

Jacqueline Pope. *Biting the Hand That Feeds Them: Organizing Women on Welfare at the Grass Roots Level.* (New York: Praeger Press, 1989) 162 pp., \$39.95.

As a social worker by training and practice, I found this book of great interest. I would highly recommend the text for second-year social work classes and especially for social work policy classes as a supplementary text. I believe that it would also be appropriate for an introductory women's study class as a supplementary text. Due to the cost of the text, I recommend that instructors place the volume on reserve rather than have the students individually purchase the book. The author chronicles the welfare rights movement in Brooklyn, New York, during the late sixties and early seventies in her analysis of the Brooklyn Welfare Action Council (B-WAC). The book does a fine job of identifying the culture of poverty prevalent in New York as well as giving a clear picture of the plight of poor women during this period. However, it does not speak directly to an ethnic or race experience, though this is alluded to throughout the text. The majority membership of the B-WAC were poor black or Hispanic women, while the key organizers were middle-class, educated, white males (two Catholic priests) and females (three Catholic nuns). The author notes throughout the text that the success of the B-WAC was the clergy's respect and appreciation for the African American and Hispanic experience, about which they admittedly had limited knowledge. If one expands the definition of culture to include the life-style and thought processes unique to a particular group of people, the text may be also appropriate for a minorities studies class, though I believe that this would be a "stretch" for most undergraduate students and would require some guidance from faculty to take this perspective. Illustrative of the need to appreciate different perspectives, the author states: "In the truest sense of the word, they were 'minorities' five times over—being economically disadvantaged; women of color, and ethnics; middle age; recipients of public aid; and (many of them) fat."

The book is very readable with minimal jargon. The methodology used to collect data was personal interviews with key players in the organization and the analysis of organization minutes and correspondence. The objectivity of the interviews may be questioned, since the author admits that she was a primary player in the initial organization and that the first president of B-WAC was (and is) her best friend. Certainly, the author is more complimentary of the organization and its strengths than she is critical of its weaknesses. However, she does point out B-WAC's shortcomings and theorizes why this seemingly strong grass roots organization may have failed to survive beyond six years. The author admits to the possibility of distortion of analysis and objectivity but nonetheless defends this methodological approach by referring to well-known authors Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, who had similar research circumstances and who encourage the reader to be the judge of impartiality.

Although this is a historical chronology, and some may wonder how germane the topic is to current social work issues, I would argue that the issues are unfortunately all too pertinent to contemporary social welfare concerns. With the conservative political arena which has reigned in our country since 1980 and the sweeping cuts in social services from the federal, state, county and local levels, it behooves all those in social services to be apprised of the strengths and limitations of the welfare rights movements. Both numbers and percentages of poor in our country are rising. These persons often have no voice and feel helpless against the enormous machine of the bureaucracy. Social service workers likewise feel like pawns in a cumbersome, often unfair, system. The lessons learned from the welfare rights movements of the sixties can teach us anew about the power of numbers, the worth of organizations at the grass roots levels and the responsibility of professionals to assist in the empowerment of their clients. The author notes that the primary shortcomings of the B-WAC were a lack of continual evaluation of program outcomes and the inability of the organizers to articulate long-term goals, to develop long-term plans of action and to implement programs that promote indigenous leadership in the grass roots movements. Contemporary social service professionals committed to client advocacy will be simultaneously forewarned of the pitfalls of grass root organizing and inspired by the strengths and capabilities of the grass roots movement model after reading this book.

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Felicisima C. Serafica, Andrew I. Schwebel, Richard K. Russell, Paul D. Isaac, and Linda B. Myers, eds. *Mental Health of Ethnic Minorities*. (New York: Praeger, 1990) xiii, 344 pp, \$59.50.

This edited collection is based on papers presented at a conference held at Ohio State University (1986), entitled *Minority Mental Health: A Multicultural Knowledge Base for Psychological Providers*. The chapters included in the book are expanded versions of the themes covered in the conference. This excellent book is a welcome entry into the ever-expanding field of psychology known variously as minority mental health, cross-cultural counseling, and multicultural counseling and psychotherapy. It is a field that has grown considerably in the last two decades, as counselors, psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, and other mental health providers and researchers have attempted to understand the complex role that race and ethnicity play in the counseling and psychotherapeutic process. It is a complex and controversial field, and one that doesn't fail to attract criticism as well as a growing number of dedicated proponents. It is likely, according to Paul Pedersen,