acknowledge personal, family, community, state, national histories of race

### 2. Connection

Connecting within, across racial lines; develop & deepen relationships

## Linked Descendants

### 1. Uncovering the truth of family, community, national history

Study, research, oral histories, family stories; strip away the whitewash; claim our place in U.S. history

### 2. Connecting

To people within, across racial lines with whom we are historically, possibly genetically, connected through the heritage of slavery, its legacies; acknowledge, develop relationships



June 2021





# How We Use the CTTT Four Approaches

### 3. Working Toward Healing

Exploring how we can heal together through dialogue, reunion, ritual, meditation, prayer, ceremony, the arts, apology, other methods.

### 4. Taking Action

Actively seeking to dismantle systems of racial inequality, injustice, and oppression; to work for the transformation of our nation.

### 3. Taking Steps to Heal

As individuals, as linked descendants, and as family and community systems, through many healing modalities.

### 4. Repairing Harms

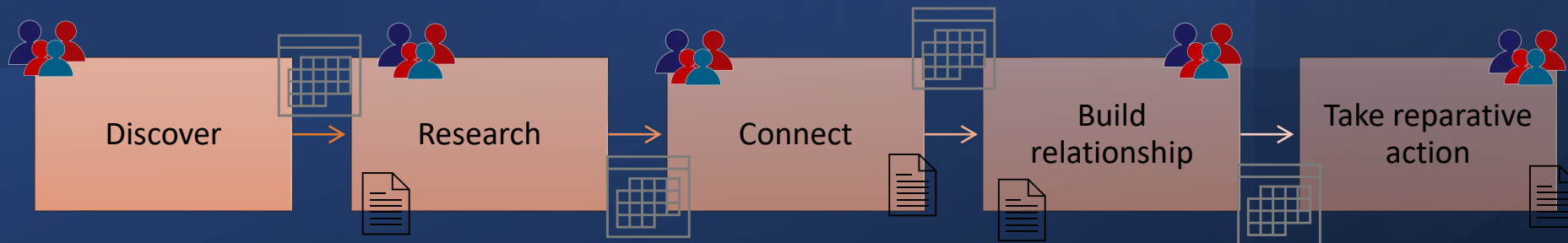
- Centering the history of people of African heritage
- Revising, enlarging family and community narratives
- Calling out brutality and oppression, separation of families, racial terror and violence practiced by enslavers
- Speaking to the loss of history, roots, connections
- Giving free access to family history research findings, documents
- Offering reparative action to African Americans harmed by enslaver families



