

The Healer: A Doctor's Crusade Against Addiction and AIDS

John S. Friedman

Beny J. Primm

CreateSpace (Dec 16, 2014)

Softcover \$14.99 (182pp)

978-1-4995-4797-9

Primm and Friedman tell a life story that deserves a place in history.

The Healer: A Doctor's Crusade Against Addiction and AIDS, by Beny J. Primm and John S. Friedman, paints a portrait of a man of character and influence.

Drug addiction and AIDS are two terrifying forces ravaging the modern world. Stories like Primm's are so exciting to read because he, unlike the average citizen, has the knowledge to help stop these forces. It's not just Primm's knowledge that makes this book compelling, but also his courage and grit. The full arc of the author's life shows his triumph in areas beyond medicine; he grew up in the segregated South, and battled for the opportunity to achieve.

Primm began practicing medicine in the 1960s in New York, and soon was using innovative methods like needle exchanges and methadone to combat the scourges plaguing the city. To ensure more lasting change, he wielded political influence to benefit those in need; he advised five presidents, beginning with Nixon. His narrative shows how he balanced the grittiness of drug abuse in inner-city New York with the pretense and protocol of political influence in Washington—a true feat.

Despite his achievements, his humility stands out. Primm's voice and recollections are friendly and warm. He is honest, open, offended when called for, but not bitter. The title of chapter one characterizes Primm as "The Responsible Revolutionary"—an apt description that captures his integrity and the magnitude of his work. While the book is about one man, it has an expansive sense of time and place. Primm knows that *what* he's done is significant, but he also knows that *when* and *where* he's worked is significant too. He neither over- or underestimates his place in history.

The nonchronological storyline is a look at his whole life. Whereas not all memoirists' early lives are pertinent, Primm's youth is intensely relevant. The book has an easy-to-read balance of narrative and exposition, giving historical weight and detail where needed, and adapting the pace to suit the story.

Friedman lends his writing expertise to create a quality book that is a delight to read, but he allows Primm's voice and life to shine through without any interference.

The Healer is relevant to pressing current issues such as mass incarceration, the war on drugs, and mental illness. It's an inspiring read for doctors, activists, political leaders, and concerned citizens—particularly those who are younger and are looking for motivation and a vision of hope.

MELISSA WUSKE (March 2, 2015)

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