

Skimmed: Breastfeeding, Race, and Injustice, by Andrea Freeman

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Legal scholar Andrea Freeman makes a notable contribution to understanding some of the issues and complexities surrounding African American women's infant feeding decisions in her 2019 book, *Skimmed: Breastfeeding, Race, and Injustice*. Having covered in depth both African American women's breastfeeding history and the Fultz quadruplets in my own research, I was eager to read this book, expecting that it would shed some new light on an important, but grossly understudied subject. Significantly, Freeman presents a historically accurate narrative of the lives of Fultz quadruplets that showcases the ways that these four Black children's lives were shaped by the capitalist economic forces that were at the heart of formula marketing campaigns that targeted Black communities in the United States between the 1940s and the 1970s (DeVane-Johnson et al., 2018). Based on the title and the pictures of the four girls on the cover, one would think this was a book about them. However, the book covered additional barriers to the Black infant feeding experience.

The strengths of *Skimmed* are that the author illuminates some of the historical barriers that Black women faced when it came to infant feeding decisions, which have been largely understudied, while also highlighting the problematic commodification of Black bodies and Black babies by the infant formula industry. Together with her historical account of the lives of the Fultz quadruplets, Freeman is to be commended in this regard. In general, most people have never heard of the Fultz quads. I am thankful that this book introduced them to the world, highlighting their life and the sacrifices they were forced to endure. For those individuals who are interested in race and health disparities or starting their journey into lactation or the birth world, this book would be a good place to start. The historical overview is important to the Black narrative, and I thank the author for engaging in this work.

However, *Skimmed* seemed to lose its purpose midway through, as it became more of a historiographic essay of Black womanhood as it pertained to barriers that Black women and families faced in their infant feeding decisions. As such, the much-needed focus on the Fultz quadruplets was significantly diluted. While Freeman's narrative offers rich detail about the

aforesaid topics—and would be quite informative to the average reader—there were some noncontextualized inaccuracies that if corrected would paint a fuller picture of the extent to which the Fultz quadruplets were exploited. For example, the author noted that the parents of the Fultz quads entered into a “contractual” relationship with the PET formula company. It is more accurate to portray the signing of the “contract” as having situationally coercive aspects without informed consent. Given the state of race relations in the United States during this period, it would have been helpful see more of an acknowledgment of the ways that poor Black families, like the Fultzes, would be almost forced, out of dire economic need, to acquiesce to the allure of a big corporation, such as PET, for fear of retaliation if they did otherwise.

There are some significant weaknesses in this book. The barriers to Black women and family's breastfeeding could have benefited from a more in-depth analysis that encompassed more of the voices of Black families who lived during this period. And I also took exception to the author's attempt to draw parallels between her own birth and breastfeeding experience, in a White family, and that of a Black family. The White lived experience cannot and should not be compared with the Black lived experience in anyway. Dr. Freeman's skin color did not cause her to be taken advantage of or discriminated against. If anything, her skin color afforded her every opportunity and accommodation to ensure a positive outcome. This is not the same for some Black families, as evidenced by high maternal/infant mortality rates in the Black community (Li et al., 2019). There were also some medical inaccuracies in the book. For example, in telling her own pregnancy story in the prologue, Freeman writes that “the hospital staff tried desperately to keep the babies inside me long enough to inject their lungs with steroids.” However, this statement is not medically accurate, as babies are never given steroid injections during childbirth to increase the maturity of their lungs. Rather, it is the mother who is given the injection. Finally, it is worth noting that there were a number of errors that were too significant for a reader to ignore, including instances where the author failed to appropriately cite secondary sources. In one example, the author tries to make a correlation between the experimental vitamin

C injections that the quads were given their whole life and the fact that all four of the women developed and died of breast cancer. In doing so the author writes “vitamin D” in the first paragraph then in the third paragraph she writes “vitamin C shots.”

Nevertheless, *Skimmed* contributes to the literature about Black families’ infant feeding decisions and would be a good read for those interested in the subject. The fact remains that there are still racial disparities in breastfeeding practices in the United States, with African Americans breastfeeding less frequently than all other racial groups (Li et al., 2019). Therefore, this book contributes to raising awareness about the varied ways that American corporations have preyed on Black communities, even down to the fundamental human practice of infant feeding. Given that this dimension of Black families’ collective experiences is rarely represented in empirical literature, Freeman’s book contributes markedly to advancing the discourse about African American families and breastfeeding and hopefully will inspire a larger conversation about this critically important subject and life practice.

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