

PICADOR

# Reading Group Gold

## *Black Man in a White Coat: A Doctor's Reflections on Race and Medicine*

by Dr. Damon Tweedy

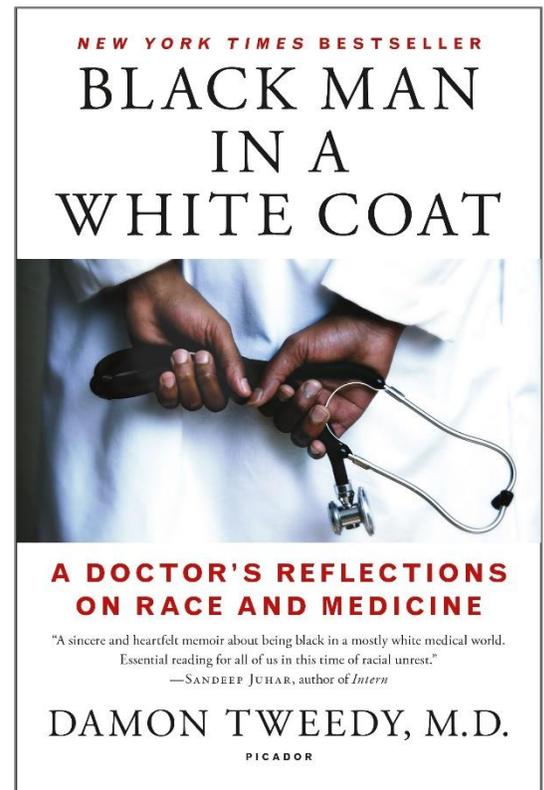
### ABOUT THE BOOK

**A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • ONE OF TIME MAGAZINE'S TOP TEN NONFICTION BOOKS OF THE YEAR • A LIBRARY JOURNAL BEST BOOK SELECTION • A BOOKLIST EDITORS' CHOICE BOOK SELECTION**

**One doctor's passionate and profound memoir of his experience grappling with race, bias, and the unique health problems of black Americans**

When Damon Tweedy begins medical school, he envisions a bright future where his segregated, working-class background will become largely irrelevant. Instead, he finds that he has joined a new world where race is front and center. The recipient of a scholarship designed to increase black student enrollment, Tweedy soon meets a professor who bluntly questions whether he belongs in medical school, a moment that crystallizes the challenges he will face throughout his career. Making matters worse, in lecture after lecture the common refrain for numerous diseases resounds, "More common in blacks than in whites."

*Black Man in a White Coat* examines the complex ways in which both black doctors and patients must navigate the difficult and often contradictory terrain of race and medicine. As Tweedy transforms from student to practicing physician, he discovers how often race influences his encounters with patients. Through their stories, he illustrates the complex social, cultural, and economic factors at the root of many health problems in the black community. These issues take on greater meaning when Tweedy is himself diagnosed with a chronic disease far more common among black people. In this powerful, moving, and deeply empathic book, Tweedy explores the challenges confronting black doctors, and the disproportionate health burdens faced by black patients, ultimately seeking a way forward to better treatment and more compassionate care.



ISBN: 9781250105042

## QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. For the person(s) who chose (voted for) this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not?
2. What do you think motivated Tweedy to share his life story? How did you respond to his “voice”?
3. What is Tweedy’s most admirable quality? Is he someone you would want to know?
4. Compare this book to other memoirs/autobiographies that you/your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like *Black Man in a White Coat* more or less than other books you’ve read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book?
5. Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend/ a younger person considering med school?
6. What was the purpose of *Black Man in a White Coat* (e.g. to teach, to entertain, to bring to light an issue)? Did reading this book make you/the group more aware and knowledgeable about any particular issues?
7. If this book was intended to teach the reader something, did it succeed? Was something learned from reading *Black Man in a White Coat*? If so, what? If not, why did the book fail as a teaching tool?
8. Was there a specific passage (or incident) that left an impression, good or bad? Share the passage and its effect.
9. The way a non-fiction book is written can impact a reader’s enjoyment and understanding of it. Was *Black Man in a White Coat* written in a way that was easily accessible?
10. Was there something especially surprising about Tweedy’s story? What was it and why?
11. Was there a lesson that could be taken away from Tweedy’s life? What was it and why is it important?
12. Why do you think Tweedy organized *Black Man in a White Coat* the way he did (medical school years, internship and psychiatric training and clinical practice)?
13. Have you had experiences similar to those that Tweedy cites (being mistaken for the maintenance person [p. 12], responding to health issues with lifestyle changes [p. 71 – 73], dealing with someone who initially did not want to deal with you because of race/gender [p. 192 – 202], receiving medical treatment [p. 147 – 150])?
14. In terms of the issues raised – do they affect your life directly or more generally? Do they impact you now or will they only apply to you sometime in the future?
15. What did you think of Tweedy’s analysis of the current situation regarding health care disparities (p. 236 – 237)? What about system-based disparities that limit access to medical care (more interns than long term doctors)? Doctor-patient relationships/attitudes and behaviors? Unhealthy lifestyles?

16. Tweedy cites other memoirs/autobiographies (*The Big Picture* by Ben Carson [p.124], *Brothers and Keepers* by John Edgar Wideman [p.131], and references *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore [p.132], *Brain Surgeon* by Keith Black [p. 25], and *Gifted Hands* by Ben Carson [p. 25-6]). Are there other works that his story evokes?
17. Tweedy is in his early 40s. It is not uncommon for follow-up memoirs/autobiographies to be written. Would you want to read a follow-up on the next chapter of his life?
18. What did you like/dislike about the book that has not already been discussed/covered?

Guide written by Troy Johnson



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