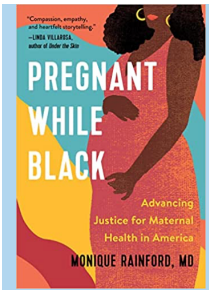
Discussion Guide



Pregnant While Black
Monique Rainford MD

Broadleaf Books
2023
245 pages
ISBN: 978-115067487618

Black Maternal Health

Summary

"Pregnant While Black is an exploration of the issues pregnant Black women face in America. Dr. Rainford draws on over twenty years of experience working in obstetrics and gynecology to offer a primer on Black pregnancies and how to better care for them. She shares the successes and testimonies of Black women who have struggled during pregnancy and childbirth, anchoring the stories of these women with researched facts.

Questions

Prelude & Introduction

1. What brought you to this book?
2. What are the stories you know—from personal experience, through family or friends, or through media and the news—about Black maternal health?
3. Dr. Rainford shares her initial expectation that the Affordable Care Act would ensure that any US citizen could easily acquire insurance and access to quality care, and then says she was mistaken. Did you share her expectation?

Chapter 1. Why Black Mothers Are Dying in America

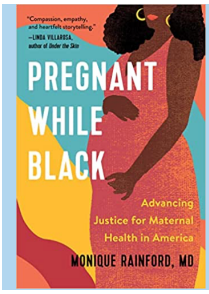
1. Dr. Rainford shares the following definition of structural racism: “the totality of ways in which societies foster racial discrimination through mutually reinforcing systems.” Give some examples of the ways structural racism functions in your context.
2. How have you seen implicit bias at play in your life?
3. Have you ever experienced a clinician who was negatively biased toward you? If not, what privileges do you hold?
4. Are any of your doctors (primary care, OBGYN, specialist) Black women?

Chapter 2. Black Women and Fertility – How is the System Failing Them?

1. Dr. Rainford makes it very clear that the health disparities Black women experience are not related to their intrinsic genetic makeup. Why do you believe Dr. Rainford must emphasize this point?
2. Statistically, Black women are less likely than White women to seek fertility help. Dr. Rainford attributes this difference to lack of knowledge, stereotypes, and stigma. What sort of stereotypes and stigma have you seen surrounding fertility treatment, particularly for Black women?

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3. Has your perspective on infertility been impacted by public stories from Black women like Michelle Obama and Gabrielle Union?
4. Dr. Rainford cites the film Belly of the Beast as an investigation into the forcible sterilizations performed on women in California prisons from 1997 to 2010. The majority of women who underwent the procedure were Black and Latina. Consider watching the film and sharing your reactions.

Chapter 3. A Deep Dive into Miscarriages and Why They Affect Black Women More

1. What thoughts and emotions arise for you while reading Ariel's and Abby's stories?
2. Prior to reading this book, were you familiar with the correlation between rates of miscarriage and exposure to air pollution? What do you know about the air quality in your area? Which communities are most affected?
3. This chapter discusses the unique demands and stressors that Black women face in the workplace. How do you see these inequities at play in your workplace?

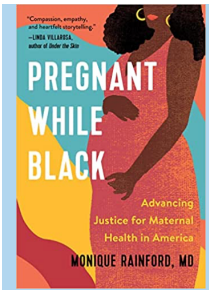
Chapter 4. Navigating the Healthcare System – The Added Burden

1. What criteria do you use when selecting a medical provider? How easy or difficult is it to find a provider who makes you feel safe and understood?
2. Dr. Rainford points to two resources, the Irth app and the Health Is Her Hue digital platform, which help Black women find healthcare providers who will treat them with dignity and respect. In your view, why are these resources necessary?
3. How would you coach the young women in your life before their first visit with a gynecologist? Have you looked at the questions recommended by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists for women headed into their visit? They also provide a list of topics you may want to discuss with your care provider.

Chapter 5. Preterm Birth Story – How the Disparity Perpetuates

1. In this chapter, Dr. Rainford cites a study comparing Twitter activity and maternal health. How do you react to the finding that mothers—both Black and (in at least one state) White—who lived in states with the highest level of racial or ethnic tweets had higher rates of preterm birth and low-birthweight babies?

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2. Dr. Rainford references a list from the March of Dimes of key indicators and policy actions to improve maternal health.[i] These include protecting comprehensive healthcare coverage for moms and children, extending Medicaid coverage into the postpartum period, increasing access to midwifery and doula services, increasing investment in public health programs, ensuring paid family leave, and promoting vaccines. How could you advocate for these measures in your community?
3. Has anyone you know hired a doula or midwife to assist them during their pregnancy? Are you familiar with the network of doulas and midwives in your state?

Chapter 6. Multiple Gestation – How Many Black Babies Will Survive?

4. In response to the data about worse outcomes for Black mothers of twins, Dr. Rainford reflects, "I would be lying if I said I was surprised." Are you surprised by the statistics you've seen thus far in this book? Why or why not?
5. It's a safe bet that if you're a Black woman, you've had to advocate for yourself in a healthcare setting. Are public officials in your county and state including Black maternal health in their platforms?

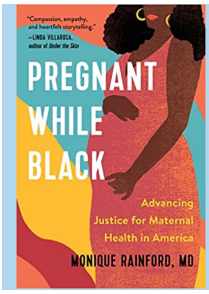
Chapter 7. Preeclampsia/Hypertensive Disorders – Too Common For Black Women

1. In this chapter, as in previous chapters, we see the importance of maternal nutrition for health outcomes. What can be done (or what is already happening) in your area to improve access to quality, nutritious foods?
2. Dr. Rainford gives us a glimpse into the agonizing decisions that healthcare providers make and talks about physician burnout. How can we better support our healthcare workers to ensure the best possible care for everyone?
3. If you have experience preparing for pregnancy, during that time did your healthcare provider insist upon a dynamic nutrition plan?

