

ABSTRACT: All history begins with a story, and storytelling remains integral to the human condition. From birth (and likely before), we are uniquely attuned to the stories of one another, as even in infancy we strive to mirror vocalizations and respond/echo the utterances of our caregivers. In our brains, narratives trigger frontotemporal response and dopamine release, as well as synchronization efforts with other listeners in the audience. By listening and sharing stories, we can engender compassion, understanding and hope. Storytelling tools are particularly important as we attempt to meaningfully engage and advocate for individuals who too often are marginalized, including those in the HIV/AIDS community. By reflecting on Baltimore and African stories we have been privileged to witness, we hope to encourage time and space for this important and healing tool. Increasing demands are perpetually competing for clinical time, but for optimal patient care, storytelling may be the best tool to establish the foundation of rapport and trust so critically needed for good medical and palliative care.

STORYTELLING IS INTEGRAL TO THE HUMAN CONDITION

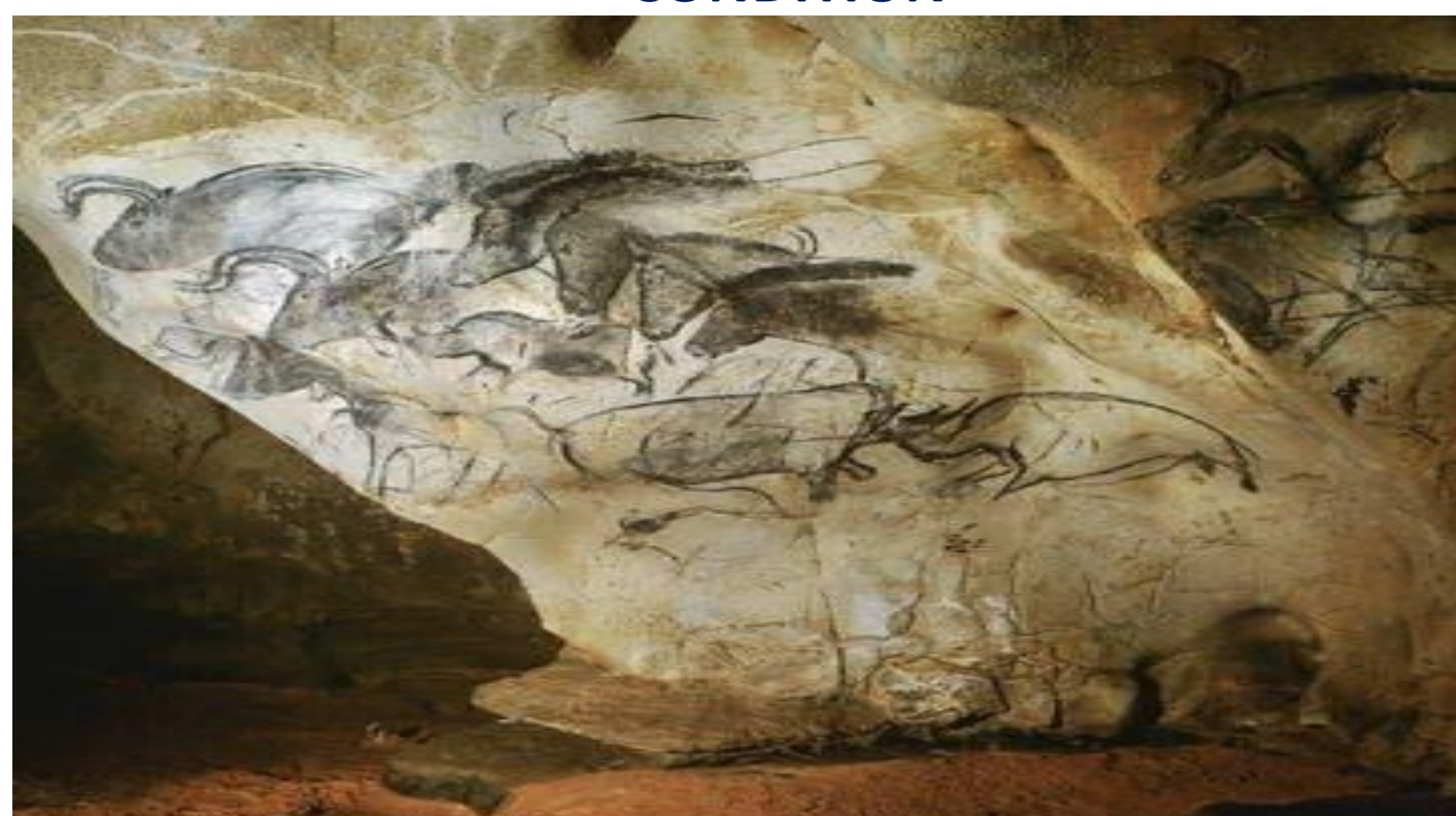


image: Smithsonianmag.com, UNESCO World Heritage

- from birth, storytelling with our young encourages mirroring vocalizations (response/echo) and progresses to narrative prose
- auditory centres respond to words but higher level frontal/parietal centres respond to stories (U. Hasson PhD, neuroscientist)
- dopamine is released with emotionally charged narrations
- multiple listeners synchronize cerebral responses when listening to same narration (neural entrainment)
- temporal coupling of synchronization between brains of storytellers and listeners



