

Lay My Burden Down: Unraveling Suicide and the Mental Health Crisis among African-Americans

Alvin F. Poussaint



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Suicide is now the third leading cause of death among Black males ages 15-19, after homicide and accidents. Although lifestyles in many cases differ dramatically, there have been no studies to determine whether or not the risk factors among African-Americans differ significantly from those of whites. These startling statistics demonstrate a real crisis in America's social landscape, and more specifically in our health care system. Leading child psychologist and co-author of the classic RAISING BLACK CHILDREN, Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint and award-winning journalist Amy Alexander, both of whom have lost siblings to suicide, offer LAY MY BURDEN DOWN as a serious and urgent response to a national medical emergency. Beginning with a concise analysis of the often troubled realtionship between African-Americans and a white medical establishment, Poussaint and Alexander trace the culturual factors that inhibit Blacks from seeking any type of medical treatment, let alone the much stigmatized mental health care, and the lack of a concerted response by white health care professionals. Most importantly, however, they ask us to look again at drug abuse, gang-banging, and the increase in HIV not as issues of poverty, but instead as medical/mehtal health issues-suggesting that they are in fact examples of suicide attempts that have never before been evaluated as such. Intervention is possible, and Poussaint and Alexander cite a number of ways that our national health care system and health care professionals may offer help, while noting the programs and policies that have already begun to make a difference.

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