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Jennifer C. Nash, *Birthing Black Mothers*. Publisher: Duke University Press, 2021. 264 pages (e.book) ISBN# 9781478021728.

Reviewed by: Oyinade Adekunle, McMaster University.

*Birthing Black Mothers* in a tale-like fashion interrogates layers of three-fold (racial, class, and gender) bias experienced by black women in the United States in the twenty-first century. The political, medical, economic, and social systems have victimized black mothers in one form or another; however, this book details the medical victimization of Black mothers throughout their mothering phase: pre-natal, during delivery, and post-natal process. Racial discrimination is experienced throughout the mothering status of a black woman from pregnancy to birthing, breastfeeding, nurturing, postpartum process, and workplace discrimination. This book explicitly examines themes of medical racism, black maternal politics, the intersection of black motherhood and black feminism are historiographically conceptualized and analyzed.

Nash assumes the position of a spokesperson regarding the medicalization of pregnancy and labor that exhibits racial disparities, particularly in maternal medical care. Using the first-person pronoun, the author admonishes the importance of “telling the truth” apropos of the good, the bad, and the ugly experiences of black mothers in the United States. The level of medicalized violence entailed the racial scientific notion of black women having a higher level of pain tolerance, the negligence of black women complaints by medical practitioners, the subservient position of black mothers, and the social control of the mothering process. These dehumanizing attitudes precipitated a shift in hospitals charged with the duty of saving lives to morgues for black mothers, evident in the high mortality of black mothers. As a black feminist, the author acknowledges the unrelenting attitudes of black mothers and charges black feminists to rise to the challenge of initiating new models that promote equity in the mothering process.

Throughout the book, the author uses contemporary experiences and case studies to echo the unequivocal power wielded by black women and provide insight into the racial *modus operandi* apparent in medical systems. The author does an

impeccable job of representing black mothers as an unrelenting political force in tackling the lacunae of inequality prevalent in the medical system.

Unlike other works of literature that discuss issues of racism through the accentuation of the unfavorable police system and victimization of black youths, the author channels the sensitivity of child loss and experiences of black mothers in shedding light on racial discrimination that has claimed the lives of black people (someone's child). The ability of black mothers to wield their pain and loss as a political tool is a formidable theme that cuts across all chapters. That said, black mothers voiced their displeasure through protests, individual or collective resistance traits, photography, social media campaigns, and writing formidable and enlightening articles.

This book is timely, especially in a period of continuous resistance to racial discrimination, systemic racism, and the widely publicized Black Lives Matter protests. The book draws attention to dynamic ways (for black women and by black women) of achieving a dualistic purpose to protect and care for one another and deal with medical racist behaviors. This includes the presence of doulas as representative of black mothers and the promotion of African cultural mothering practices. These black maternal friendships recognize and promote efforts of black mothers across various spheres, active involvement in politics and political administration, and advocacy of mothering activities such as breastfeeding.

Despite the previous publication of parts of the book in peer-reviewed journals, the absence of a clear-cut approach, either chronological or thematic, calls to question the effective communication of themes raised as it makes it difficult for the audience to connect analytical sequences. However, there is the reiteration of core themes in every chapter and dedication of one chapter to the review and analysis of similar literature on black motherhood, maternal health, medicalized violence, and the American medical system. This is a skillful way of broadening the audience's knowledge and raising awareness on existing literature debating core themes; and it elevates the significance of this book in shedding light on the gap inherent in other works of literature.

The contemporaneous feature of sources such as newspapers, advertisements, statistical data, social media campaigns, interviews of birth doulas, and celebrities' participation is commendable and relatable. Nash draws attention to the relevance of photographs to a black mother as a constant reminder and evidence of mothering. This extends to pictorial representations of themes discussed, black mothers' initiatives, and thought-provoking campaigns. Also, the first-hand accounts of

women in these capacities and initiatives of black female celebrities give credence to the reality faced while mothering daily.

This book joins a worthy collection of literature that dissects systemic violence, racism, black feminism, and black communal unity. An individual affected by gender, class, and racial categorizations, particularly females across all age groups, stands to understand her history, present conditions, and possible future orientations inherent in the medical system. Scholars across various disciplines such as history, political science, medicine, indigenous studies, human rights, feminist studies, and political administrators are enjoined to interact with the themes discussed in this book.

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