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# The Journey We're On

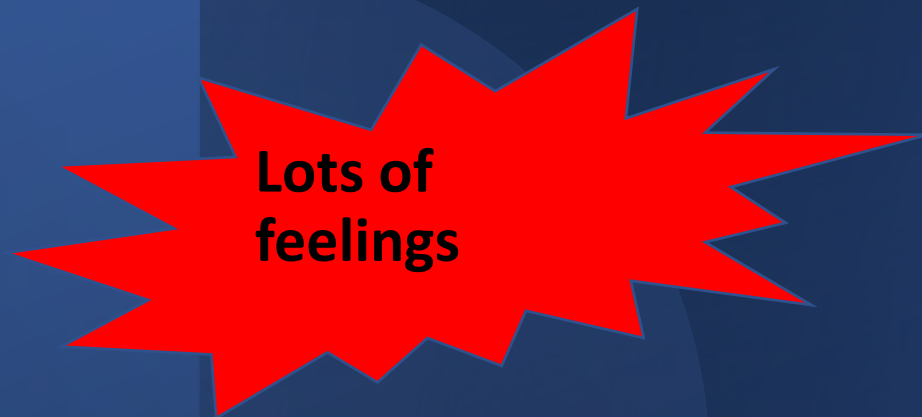




# Going On the Journey



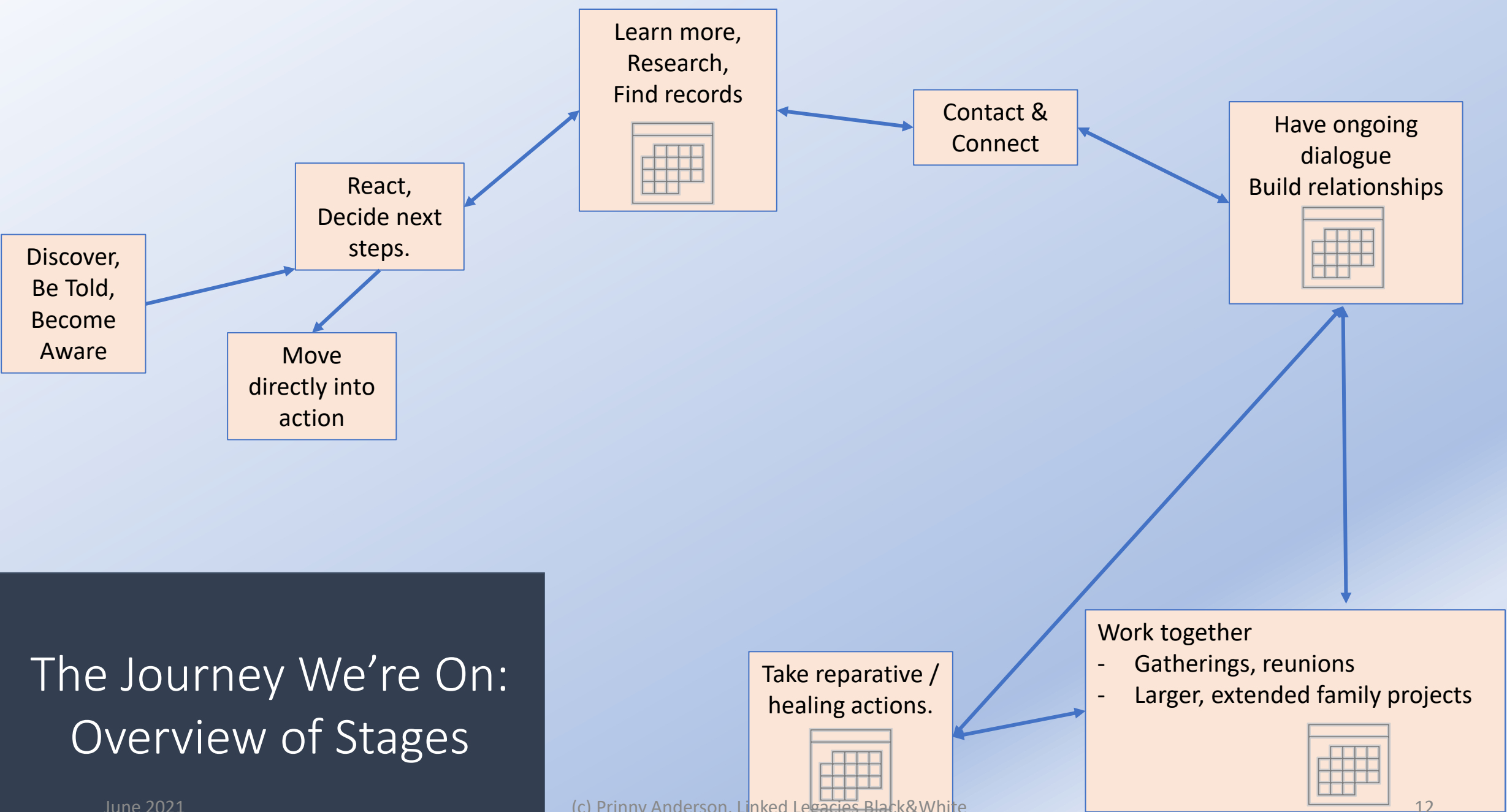
- **Research** ancestors
- **Share research** findings, documents
- Discover **linked descendants**
- **Process** their histories
- Take steps toward **healing**
- May carry out **reparative work**



