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Black Women, Black Love

America's War on African American Marriage

By Dianne M. Stewart

“Stewart interweaves eye opening statistics with engrossing personal narratives of contemporary and enslaved women whose lives (and deaths) are a testament to the complexity of Black women’s quests for love and a celebration of their resilience in the face of daunting odds... A beautiful, strikingly original work that is both scholarly and deeply moving.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred ★

“*Black Women, Black Love* is profoundly necessary and long overdue. Dianne M. Stewart decimates popular myths about Black love and marriage. She reveals through data, history, and compelling storytelling that structural racism and patriarchy—beginning with slavery and continuing through racist welfare policies, mass incarceration, and more—have consistently thwarted the efforts of Black women to marry and sustain healthy, loving relationships.”

—Michelle Alexander, *New York Times*–bestselling author of *The New Jim Crow*

When the search for love is a struggle, or a relationship ends, the “failure” can feel entirely personal. But as Dianne Stewart shows in ***Black Women, Black Love: America's War on African American Marriage*** (Seal Press, October 6, 2020), Black women seeking satisfying long-term relationships with Black men are working against the headwinds of 400 years of history, racist policies, and deep-seated prejudice. Drawing on research in American history, economics, social science and theology, Stewart exposes this tragedy of “forbidden Black love” as our nation’s most neglected civil rights issue.

Personal stories sourced from contemporary letters, diaries, and interviews illuminate each example as Stewart documents the affronts to Black love endured over generations, in forms both brutal and bureaucratic: from slavery, through Reconstruction, the Great Migration, and the present era of mass incarceration. She critically examines Eurocentric, patriarchal family structures that require a man to be “head of the household” and chief breadwinner, showing how these expectations clash with economic discrimination that Black men face. And she looks at the painful persistence of colorism and phenotypic stratification (CPS) and its psychological impact on the entire Black community, but especially dark-skinned women.

Finally, Stewart explores ways that public servants, the religious community, and allies can join Black women in beginning to undo the legacy of forbidden black love: proposals for creating pathways to financial stability and

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wealth building, strengthening the range of prosocial kinship networks beyond the nuclear family, and combatting deeply internalized bias against dark skin.

She writes: “Owing to the centuries-long structural violence against Black persons, the theft of their labor and resources, and the grievous violations of their human and civil rights in this American democracy, Black women’s testimonies of stolen love and stolen legacies are legion. However, portraits of love’s revolutionary and sustaining power in Black women’s lives allow this book’s stories of trauma to be accompanied by stories of hope and resilience...

“Through practices of love, Black women have fashioned a womanist grammar of belonging, indeed a womanist ‘love language,’ that this nation must now learn to speak fluently. As we mobilize with allies who want to see new possibilities for Black women and Black love in America, this is the heritage we must remember and uphold.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dianne M. Stewart is an associate professor of religion and African American studies at Emory University, where she created the course “Black Love.” She earned her MDiv from Harvard Divinity School and her PhD in systematic theology from Union Theological Seminary in New York City. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia. Her writing has appeared in *The Washington Post* and other outlets.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

BLACK WOMEN, BLACK LOVE

America’s War on African-American Marriage

By Dianne M. Stewart

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