Chapter 8. Stillbirth – The Searing Pain of Loss and Why Black Women Suffer More

1. Dr. Rainford cites a study about the impact of significant life events (SLEs)—financial, emotional, traumatic, and partner-related—on rates of stillbirth. Consider how prevalent these sorts of events have been in your life. If they are not prevalent, what privileges do you hold?

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2. Mrs. Anderson's story, like others in the book, is difficult to read. Take a moment to check in with yourself: What emotions are these stories bringing up for you?

Chapter 9. Low-Birthweight Babies – What's in a Number?

1. Watch the TED Talk from Miriam Zoila Pérez that is referenced in this chapter: "How Racism Harms Pregnant Women—And What Can Help."[ii] Share your reactions.
2. This chapter discusses the importance of social support for pregnant women. What social supports do you have access to? In what ways could you advocate for more social supports for others in your community?
3. Does your church or book club regularly invite healthcare providers to host clinics where they administer vaccinations, dental care, and other healthcare? Who do you know that works in healthcare and lives in your community? Are they trained to handle emergencies pregnant women may face?

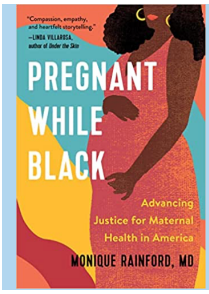
Chapter 10. Social Support for Black Pregnant Women and the Role of the Father

1. What messages and values were passed down to you by your family or society about finding a spouse or partner?
2. In this chapter, Dr. Rainford reflects on how "the United States has systematically set Black women up to be single parents, while at the same time imposing a negative stereotype on Black women who are single parents." What systemic factors and negative stereotypes can you identify from your experience?
3. Is doula support provided by your employer's health plan? If not, consider advocating for increased coverage.
4. How have the men in your life supported you during pregnancy? What were the books and knowledge from their families that aided you?

Chapter 11. Sickle Cell Disease and Lupus – Ignored and Undertreated

1. Why do you think average life expectancy for patients with cystic fibrosis has improved more significantly over time than average life expectancy for patients with sickle cell disease?
2. Likewise, why do you think funding for sickle cell disease lags behind funding for other diseases, despite being the most common genetic disorder for babies?
3. Have you been denied pain medication or experienced pushback when dealing with a sickle cell crisis?

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4. What thoughts and emotions arise for you while reading Connie's and Claudia's stories?

Chapter 12. Mental Health Challenges – The Silent Pandemic

1. How do the stereotypes of the "Angry Black Woman" and the "Strong Black Woman" function in your societal context?
2. Have you experienced or feared stigmatization when it comes to mental health? In your view, what is the root of the stigma?
3. How can we promote more compassionate responses to anger and other difficult emotions?
4. How can you better advocate for Black women in your workplace (maternity leave, pay, executive-level mentoring, etc.)? In your career field?

Chapter 13. COVID-19 and the Effect on Black Pregnant Women

1. Dr. Rainford suggests that one root problem underlying vaccine hesitancy is that many patients lack trust in their healthcare professionals. What could be done to increase trust?

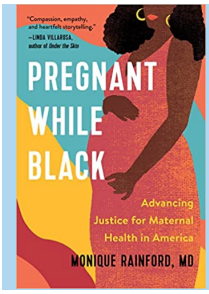
Chapter 14. The Route of Delivery

1. The description of Charles Johnson's testimony about his wife Kira's death is deeply disturbing. Take a moment to check in with yourself: What emotions are these stories bringing up for you?
2. Had you heard Serena Williams's story prior to reading this book? What does it say about our standard of care for Black women that even one of the most famous athletes in the world wasn't treated with dignity during the birth of her baby?
3. Dr. Rainford suggests a number of theories as to why Black women are more likely to give birth by C-section, including that implicit bias prevents providers from giving Black laboring women the time and attention they need to give birth vaginally. What are your reactions to her theories?

Chapter 15. The Postpartum Experience – The Care That Ends Too Quickly

1. Dr. Rainford discusses the importance of "the village" for supporting mothers in the postpartum period. If you are a mother, did you have a village to draw upon? How can you be a part of the village for others in your community now?
2. Do you draw any lessons from Dr. Sally Ward's story about how to advocate for yourself in healthcare settings?

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3. Consider contacting your representatives to advocate for an expansion of Medicaid benefits from the current sixty days up to twelve months postpartum.

Chapter 16. The Newborn Tax on Black Children

1. How do you react to the statistic shared in this chapter that Black newborns are less likely to die when being cared for by Black physicians?
2. Why does it seem that society is more willing to blame Black mothers for SIDS and accidental injuries than to adequately invest in the health and well-being of Black mothers and children?
3. What came to mind as you read the courtroom scene from *A Time to Kill* that closes this chapter?

The Ray of Hope

1. What signs of hope do you see as this book comes to a close?
2. What is one action step you will take today to positively impact Black maternal health?
3. What would you personally like to ask Dr. Rainford?
4. How will you respond to Dr. Rainford's final question: "Are you on board?"

[i] https://www.marchofdimes.org/report-car

[ii] https://tinyurl.com/58t5rua4

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