Strong desire/need to talk to others, process reactions, feelings



(c) Priny Anderson, Linked Legacies Black&White



# The Journey We're On: Overview of Stages

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(c) Priny Anderson, Linked Legacies Black&White

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Discover,  
Be Told,  
Become  
Aware

React  
Decide next  
steps

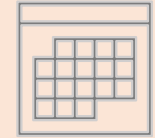
Move  
directly into  
action

Learn more,  
Research,  
Find records

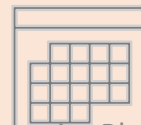
Over time, the Linked Descendants have developed a “map” of the typical journey our members take, trying to account for the different types of experiences that we all have. But the map makes the journey look clear, clean and orderly, when it is not, by any means. Instead, it is messy and iterative. Each person’s journey is unique.

Nonetheless, with a map, it’s easier to locate yourself at any given time and remember the options you have and the guidance available from others who are also on this journey.

Ongoing  
Dialogue  
and relationships

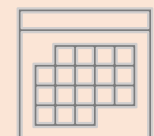


Take reparative /  
healing actions.



Work together

- Gatherings, reunions
- Larger, extended family projects



### The Stages:

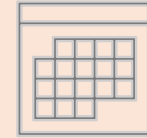
- You find out something about your family history, something that gets you started, wanting to know more.
- You have a reaction – Curiosity? Puzzlement? Outrage! Shame? You decide whether to move ahead and how.
- Sometimes you decide to move directly into reparative action.
- More likely, you decide to learn more, to do research, to see what more you can find out.
- At some point, you want to contact and connect, if you have discovered people you're related to and people you're linked to through slavery and its legacies.
- If you do connect, you may have opportunities for dialogue, for building relationships. You may be able to collaborate on gatherings, family reunions or extended family projects.
- You may also find ways to work on healing historic harms through reparative action.

Discover,  
Be Told,  
Become  
Aware

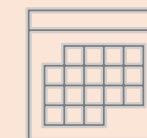
React,  
Decide next  
steps.

