

James Henry Harris. *Black Suffering: Silent Pain, Hidden Hope*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2020. 200 pages. 24.99.

In *Black Suffering*, James Harris uses a variety of genres to reveal how the pervasive reality of Black suffering is widely normalized. The normalization of Black suffering means that it is accepted rather than resisted. He argues that people from various races and backgrounds are numb to Black suffering. This numbness allows Black suffering to persist, despite efforts of liberating resistance. To address the normalization of Black suffering, Harris takes a twofold approach. He explores the phenomenology that prevents Black people and communities from awareness of their suffering, and underscores the dire necessity of liberation.

*Black Suffering* consists of thirteen chapters. Harris weaves theoretical chapters with narrative-based ones. This creative mixture offers the reader new lenses to understand and address Black suffering. Beyond describing the extent and nature of Black suffering, the first two chapters depict how much of Black suffering is silent and evil. The silent aspect means that it often goes unnoticed and unnamed. Harris argues that Black suffering must be seen as real. It cannot be reduced to the language of symbols or alterity, which tends toward abstraction. The concrete history of Black suffering in the United States has been simultaneously institutionalized and denied by whiteness. Despite this, Black communities have been places of forgiveness and hope. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the development of Black consciousness, which can prompt hopeful resistance. Harris calls for change within Black communities, even while his work acknowledges how modern situations came to be. In other words, Harris offers guidance to communities instead of merely critiquing them. The sixth chapter correlates Nat Turner's understanding of freedom as a resistance to the colonizing "otherness" of the colonizers. Otherness as freedom, for Harris through Turner, becomes a Hegelian thesis for Black people instead of being an antithesis to whiteness.

In chapter 8, Harris engages with Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. He recounts struggling to read the book for decades. *Beloved* is a place where Black suffering is concretized in and through Black cultural sources. Despite grappling with the harshness of Black suffering, Harris underscores the hope these Black sources cling to and provide for the Black community. The ninth chapter correlates Black suffering and hope with the suffering and hope of Job. These correlations come to full fruition in chapter 11 where he writes about the necessity of preachers addressing silent Black suffering and pain. Just as the personal and creative narratives do throughout the book, Harris encourages preachers to create "a critical consciousness by awakening those who have become numb to their pain and suffering" (144). Harris continues to be optimistic that Black liberation preaching can provide the possibility of new ways of being. The penultimate chapter situates the task of Black preaching as addressing the silent suffering through preaching Christ. He calls for greater clarity and efforts in interpreting, understanding, and explaining Black suffering. The final chapter discusses the biblical hermeneutic of liberation through Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.

While readers who are familiar with previous works by Harris will recognize his utilization of Hegel, Ricoeur, Turner, and Cone, *Black Suffering* also engages Morrison, Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth, and other Black women. These voices continue to recognize the importance of intersectional realities and the need for greater inclusion. Harris works to bridge gaps between the academy and Black communities. The work does not presume that the academy or the church has all the answers. They are two voices in an ongoing conversation, and his place in both communities contribute to *Black Suffering*. Harris models how the church and

academy can converse to the mutual benefit of each. This contribution is needed because the church and academy must work together, with all their beneficial tools and perspective, to address silent suffering.

*Black Suffering* is a “call to consciousness” (7). In a convincing utilization of theology, philosophy, and narratives, the reader is awakened, or reawakened, to the ongoing tragedies of Black suffering. With the experience of a gifted preacher, Harris’s utilization of various genres contributes to the awakening process he describes. Naming the numbness, and encouraging the reader to move past it, is a helpful contribution to current conversations on Black suffering. The work reminds preachers of the pervasive power of stories. While the intended audience is not exclusive to preachers, the entire work is relevant to preaching. Harris clearly centers Black liberation preaching on the task of addressing Black silent suffering through preaching Christ. *Black Suffering* is creative and incisive in its description of current issues and constructive proposals for moving forward.

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