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Review of *Against the Wall: Poor, Young, Black and Male*. Elijah Anderson. Reviewed by Paul G. Wright.

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Elijah Anderson, *Against the Wall: Poor, Young, Black and Male*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, Reissue edition, 2009. \$24.95 papercover.

To understand the factors that contribute to the plight and the challenges that young black males face in their communities, numerous studies have been conducted and many scholars have offered their analyses on this issue. The young poor black male resides at the apex of nearly every negative statistic in the sociological and psychological literature. The sociological literature has a long list of negative descriptors in which to identify the young black male. The following is a list of some of those descriptors: incarcerated, unemployed, HIV-infected, drug addicted high school drop out, and perpetrator of violent crimes. Moreover, young black males are often portrayed as hyper-masculine, hyper-sexual beings with a propensity to create unintended pregnancies and subsequently become peripheral fathers.

Typically, the scholars on this topic take one of two positions to explain this phenomenon that is ravaging poor urban black communities throughout the United States. The debate centers on either the notion of black youth not taking personal responsibility for their actions as an explanation for these young black males' behavior; or the notion that structural issues, such as poverty, are the major cause for young black males' predicaments. Typically, the debate and the analysis do not seem to capture the numerous and intricate factors that explain this plight. They are filtered through the same lens and one is left with the same identified causes and lackluster solutions to these problems.

Thus, Elijah Anderson and colleagues assume a different stance by offering a more thorough analysis of young black males that is based on multiple reliable sources, such as empirical data, ethnographic research and explicit narratives from the subjects themselves. Anderson brings to our attention and helps us understand the realities of young black males who are socialized in "concentrated poverty," segregation, poor schools, disorganized families, and communities with a lack of employment opportunities.

The book elaborates on numerous issues that adversely

impinge on poor young black males and takes an extra step by discussing several significant topics that are not usually discussed in detail regarding this population. For instance, it details the increasing suicide rate among young black males between 15 and 24 years of age and the many factors that help create this problem. The book discusses how suicide is typically considered a "white issue" and not something that adversely affects young black males.

The book elaborates on the ineffectiveness of institutional psychological treatment for young black male offenders who are released from those institutions and are returned to their communities. It discusses how the psychological modalities that are used in institutions may actually make black males more apt to become victims of aggression in their communities and leave them ill prepared to navigate through the urban terrain when they are released. The current psychological treatment practices in institutions may have some detrimental and unintended consequences which may partially explain the high recidivism rate among black males.

Anderson takes a bold step and launches into uncharted waters. He discusses the stereotypes and discriminatory practices that many young black males face when seeking employment from prospective employers. The book points out how white males with criminal records typically have a higher success rate in obtaining employment than young black males with the same qualifications without a criminal record. One concern is that the discussion on immigration could have illustrated a more relevant connection to the plight of young black urban males who may be impacted by immigration issues. However, the book is a thorough and chilling account of the plight of young black males who reside in concentrated urban poverty and present as hyper-masculine; thus, they are often misunderstood, anonymous and negatively stereotyped. It should be required reading for anyone who seeks the truth and desires to truly understand the issues that young black males face throughout their lives.

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