Move  
directly into  
action

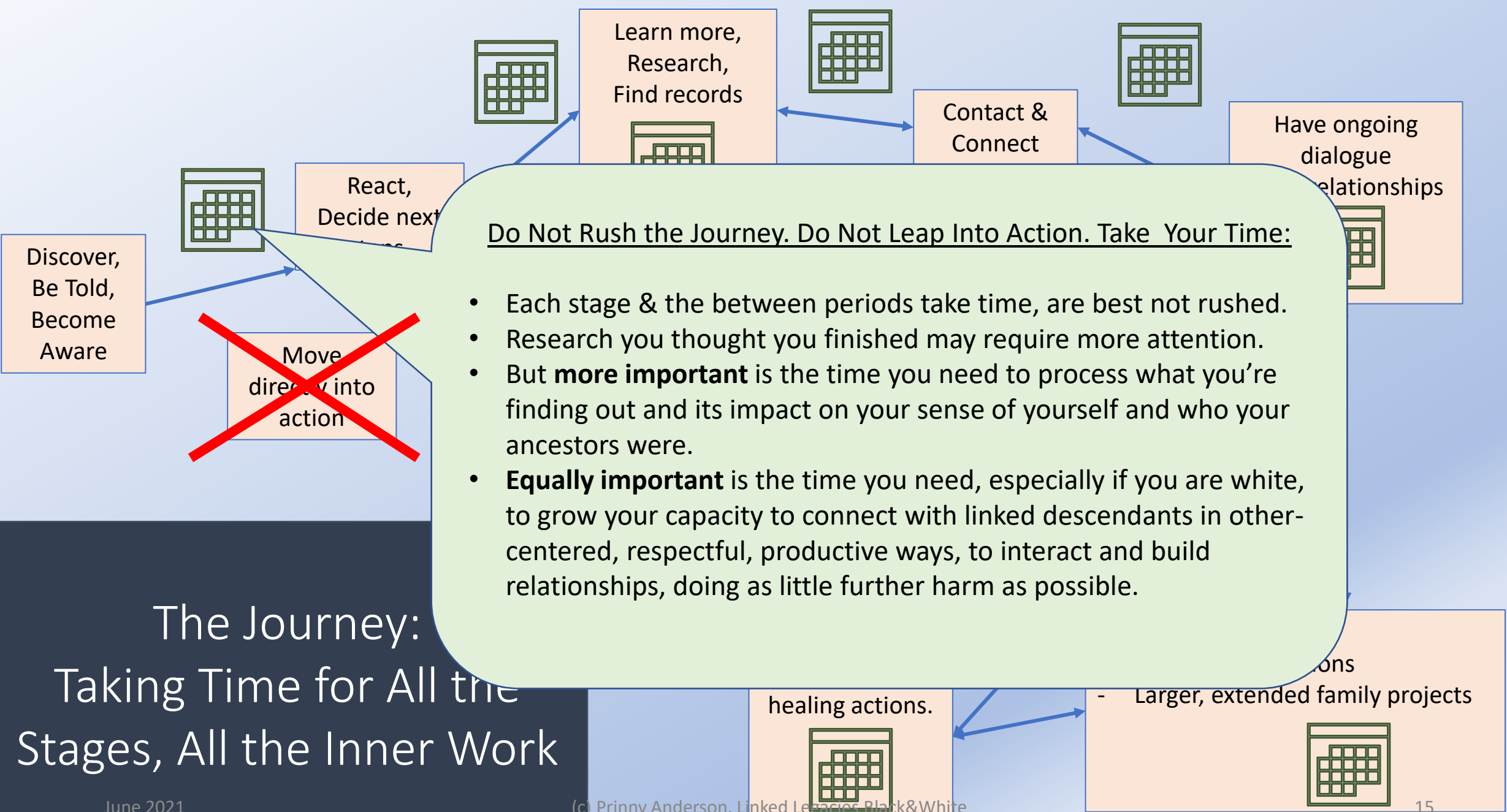
Have ongoing  
dialogue  
build relationships



Family  
reunions  
extended family projects



# The Journey We Overview of Stages



Do Not Rush the Journey. Do Not Leap Into Action. Take Your Time:

- Each stage & the between periods take time, are best not rushed.
- Research you thought you finished may require more attention.
- But **more important** is the time you need to process what you're finding out and its impact on your sense of yourself and who your ancestors were.
- **Equally important** is the time you need, especially if you are white, to grow your capacity to connect with linked descendants in other-centered, respectful, productive ways, to interact and build relationships, doing as little further harm as possible.

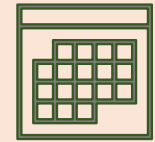
The Journey:  
Taking Time for All the  
Stages, All the Inner Work

## Process What You Learn, Develop Your Capacities

- As you find more information in reading and research, think about it deeply. Think about what it tells you about people's lives and characters, beliefs and values, and about the culture they created and supported.
- Integrate those reflections into your family narrative, correct the story, strip away the myths and cover-ups.
- Adjust your self-identity. You come from families with talents, strengths, goals, commitments. You may come from complicated people whose characters combined strengths with appalling flaws and complicity in brutal acts.
- Do personal growth work in self-awareness, coping with difficult emotions, de-centering self. Deepen skills in communication, relationship building, . Expand your knowledge, perspective related to slavery, its legacies, race, racism.

Discover  
Be Told,  
Become  
Aware

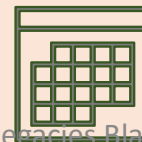
Have ongoing  
dialogue  
Build relationships



Speak, write,  
process

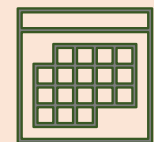
Speak, write,  
process

Take reparative /  
healing actions.



