

Book Review: Holding On: African American Women Surviving HIV/AIDS by Alyson O'Daniel

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O’Daniel, Alyson. *Holding On: African American Women Surviving HIV/AIDS*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. xviii + 240 pages. Paperback, \$44.95.

Holding On: African American Women Surviving HIV/AIDS is a portrait of HIV positive, African American women and their relationship with the United States health care system. The author, Alyson O’Daniel, an assistant professor of medical anthropology at the University of Indianapolis, chronicles the lives of forty African American women who live in Midway Town in North Carolina. The participants in this study live in a neighborhood, called ‘the hood’ by locals, where most of the houses are dilapidated with broken windows, unhinged doors, and yards overgrown with weeds. Midway is also infested by drugs and neighborhood violence.

The question upon which the book is based is as follows: ‘What can these women’s experiences tell us about the realities, political mechanizations, and the processes of power at play with respect to their HIV-related survival?’ The book examines social lives, experiences, and perceptions of HIV-related health. It also explores the relationship between the women’s daily lives and the public health care program, with an emphasis on the link between living conditions and the women’s sense of survival. In doing so, O’Daniel offers an astounding account that exposes inadequate health care delivery to women of color that have prevented them from lifesaving treatment and care. The main life objective of the study’s participants is survival and the pursuit of a good life. This finding is, in fact, contrary to the goals of the caregivers who implement the Ryan White/HIV/AIDS program that provides funding for HIV treatment for those who have no other means to finance their medication. This neglect has also been compounded by poverty and the community in which they live. When the author looks at the official discourse and deeply investigates the African American women’s experiences in Midway, she concludes that life in Midway produces conditions of social exclusion and health care inequality.

The research is timely with respect to O’Daniel’s insight into the marginalization of African American women, as well as the enduring issues in American public health delivery particularly in the current American political landscape. *Holding On: African American Women Surviving HIV/AIDS* is lucid and insightful about the role of health providers, particularly in poor communities, and the text highlights the marginalization of women of color in addressing health issues. The book will serve as an excellent read for graduate and undergraduates in the social sciences, particularly social workers, and those concentrating on gender politics, history, political science, and public health policy. The reader is left with a great appreciation of O’Daniel’s in-depth analysis of the subtle discrimination against African American women when formulating HIV/AIDS public health policy.

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