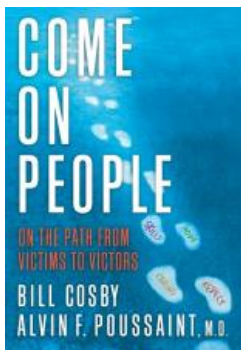


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## A Recovery Plan for Black America — And a Courageous Message for All Americans

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Bill Cosby worked his way into American hearts through his great talent as a comedian and actor, but there has always been more to Bill Cosby than any laugh line can convey. He is also a man of ideas and a man who cares deeply about his country.

Cosby is also a man who cares deeply about the breakdown of the family and social cohesion among black Americans — especially among young black men and boys. In his new book, *Come on, People: On the Path from Victims to Victors* [Thomas Nelson], Cosby teams up with Harvard University psychiatrist Alvin F. Poussaint to confront many of these issues head-on. The book is as courageous as it is timely.

“For the last generation or two, as our communities dissolved and our parenting skills broke down, no one has suffered more than our young black men,” Cosby and Poussaint lament. They face the issues honestly and do not mince words. At the same time, they place these challenges within the context of what they also see as continuing prejudice against black Americans. The essence of their argument is that while black America can blame others for many of the challenges they face, they hold the key to their own recovery through personal and group achievement and responsibility.

Consider a paragraph like this:

*We are calling on men, all men, the successful and the unsuccessful, the affluent and the poor, the married and the unmarried, to come and claim their children. You can run the biggest drug cartel in America or win the Super Bowl, but if you haven't claimed your children, you are not a man. You can make all the excuses you want, but no one can stop you from claiming your children. It's not about you. It's about them. If you have not come to claim your children, you have stolen their hope. You have stolen any kind of feeling that they are worth something. They will likely have no sense of the past, little pride, and even less faith in the future. They will see fathers at the mall or on TV and they will wonder how stupid or ugly they must be to have driven their fathers away.*

The authors lament the breakdown of marriage and fatherhood most of all, tracing most of the pathologies they cite to that cause. They also note that even under the worst oppression by others, black Americans had held their families together or had done their very best to do so. These pathologies are now self-inflicted.

This paragraph should haunt all Americans:

*There is one statistic that captures the bleakness. In 1950, five out of every six black children were born into a two-parent home. Today, that number is less than two out of six. In poor communities, that number is lower still. There are whole blocks with scarcely a married couple, whole blocks without responsible males to watch out for wayward boys, whole neighborhoods in which little girls and boys come of age without seeing up close a committed partnership and perhaps never having attended a wedding.*

Just think about that — whole blocks of children growing up without ever seeing a married couple up close or having

attended a wedding. The problem can be traced to the breakdown of marriage and the absence of fathers, they argue. In their words, “Parenting works best when both a mother and father participate. Some mothers can do it on their own, but they need help. A house without a father is a challenge. A neighborhood without fathers is a catastrophe, and that’s just about what we have today.”

Bill Cosby has raised these issues before, but never with a presentation and articulation as forceful and comprehensive as *Come On, People*. Christians will want to take many of the arguments beyond where Cosby and Poussaint leave them, but all will recognize the courage represented by this brave book.

Here, for example, is a passage in which the authors deal with the shift in young male sexual behavior and its consequences:

*As we became older and grew more interested in girls, our hormones raged just as boys’ hormones rage today. The Internet may be new. Cell phones may be new. But sex, we don’t need to tell you, has been around since Adam and Eve. So has shame. We knew that if one of us got a girl pregnant, not only would she have to visit that famous “aunt in South Carolina,” but young Romeo would have to go too, not to South Carolina maybe, but somewhere. It would be too embarrassing for Romeo’s family for him to just sit around in the neighborhood with a fat Cheshire cat smile on his face.*

*And there was something else we understood: that girl likely had a daddy in the home. And he’d be prepared to wipe that grin off Romeo’s face permanently. This was what parenting was about. It wasn’t always pretty, but it could be pretty effective.*

More:

*For no good reason we can understand, society seems to be telling young black men that fatherhood is no big thing. Society tells young people in general to look after number one and to worry about everyone else later, if at all. Like the sixteen-year-old on the TV show—if you don’t like the outcome, walk away. Even if you get married and you’re not happy, walk away. With all the temptations to walk away, the black divorce and separation rate today is 50 percent higher than the white rate. And black women who divorce are considerably less likely to remarry than white divorcees, partly because of the shortage of black males.*

*Without being told and told often, young men simply do not know or understand what a father’s responsibilities are. Many of them have never seen a real father in action. Many do not appreciate that fathers are important to a child’s healthy development or that unemployed, separated, and unwed fathers can still interact with their children and contribute significantly to their well-being.*

The issues Cosby and Poussaint address are important to all Americans, and every American has a personal stake in the recovery these authors hope to encourage.

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Many people who enjoy and appreciate [Bill Cosby](#) do not know that he holds both Masters of Education and Doctor of Education degrees from the University of Massachusetts. His doctoral dissertation was entitled, “The Integration of Visual Media via Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids into the Elementary Schools Culminating as a Teacher Aid to Achieve Increased Learning” (1977).

Cosby has his critics within the African-American community, notably [Michael Eric Dyson](#) of Georgetown University. In his book, *Is Bill Cosby Right?*, Dyson argues that Cosby blames black Americans for problems caused by others and rejects Cosby’s proposals for recovery.