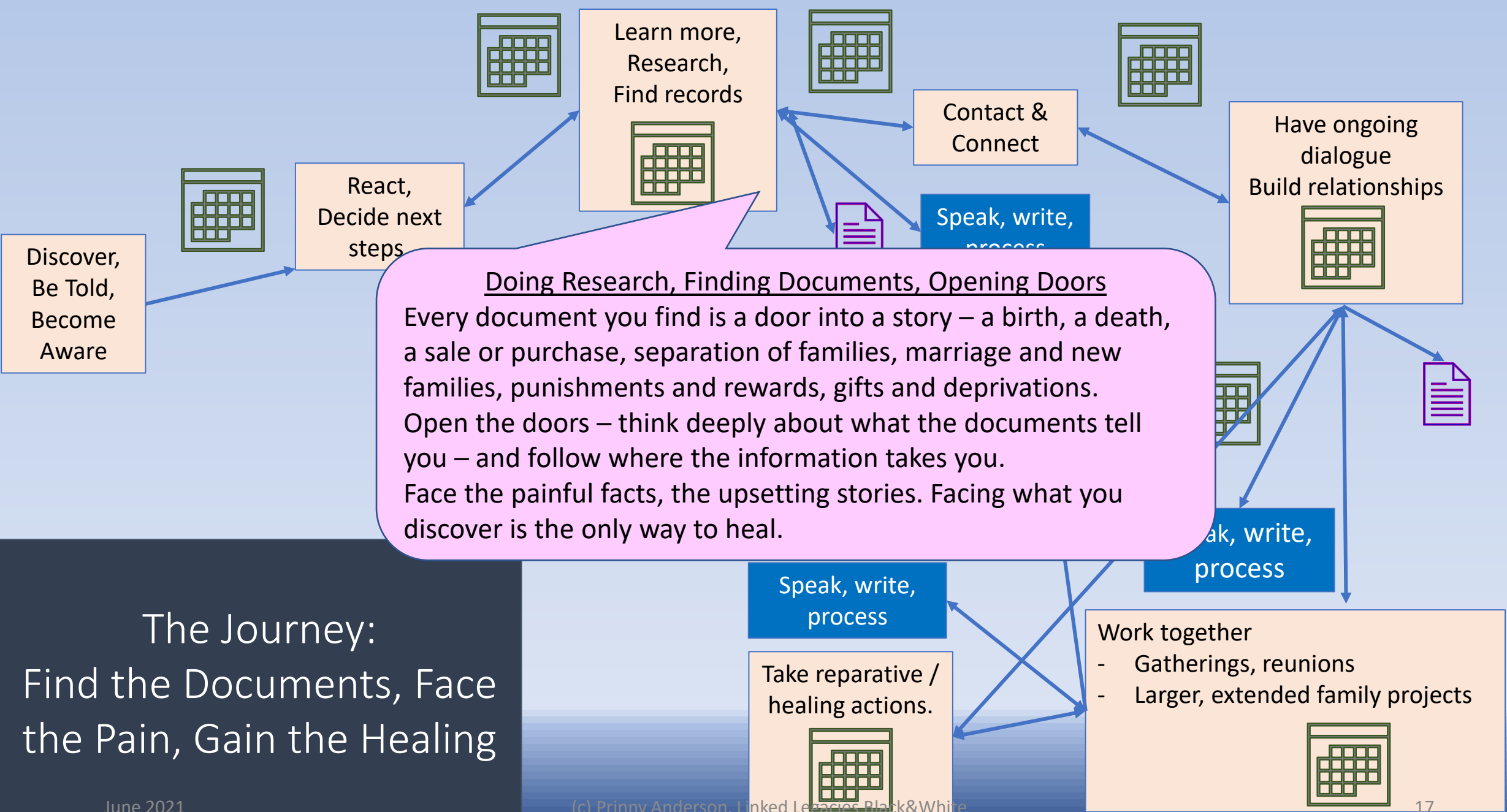
Work together

- Gatherings, reunions
- Larger, extended family projects



# The Journey: Process, Learn & Do the Inner Work





Doing Research, Finding Documents, Opening Doors  
 Every document you find is a door into a story – a birth, a death, a sale or purchase, separation of families, marriage and new families, punishments and rewards, gifts and deprivations. Open the doors – think deeply about what the documents tell you – and follow where the information takes you. Face the painful facts, the upsetting stories. Facing what you discover is the only way to heal.