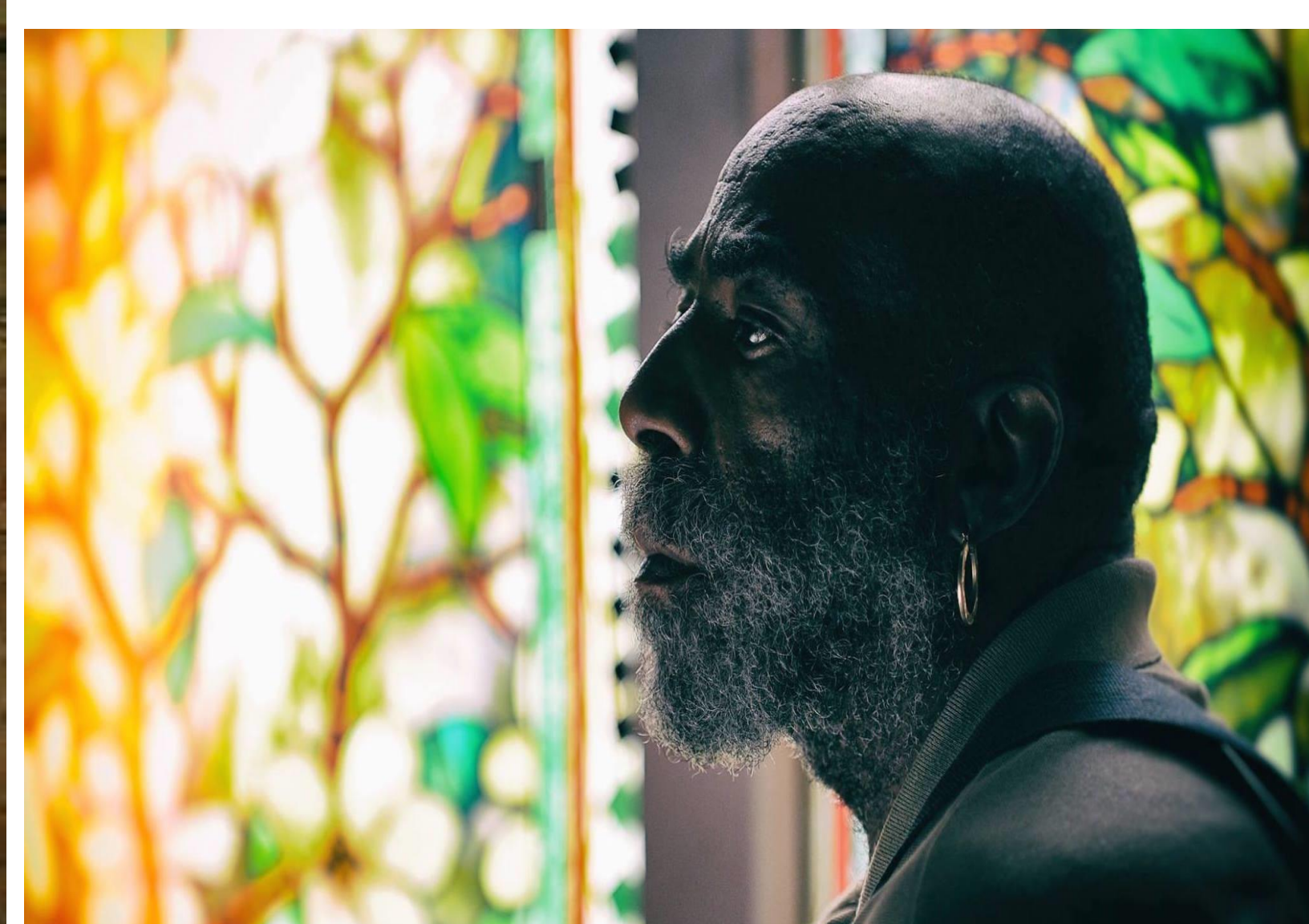
image: Santiago Ramón Y Cajal

STORYTELLING...

