

A biography of the eminent psychiatrist Dr. Poussaint, M.D

Written by Patricia Turnier

Saturday, 02 October 2010 18:20



Dr. Poussaint is one of the finest and greatest psychiatrists in America. He was born in East Harlem (NY) in a family of eight children. His ancestors were from Guadeloupe and New York City. His parents were Harriet Johston Poussaint, a homemaker, and Christopher Poussaint, who worked as a printer and typographer. Dr Poussaint is a renowned authority, an eminent dedicated psychiatrist and teacher, part of the American intelligentsia.

He is also a prolific author. In addition to co-authoring *Come On People*, Dr. Poussaint is co-author of *Raising Black Children* and *Lay My Burden Down: Unraveling the Mental Health Crisis Among African Americans*. He closely collaborated with [Dr. Bill Cosby EdD](#) on several of his best-selling books. Dr. Poussaint's books should be translated into other languages (French, Spanish, Creole, etc).

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He is a man of courage, philanthropy and a veteran of the civil rights movement. From 1965 to 1967, he was Southern Field Director of the Medical Committee for Human Rights in Jackson, Mississippi, selflessly providing medical care to civil rights workers and aiding in the desegregation of health facilities throughout the South. He is the former chair of the board of directors of PUSH for Excellence. He also served as one of Rev. Jesse Jackson's advisers in the 1984 presidential campaign.

Dr. Poussaint has authored widely cited articles in medical and lay journals. He is a highly respected consultant for the various medical institutions affiliated to Harvard Medical School in Boston and an honored speaker at a multitude of public forums. Thus, he joined the prestigious Harvard (the oldest and illustrious university of the United States) Medical School's faculty in 1969, where he remains today as a professor of psychiatry and faculty associate dean for Student Affairs. Dr. Poussaint is passionate about his work and is also currently director of the Media Center at the Judge Baker Children's Center in Boston.

He is known for his numerous contributions to *Ebony* magazine. He has been a frequent guest on the Oprah Winfrey Show. He was one of the brains and a major force behind the sitcom *The Cosby Show*

, one of the most-watched television programs in America. It was an extraordinary success which made history. This show helped propel NBC from third to first place in the primetime ratings. At one point

The Cosby Show

was viewed by 38.3 million people, approximately one third of the American TV audience. This sitcom was the most-watched television program in America from its debut in 1984 until the end in 1992. Dr. Poussaint was a script and production consultant to NBC's

The Cosby Show

(from 1984 to 1992) and also to

The Cosby Show'

s spin-off

[*A Different World*](#)

(from 1986 to 1993).

With

The Cosby Show

it was the first time in television history that a sitcom had African-American parents with liberal professions.

The Cosby Show□

changed the perception of the Black family worldwide. It was an educational situation comedy. For instance, Afrikaners began to view differently Black people and the sitcom was a hit in South Africa (it is important to note that at the time the masses of Black South Africans didn't have access to television sets). The Cosby's grandchildren (on

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The Cosby Show

) were named Winnie and Nelson in honor of Winnie and Nelson Mandela. It was also the first time in television history in America to showcase a sitcom with young African-American adults attending college via

A Different World

.

Dr. Poussaint's contribution to these shows definitely raised a new standard to the current (at the time) and the following American sitcoms in terms of social consciousness programming. The world knows Dr. Alvin Poussaint as a tireless crusader in the campaign to increase parental and public awareness regarding the harmful effects of violence and the increasing commercial exploitation of young children through television. Dr Poussaint continues to share his expertise with the media and works as an advocate of more responsible programming. He has appeared on numerous channels such as CNN. Dr. Poussaint is an expert on race relations in America, the dynamics of prejudice, and issues of diversity as our society becomes widely multicultural. He lectures on many college campuses and also serves as a consultant to government agencies and private corporations. He has done pioneering research on African American related to [psychological](#) and social issues.

Dr. Poussaint is one of the most important and respected physicians of diverse interests in the United States. He was classed among the top America's leading physicians in the July 2008 issue of Black Enterprise magazine. In spite of the diversity of his huge successes and accomplishments, Dr. Poussaint, a legendary psychiatrist distinguishes himself by his admirable simplicity and his generosity to share his knowledge. He embodies the great spirit of America. Through his books and his influence in the media, Dr. Poussaint gave us a legacy and we are looking forward to his next contributions. *This article was published in English (in Canada) and French (in Europe and Africa).*

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Personal information:

Dr. Poussaint married an accomplished African-American physician, Dr. Tina Inez Young on December 5, 1992. She is a specialist in neuroradiology. Dr. Poussaint and Dr. Young Poussaint have a daughter and a son from Dr. Poussaint's previous marriage.