The Journey:  
 Find the Documents, Face the Pain, Gain the Healing

## Obstacles & Resistance in Ourselves, from Others

Resistance: All the emotional reactions and psychological strategies we have to keep ourselves from moving ahead with research, analysis, revising the family narrative, and sharing with others.

Obstacles: For Black & brown people – Missing data, lack of documentation, manipulation or resistance by white owners of documentation around “giving access.” Sometimes also negative reactions by family or community to doing research, to findings, to revisiting the pain of the past.

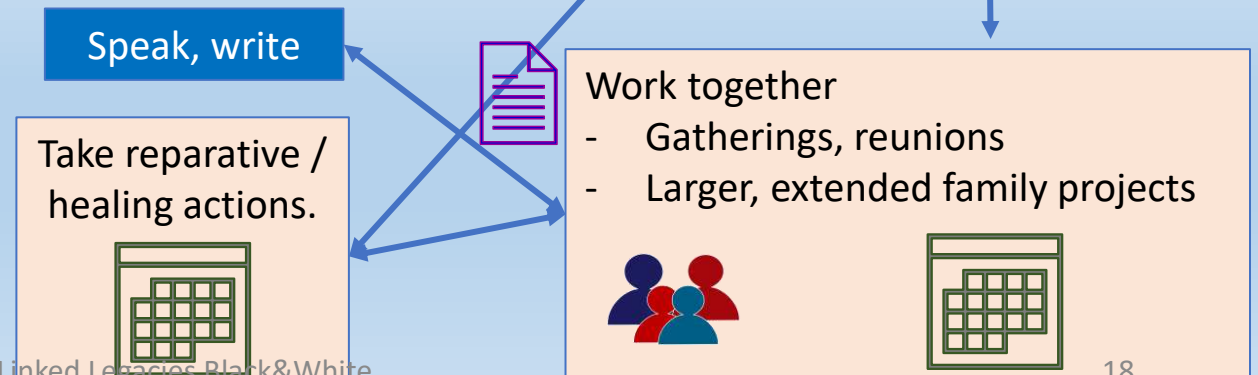
Obstacles: For white people – Denial, resistance from family, community to “digging up the past.” Fears about what will be learned, what it will say about the family, what “other people” will think. Loss or withholding of documents. Refusal to talk about family history.

Gather your courage. Work with like-hearted others Press on.

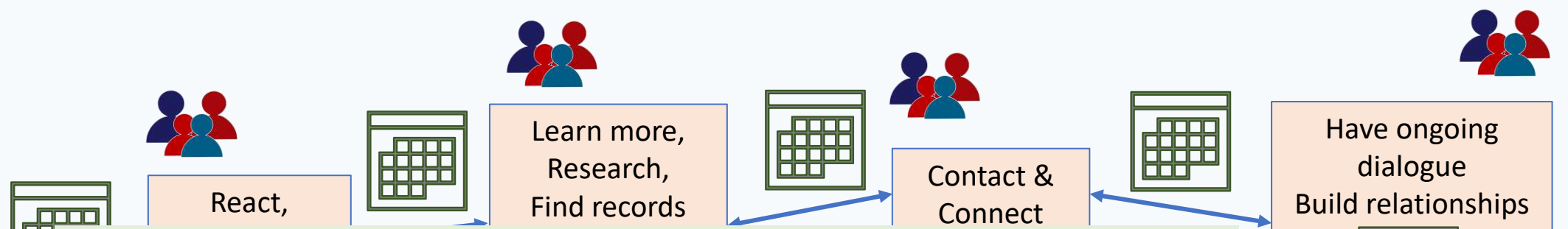
# The Journey: Obstacles & Resistance in Ourselves, From Others

