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Double Burden: Black Women and Everyday Racism. Yanick St. Jean and Joe R. Feagin. Reviewed by Wilma Peebles-Wilkins, Boston University.

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Book Reviews

Yanick St. Jean and Joe R. Feagin, Double Burden: Black Women and Everyday Racism. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998. $35.00 hardcover.

Double Burden expands the growing body of literature with African American perspectives on racism and race relations by describing the negative experiences of well educated, middle-class black women. The book primarily addresses what the authors have termed "gendered racism", but ties the discussion into the general issues of discrimination against the African American community and its impact on family life. As is characteristic of the well-known and extensive scholarship on race relations by co-author Joe Feagin, the content of this book challenges the denial of those who minimize the "continuing significance of race" and documents racial barriers which occur daily in American culture. Given some of the economic gains made by African Americans within the last thirty-five years, many would like to believe that race is no longer a problem in American society. Such social perceptions make this book particularly significant.

This work documents African American women's continued perceptions of racial discrimination with anecdotal accounts drawn from a qualitative research study involving more than 200 interviews of African American women living in various parts of the United States. Focus groups were utilized to obtain data about racist encounters of African American women and to elaborate on the "double burden" or the varied manifestations of both sex and racial discrimination in the workplace. Negative media stereotyping and issues associated with white standards of beauty as well as the longstanding stigmatization of black women in relation to sexuality and family life are also covered. Reactions based on group identity and collective memory are illuminated. Primarily, the book brings to the social science literature a sentiment about the double burden which has heretofore primarily been conversation confined to the African American community and among middle-class African American women themselves. While the book is based on qualitative research, it does not appear

to be telling the African American reader anything new. Rather, it confirms prevailing African American folklore about the dominant culture in America, about the threat of race, about white privilege, and the range of negative interpersonal and institutional encounters with white America.

The book does expand what exists in folklore beyond the African American community. No doubt, readers unfamiliar with African American folklore about race will be shocked by such intense reactions to white society. Four issues associated with isolation and exclusion which are discussed in the book are worthy of special note for readers: feelings of lack of human recognition, the personal consequences of stigmatization, the social response to single marital status, and the buffering role of the extended family.

Lack of full human recognition was described as one of the costs of discrimination. St. Jean and Feagin expand the documentation in recent field research reports about workplace discrimination against African American women by describing stereotyping about incompetence, social isolation because of being "the only one", expectations based on white images of physical appearance, being the spokesperson for the racial group and so on. Negative feelings as well as subtle and overt insensitive behavior toward African American women prevail in the workplace. Workplace humiliation, downgrading of ability and insensitive behavior and remarks are examples here. All of these behaviors on the part of whites cause undue job-related stresses which may also translate into physical symptoms. Medical research studies at Harvard University, for example, document the correlation between hypertension in blacks and discrimination. The best examples of the costs of discrimination given in the book are insensitive comments by whites associated with affirmative action.

Stigmatization and stereotyping involve negative societal images based on physical appearance, sexual behavior, media depicted images and in relation to the welfare dole. African American women are burdened with the tasks of warding off negative images by coming to grips with the fact that they may not win white society's approval. Focusing on their talents and abilities beyond these stereotypes help black women develop themselves as " complete human beings."

The discussion on the social response to single African American women who succeed in the workplace is worthy of note. Experiences of the women in the study are reminiscent of the right wing double message to women. That is, welfare mothers are viewed negatively for staying home with their children and not working while simultaneously, middle-class white women are made to feel guilty for going to work and not staying home with their children. Similarly, African American women who are single and successful are treated punitively for not being married rather than being respected and rewarded for not being on the welfare dole. Additionally, the successful black woman may be seen as symbolic of the failure of black men (and others) and this can spill over negatively into family and community life.

African American men and women alike must continue to use the extended family as a buffer. As noted by the authors, "Closeness to extended families can help black women and men absorb and counter the many damaging impacts of racial oppression." (p. 151). This African American tradition is being diminished somewhat by the American value of individualism and the focus group respondents expressed this concern. Networking among relatives and "fictive kin" provide support for African American men and women alike and serve as a buttress in the face of continued stigmatization, dehumanization, and discrimination in the workplace and other aspects of daily life.

Double Burden is a more public statement of what has been primarily expressed in closed African American circles and as such, serves to enlighten a broader population about the ever presence of negative racial occurrences in black life.

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James I. Charlton, Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability, Oppression and Empowerment. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998. $27.50 hardcover

By the year 2000, approximately 850 million people worldwide will experience some degree of disability, 13% of the world population. Eighty percent of people with disabilities live in Third