...fosters interest and engagement in listeners, even in "resistant" audiences

...is a tool to promote comprehension, engender empathy and understanding

... is an instrument for healing, both for the narrator and the listener



"I'm a storyteller," explained Monceaux in his studio. "Everything I do is about the glorification of being American, and telling an American story from my own perspective as a Black American."
BMore Art, "The Great American Storyteller", July 4, 2015



images: courtesy of estate of Morgan "Nagrom" Monceaux, May 9 1945 – May 31 2017

A Baltimore artist & Vietnam veteran struggles with homelessness, isolation, and stigma as his comorbidities, including intermittently controlled HIV infection, escalate out of control



image: courtesy of C. Cunningham RN, C. Alexander MD

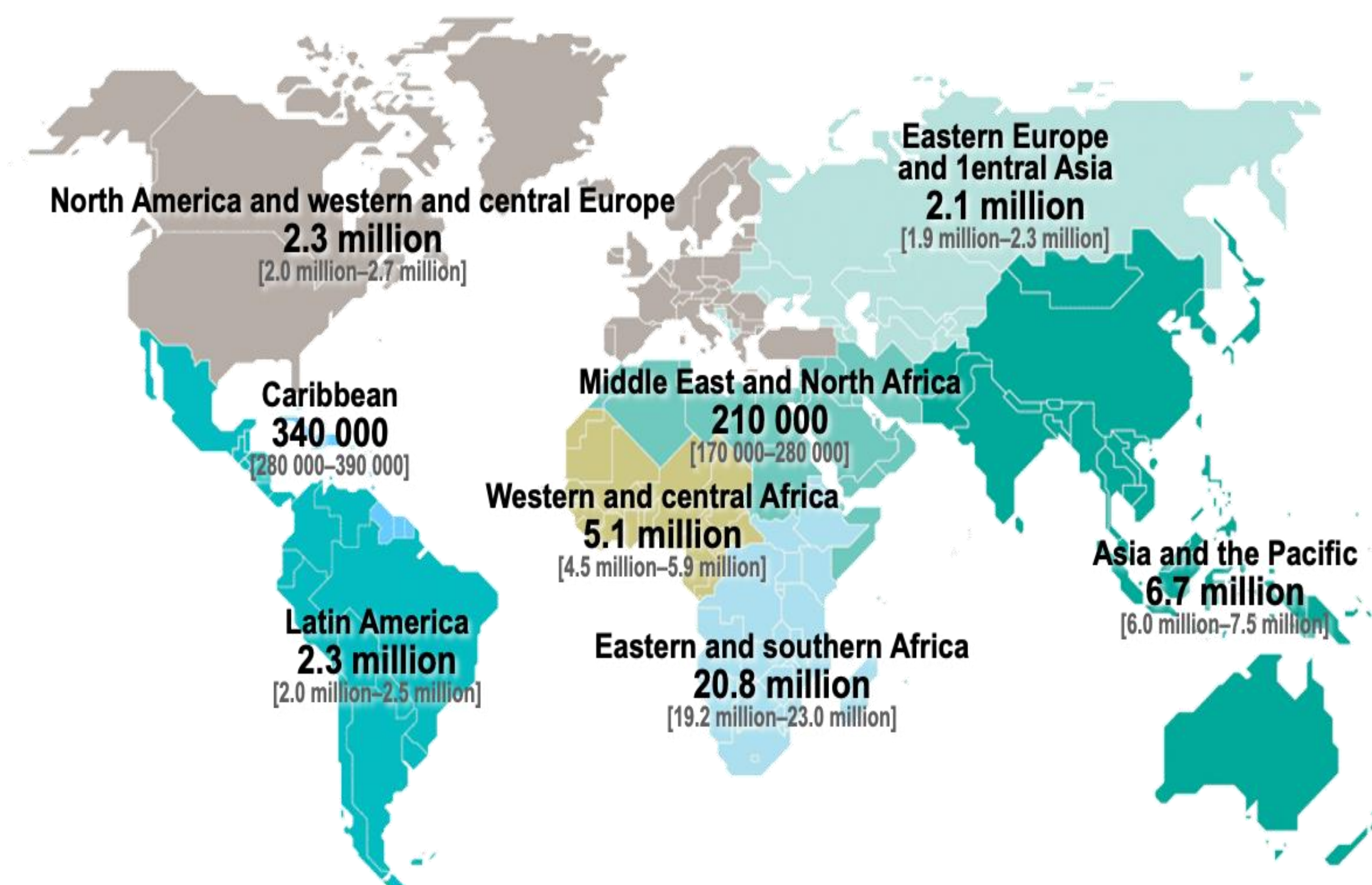
East African women work the fields accompanied by their young charges; access to antiretrovirals through programs such as PEPFAR have enabled individuals to pursue productive and meaningful lives