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(c) Priny Anderson, Linked Legacies Black&White



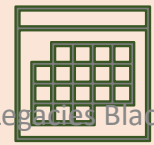
Discover,  
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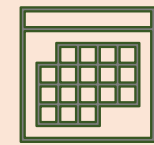
- Steps toward healing
- Seek to have ongoing dialogue with your family, with your linked descendants, perhaps with other people in the LDWG, in CTTT. **Listening and sharing heal.**
  - Build relationships with linked descendants, patiently, based on empathy, trust, openness. Learn about each others' families, dreams and hopes.
  - Attend, create family and community gatherings. Visit, have fun, eat, worship and work together.
  - Consider reparative action in families, communities, with the descendants of the enslaved families directing the effort.
  - Consider larger, public level reparations.
  - Consult with other linked descendants. Get input from LDWG and the CTTT Reparations Group

Speak,  
write

Option for larger, public level reparative / healing actions.



- Larger, extended family projects



# The Healing through Conversation, Connection, Reparative Action

June 2021



BitterSweet Editors  
January 12, 2014



[History, Culture, People, Places & Events](#)

### Remembering their names

When I joined Coming To The Table over two years ago, I began a journey—a journey into the lives and times of my slave-holding ancestors...



grant.hayter-menzies  
October 22, 2013



[Research & Finding Documents](#)

### Bittersweet Memories

When I was a small child, there was an old woman I remember seeing when we visited my grandfather's house on the Southside of Chicago....

Sharon Leslie Morgan  
November 9, 2013



[Linked Descendants](#)

### Being Linked Through Slavery Means ...

Being a “linked descendant” puts racism and white privilege in a harsh light for me. It makes speaking out honestly about the legacy of slavery...

Prinny Anderson  
October 31, 2013



Writing Stories:  
Linked Descendants Writing Pods

Self-organizing groups of six people who meet monthly to process their linked descendants journey through writing

To sign up:  
: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ttrsAp3YW2-5pcsSLT6obnG2c96nezollY3xqHOyl4c/edit>





# OUR BLACK ANCESTRY

*You are the dream. Discover the Dreamers.*

A non-profit organization dedicated to providing resources for African American genealogical research, preserving historic materials and properties, and promoting healing of wounds that are the legacy of slavery.

Resources include

- Research consultation and services
- Databases of family names, places of enslavement, and more
- Network of over 30,000 members
- Partnership with ROAR and FamilySearch
- Partnership with Coming to the Table & the Linked Descendants Working Group

[Our Black Ancestry](#)





## What We Have Learned

What we have learned on the Linked Descendants journey applies to every member of Coming to the Table.

- Everyone in the U.S. has a direct connection to slavery, be it through DNA or through systems of privilege and oppression. Find out what yours is.
- Find your place at the center of American history and culture.
- Use a map and find support to go on the research and learning journey.
- Move into action thoughtfully, after reflection. Refrain from leaping!
- Cultivate compassion and empathy for the impact of slavery and its legacies on others, on our own families and communities, on ourselves.





## What We Have Learned

- .
- Through research and learning, we are reshaping our identities into more complex, nuanced ones, encompassing the strengths of our ancestors and the harms they survived and/or perpetrated. Find and accept yours.
- Ultimately, we are re-writing the narrative of American history.
- We find and follow more powerful motivations for addressing systemic racism and white supremacy.
- We are building personal platforms from which to write, speak, teach, and take action.
- We acknowledge the pressing need for white descendants of enslavers to deepen self-knowledge, emotional self-management, capacity to de-center themselves, dialogue and relationship skills.

