



*Book Review*

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## **Book Review of Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond**

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**Hill, M. L. (2017). *Nobody: Casualties of America's war on the vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and beyond*. Simon and Schuster. ISBN 978-1-5011-2496-9**

**N**obody: *Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable* is a civil rights/social justice text that examines the role society, institutions and government play in systematically oppressing the poor, black, brown, queer, trans and immigrant communities in America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hill, through selected incidents of police killings of unarmed black people and the Flint water crisis, explores how racism, social structures, legislation and general disregard for humankind have led to protests for the lives of "Nobodies" (so-called because America refuses to admit their existence). He further argues that the current practices of criminalizing, imprisoning or killing 'Nobodies' will yield no results unless there is a change in ideologies coupled with a healthy respect for human life. Hill's book is significant to both adult education and public programs because it illuminates the need for discussions and studies on the importance of protesting against and advocating for an end to institutionalized racism and educational inequality; and, thus, create a space for the marginalized to understand their status and speak out for change.

The first of seven chapters, "Nobody," draws on America's history of slavery and discrimination against people of color and posits that "the problem of the color-line" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 9) persists. He defines citizens who have been rendered disposable through economic and public policies and social practices - the exploited, the vulnerable and dehumanized - as "Nobodies." Based on the "Broken-window policing" that suggests that glossing over little or petty crimes creates the milieu for worse and/or deadlier crimes to occur, communities that are already being oppressed because of inadequate public schools and education, racism, lack of employment opportunities and general movement towards neoliberal ideas (usually black, brown and poor neighborhoods), are now constantly harassed, fined and criminalized for offenses that could be

stopped with a little compassion and support. Hill then turns his attention to the selective justice system that renders poor defendants, who cannot afford private lawyers, incapable of defense as they are saddled with overwhelmed and underpaid public lawyers. “Bargain” and “Caged” (the third and fifth chapters) both tackle the role of neoliberalism in this exploitation of the poor and vulnerable in society by examining the privatization of prisons, which has led to mass incarcerations benefitting the affluent in society. The fourth chapter, titled “Armed”, points out discrimination in gun rights, and the latitude police have been given to “wage war on the neighborhoods and treat homes like occupied territory” (p. 119). “Emergency,” the sixth chapter, exposes the destructive effects of neoliberalism in America. With the example of Flint, Michigan, it is obvious how the drive for privatization and profit-based organizations and institutions dehumanize people unless there is some form of economic advantage to be gained.

This book is significant to the discourse on social justice and change for both the academic and public arenas. By linking current 21<sup>st</sup> century issues to historical moments in American history, Hill suggests that not much has changed especially for Black Americans; they are still being *lynched*, as is evident in the staggering rates of unarmed Black men being killed through state sanctions and the mass incarceration: i.e. “Old vices in new forms” (p. 130). It is noteworthy that apart from Sandra Bland (who is, according to Hill, “casualty of a broken criminal justice system (p. 66)) and Cooper (who committed suicide after being sexually abused while on death row as a minor), not much is said about the plight of vulnerable (Black) women amid all this systemic oppression of the vulnerable. The current push for neoliberal ideology and governance play a crucial role in the state of the vulnerable, “the very notion of the public has become disposable” (p. 78) in its stead, individualism is the norm. Hill makes a sturdy argument for challenging the neoliberalist ideologies and governance, racial discrimination and racism, police policies and the justice system. This resistance and revolution is already underway; the Poor, Black, Brown, LGBTQ and marginalized people are speaking up-through protests. In “Somebody”, the final chapter, we see a 21<sup>st</sup> century resistance to assert the value of black lives and the marginalized in the society. States are being scrutinized by the media and government, and the vulnerable are now stating emphatically, that they are, in fact, SOMEBODY.

## References

Du Bois, W. (2007). *The souls of Black folk* (Du Bois, W. E. B., 1868-1963). Oxford; England: Oxford University Press.



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