

Sickening: Anti-Black Racism and Health Disparities in the United States

Anne Pollock

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“Health is a capacious category, inextricable from the entire social world,” says Anne Pollock in *Sickening*, about how societies’ intricacies and ills are reflected back in the ways health is conceptualized, stratified, and addressed. A crucial guided analysis of anti-Blackness and its impact on Black people’s ability to live as fully entitled citizens, Pollock’s scholarship is essential medicine for a society in denial about its sickness.

An interdisciplinary scholar of science, technology, and society, Pollock uses Foucauldian biopolitics as a critical framework, asserting that the “state is involved in setting up relations in which some bodies’ flourishing is fostered, and other bodies are relegated to conditions of suffering and death.” When it comes to contemporary racialized healthcare, it’s the “slowness and relative invisibility of these kinds of harms [that] pose challenges for contestation.”

Sickening does an excellent job of making that invisibility manifest through its six chapter-long case studies. All of the cases are from the last twenty years, and they include anthrax deaths in the US Postal Service, Hurricane Katrina, the Scott sisters’ incarceration, police brutality against Dajerria Becton, the Flint water crisis, and Serena Williams’s birth narrative. In her conclusion, Pollock links these examples to the summer of 2020 and its twinned landmarks: Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter protests. Intentional in her case selection, Pollock’s contemporary events counteract the false sense that health inequality is located in the past.

“Simultaneously urgent and slow” enough to present these complex issues in easily comprehensible parts, *Sickening* is an accessible study with wide crossover appeal for both classrooms and general interest audiences. Moreover, the book is a reminder that “our analysis should *begin* with the outrage at these events and their ubiquity; it should not *end* there.”

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (September / October 2021)

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