A woman successfully manages her antiretrovirals and overcomes several AIDS-defining conditions, only to fall out of care after her son succumbs to violence on Baltimore streets

image: Devin Allen/courtesy of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

Adults and children estimated to be living with HIV | 2023

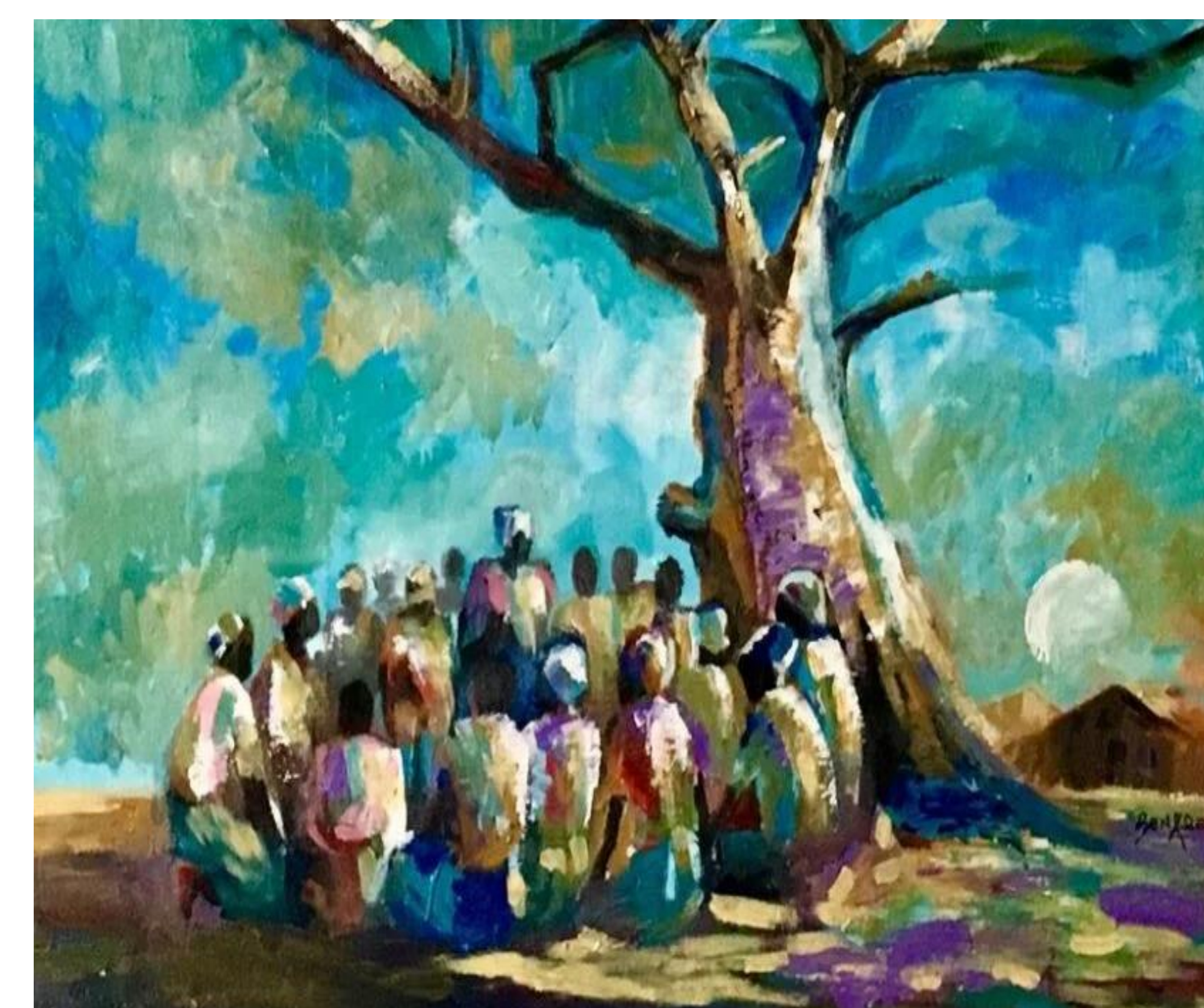


Total: 39.9 million [36.1 million–44.6 million]

UNAIDS.org

"Every person is infinitely precious. So as UNAIDS new report proves that world leaders can end AIDS by 2030, how then could they make any other choice? We cannot end AIDS in some places or for some people. We can only end AIDS by ending AIDS everywhere for everyone."

Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba



"STORY TELLING", artist Benedict Adedipe

"We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language.

That may be the measure of our lives".

-Toni Morrison, writer, Nobel laureate

The authors have no conflicts of interest

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