Education:

1956 BA Columbia College (four year New York State Regents Scholarship)

1969 M.D. Cornell University Medical College

1964 MS University of California at Los Angeles

Postdoctoral training:

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Internship and Residencies:

1960-1961 Intern in Medicine, UCLA Center for the Health Sciences, Los Angeles, CA

1961-1964 Psychiatric Resident, UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute, Los Angeles, CA

1964-1965 Chief Resident, Department of Psychiatry, UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute

Hospital or Affiliated Institution Appointments:

1967-1969 Senior Staff in Psychiatry, Columbia Point Health Center, Boston, MA

1969-1974 Associate in Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA

1974-1978 Associate in Psychiatry, Massachusetts Mental Health Center, Boston, MA

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1978 Senior Associate in Psychiatry, Children's Hospital and Judge Baker Children's Center, Boston, MA

1979-1984 Medical Director/Co/founder, Bereavement Study Group, Judge Baker Children's Center

Some of the many other Professional Positions and Major Visiting Appointments of Dr. Poussaint:

1965-1967 Southern Field Director, Medical Committee for Human Rights, Jackson, Mississippi

1975 Delegate, Official United States State Department Medical Delegation to People's Republic of China

1976 Member of Official Congressional Delegation to Cuba

1979 Consultant to FBI, State Department and White House for conferences on civil rights, families, children, etc

1980-1981 Member, Board of Visitors at Boston University's School of Social Work

1983-1984 Co-campaign manager, Reverend Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign in the

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts

1985 Member, Project Interchange sponsored seminar in Israel for American Leaders of Public Policy

1985-1990 President and Chairman of the Board, PUSH for Excellence

1998 Co-Chair, Fifth Annual Children and the Media Conference, "A Different World: Media images of race and class", Children Now, Los Angeles, CA

1999 Member, TransAfrica Forum Delegation to Cuba

2000 Expert on Children's Mental Health, Beansprout.net

Some of the many Dr. Poussaint's involvement in National Television/Educational Media:

1979- Consultant for various television stations and film projects, including a variety of PBS programs such as NOVA, Seasons of Life and Childhood

1984-1992 *The Cosby Show* (Season 1 to 8 are available on DVD)

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1986-1993 [A Different World](#) (Season 1 to 6 are available on DVD)

1991-1994 Script Consultant, Different and the Same: Helping Children Identify and Prevent Prejudice. A video curriculum for early elementary school classrooms, Family Communications, Inc.

1992 Production Consultant, Here and Now, NBC-NY

2000 Consultant, Little Bill book series, Simon Spotlight

2005 Member, National Advisory Committee, Won't you be my neighbor?, Family Communications, Inc.

Some of the many Dr. Poussaint's articles:

Clinical Manifestations and Diagnosis of Amyloid Polyneuropathy

by T.L. Munsat and A.F. Poussaint

(Neurology, Minneapolis, 1962; 12(6): 413-422)

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A Controlled Study of Imipramine (Tofranil) in the Treatment of Childhood Enuresis

by A.F. Poussaint and K.S. Ditman

(J Pediatrics, 1965; 67(6): 283-290)

The Stresses of the White Female Worker in the Civil Rights Movement in the South

by A.F. Poussaint

(Am J Psychiatry, 1966; 123(4): 401-407)

A Negro Psychiatrist Explains the Negro Psyche

by A.F. Poussaint

The New York Times Sunday Magazine, August 20, 1967:52+

The Black Administrator in the White University

A. F. Poussaint

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(Black Scholar, September 1974:8-14)

Black Suicide

by A.F. Poussaint (Textbook of Black-Related Diseases, ed. R.A. Williams, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975)

Interracial Relations and Prejudice

(Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry/III, third edition, eds. H.I. Kaplan, A.M. Freedan and B.J. Sadock, Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1980: 3155-3161)

Black Children: Coping in a Racist Society

by A.F. Poussaint

(Voices of Multicultural America: Notable Speeches Delivered by African, Asian, Hispanic and Native Americans, 1790-1995, ed. Deborah Gillan Straub, Detroit: Gale Research, 1996)

Psychology and Psychiatry By A.F. Poussaint

(Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History, vol. 4, eds. Deborah Gillan Straub, J. Salzman, D.L. Smith, C. West New York: MacMillan Library Reference USA, 1996)

Prostate Cancer: Male Killer Hits Famous & Not-So-Famous

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by A.F. Poussaint

(*Ebony*, April 1997, 116-120+)

Racial Issues in Medicine: A Psychosocial Perspective

by A.F. Poussaint

(*Humane Medicine: A New Paradigm in Medical Education and Health Care Delivery*, vol. II, ed. R.A. Williams, Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins Healthcare, 2001; 33-40)

Is Extreme Racism a Mental Illness? Point-Counterpoint

by A.F. Poussaint

(*Western Journal of Medicine*, 2002; 176:4)

Books by Dr. Poussaint:

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Why Blacks kill Blacks (1972), (introduction by Rev. Jesse Jackson) Emerson Hall Publishers, Inc.; 1st edition

Raising Black Children, (originally titled Black Child Care (1975)) co-author with James P. Come, Plume: New York, 1992

Lay My Burden Down: Suicide and the mental health crisis among African-Americans, by Alvin F. POussaint, M.D and Amy Alexander, Beacon: Boston, 2000

Come On, People: On the path from Victims to Victors, by Bill Cosby EdD and Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D, Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 2007