



Why Are Our Babies Dying?: Pregnancy, Birth, and Death in America

Sandra Lane

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Syracuse, New York, in the late 1980s led U.S. cities in African American infant deaths. Even today, in this "all American city," infants of color die more than two times as often as white babies. Infant mortality is too often addressed as if it were an isolated problem, rather than part of a systemic and repeating pattern of embedded racism and structural violence. The clearing of whole neighborhoods during urban renewal, coupled with the collapse of industry, brought unintended consequences. Dilapidated rental housing, abandoned houses, and empty lots provide the conditions for lead poisoning, gonorrhea, and illicit drug use. Inadequate education, unemployment, and racially biased arrest and sentencing underpin the epidemic of African American male incarceration. Inmate fathers cannot provide financial support and only limited emotional support during collect calls from jail or prison. Supermarkets fled the inner city, where corner stores sell cigarettes, malt liquor, lottery tickets, and drug paraphernalia in place of healthy food. The stories and the data in this book show that low birth weight, premature birth, and infant death are a part of life patterns resulting from systemic discrimination increasing risk over a lifetime and, in some cases, reaching the next generation.

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