Battling Over Birth: Black Women and the Maternal Health Care Crisis
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Praeclarus Press © 2018, 204 pages, paperback, \$19.95

Much attention has been given to the poor birth outcomes and the alarmingly high maternal mortality and morbidity rates among Black women. While researchers and media outlets often report on the dire statistics, little research has been forwarded to focus on solutions or on centering women of color as the authoritative voices for recommendations for how to turn the tide.

That is, until now. *Battling Over Birth: Black Women and the Maternal Health Care Crisis* reveals hard truths—powerful findings on the role of racism, coercion, inadequate prenatal care, the pressures undermining breastfeeding, and the lack of access to alternatives to a broken maternal healthcare system as the key threads of Black women's birth experiences. *Battling Over Birth* is the product of a California-based participatory research project that gives an unprecedented look into the lived experiences of Black women in birth and during the postpartum period. The coresearchers, using a research-justice approach and a human rights framework, recorded narratives and collected questionnaires from 100 Black women who had been pregnant, or given birth, and who had a child aged 5 years or younger.

The striking expressions of racism and fear and the lack of adequate prenatal care or postpartum support leave little question as to why Black women emerge from giving birth feeling violated or disempowered. In fact, rather than viewing physicians, nurses, and other medical staff as a trusted team working on their behalf, participants

reported numerous incidents of stress and conflict including stereotyping, defending themselves against unwanted interventions, and having their boundaries or bodily autonomy disrespected.

You want to act like a trauma center. I'm having a baby! ...That's not how you birth. My dog gave birth in better circumstances!—Camille, 44, hospital, vaginal birth (p. 56)

Cultural expectations such as the archetypal “Strong Black Woman” identity also impacted how women accessed support or expressed their needs. While dealing with pregnancy and postpartum recovery, Black women also contend with the social conditions created by systems of race, class, age, and gender. They are not shielded from these stressors or economic injustice during the pregnancy and postpartum period.

The report is groundbreaking not only with its scope, research framework, and narrative collection but also with the depth of its recommendations. The report concludes with seven key areas of detailed recommendations for a range of stakeholders, including physicians, nurses, medical schools, policymakers, birthworkers, faith-based institutions, neighbors, coworkers, and even for Black women and pregnant persons themselves. The Black maternal health crisis will need a varied cast of committed actors to ensure every black woman receives her human right to a safe and empowering labor and delivery.

Kimberly Seals Allers, MS, is an award-winning journalist, author, and an internationally recognized speaker, consultant, and advocate for maternal and infant health. A former senior editor at *Essence* and a writer at *Fortune* magazine. Kimberly is a leading voice on the sociocultural and racial complexities of birth, breastfeeding, and motherhood. She was recently named as one of “21 Leaders for the 21st Century” by *Women’s eNews*. A frequent contributor to *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*, last year, her online commentaries received over 8 million page views. Kimberly’s fifth book, *The Big Let Down—How Medicine, Big Business and Feminism Undermine Breastfeeding*, was published by St. Martin’s Press in January 2017.

NICU Baby App, From MoD

March of Dimes has released an app for parents with babies in the newborn intensive care unit (NICU). The "My NICU Baby" app was created to provide accessible answers, tools and support for parents, so they can learn about NICU staff, policies, equipment and terminology on their own schedules. The app can be used to track breastfeeding sessions, breast pumping, kangaroo care, and weight. Parents can connect with other NICU parents in the app and create a customizable check list to prepare for taking their baby home: <https://www.marchofdimes.org/nicufamilysupport/my-nicu-baby-app.aspx>

Source: USBC

Women's Health Policy Position Paper, From ACP

The American College of Physicians has published a position paper titled, “Women's Health Policy in the United States.” The paper outlines the unique health challenges faced by women in the U.S. health care system, and contains policy recommendations for improved health outcomes, including universal access to paid family and medical leave. Improving breastfeeding initiation and continuation rates are included as part of the ACP's recommendation for universal access to paid family and medical leave: <http://annals.org/aim/fullarticle/2682682/women-s-health-policy-united-states-american-college-physicians-position>

Source: USBC