

viding ample ammunition to ignite critical thinking in the field of social work. By contextualizing the long history of anti-oppressive discourse and practice, Mullaly provides an important link between social theory and social work theory and practice. In this way, a direct linkage is made between progressive social work and the struggle for social justice in theoretical discourse and social movements.

Used as a text, *Challenging Oppression: A Critical Social Work Approach* introduces social work students to the institutions, public policies, and social processes that contribute to oppression. Beyond this it introduces students to the definitions and theories of the oppressed, the oppressor, and the complex intertwining of the two. It provides models of anti-oppressive practice for the budding social worker.

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DOWNSIZING DEMOCRACY: HOW AMERICA SIDELINED ITS CITIZENS AND PRIVATIZED ITS PUBLIC. Matthew A. Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg. *Johns Hopkins University Press*. 2002, 294 pp.

Do you ever wonder why progressive candidates for office rarely engage in issue-based campaigns, why advocates failed to organize public assistance recipients during the welfare reform debate of the mid 1990s, or why Al Gore turned down Jesse Jackson's offer to mobilize disenfranchised voters during the 2000 election fiasco? What was there to lose? Bush supporters had no problem chanting and interrupting the re-

counts until they were eventually called off. Yet for Gore, the matter presented “a legal question,” best handled in the courts by professionals instead of in the court of public opinion. This is “a rather significant observation from a candidate for elected office” (p. xi). Matthew Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg note in the preface to their intriguing new work, *Downsizing Democracy: How America Sidelined Its Citizens and Privatized Its Public*.

This book investigates the demobilization of the masses. Its thesis is simple enough. As the Al Gores of recent history have developed management techniques to “reinvent government,” the idea of the citizen has been subsumed by the metaphor of the customer, and civic life has been replaced by check-book democracy. Herein lies the problem: Citizens are thought to own their government, while customers receive services from businesses in which they have little ownership. Citizens actively engage in democratic institutions, while customers passively receive services. Citizens call for reforms, while customers receive rebates (tax breaks). Crenshaw and Ginsberg’s narrative is the tale of the transformation of Winthrop’s City on a Hill into a suburban shopping mall.

The result is a system that has more to do with personal need than public good, resulting in a phenomenon the authors describe as personal, rather than public, democracy. Forget national health care; the people need tax cuts. Crenshaw and Ginsberg suggest that sometime between the end of Robert Kennedy’s campaign to mobilize both working class white people and the civil rights coalition, and the beginnings of Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s “professionalism of reform,” advocacy groups came to favor administrative remedies instead of mobilizing voters around issues. The authors trace a shift from community organizing to lobbying and legal strategizing in civil rights, environmental, and consumer movements beginning in the 1970s. The result has been an approach favoring the work of elite professionals instead of the rank and file.

Freed from the necessity of having to reach beyond their limited class base to accommodate broader constituencies, current reform movements often focus on the narrowly defined desires of affluent elites for comfort, status, and satisfaction of aesthetic needs rather than on the more fundamental material needs of their less fortunate compatriots. How else is one to characterize the “post materialistic” or “quality of life” issues espoused by so many so-called citizens’ groups? To paraphrase from Lenin’s critique of the working class, left to its own devices, the bourgeoisie seem capable of only consumer consciousness. (p. 183)

Recall that Rudy Giuliani and George Bush both suggested that the best thing citizens could do to help after 9/11 was to go shopping.

The picture in the book is of an elite influence on government, which survives without the support of regular folks. Rather than expand a range of public services, “elites promote the private market as a better source than government for education, health, welfare, and benefits,” Crenshaw and Ginsberg explain (p. 5). To make their case, they put forth discussions of subcontracting of government services, vouchers, and the ascension of neoliberal economic policies. Those who write the biggest checks come to dominate a government once controlled by a system of checks and balances. For the authors, devolution, decentralization, and privatization have come to serve as “patterns for structuring public policy without a public” (p. 202).

Of course, it is not as simple as that. Not all privatization is bad, or all public services good. Housing constructed through public-private partnerships and tax credits is often superior to public housing. Government subcontracting can offer non-profits fair and manageable means with which to provide services. In other cases, these contracts do function as a means of cooptation and control. Devolution can be a first step toward privatizing, neglecting, and eliminating a social safety net for the most vulnerable. The result is often grim. During the same years in which welfare roles declined, the government-sponsored private prison industry exploded. Concurrently, private prison firms “lobbied the states for increased prison terms for a variety of offenders, a strategy designed to fill prison beds and corporate coffers,” the authors explain, concluding, “the privatization of punishment threatens to transform the law, justice, and punishment into mere commodities” (p. 212).

If privatization “represents a thin cover for the private use of public power” (p. 194), then the question remains: Where is the organized opposition? It exists. Unfortunately, the authors hesitate to acknowledge it, only briefly noting the Ross Perot presidential campaign in 1992, the Ralph Nadar campaign in 2000, and the protests against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund propelled by the global justice movement against corporate globalization—whose ostensible purpose is to fight the privatization of all aspects of life. The problem is, none of these movements fit into neat and tidy liberal reform models. Nevertheless, they represent vital movements, engaging citizens to do far more than simply volunteer, as the authors contend. Still, in the case of many professional reformers, advocates, and once-mobilized social workers, service delivery does tend “to displace collective mobilization” (p. 224), especially when reform-minded groups take government money. While

this is an accurate thesis, there are countless examples to the contrary, in which advocates both organize and provide services worthy of attention. Yet the emphasis in professional social work education does emphasize administration rather than community organizing. Marginalized professionally, these organizers still face many of the obstacles presented by the authors.

“They would never want to do away with the fiction of American democracy,” a friend recently pontificated while we were killing a long day in jail last spring. We had been swept off the sidewalk by the New York Police, without a warning to disperse or a vestige of concern for the undemocratic symbolism of arresting people opposed to war profiteering. While opposition does exist, the authors clearly articulate the challenges presented by a shift—in areas from prisons to war to social welfare—of a governmental departure from solving public problems and toward generating private profits.

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NOTE

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RECKONING WITH HOMELESSNESS. Kim Hopper. *Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003, 271 pp.*

For a quarter of a century, homelessness has been one of the U.S.’s most pressing social problems. In *Reckoning with Homelessness*, Kim Hopper, who coauthored (with Ellen Baxter) one of the first studies of contemporary homelessness in New York City (1981), reflects on his twenty-five years of engagement with this issue. Blending memoir, advocacy, and anthropology in equal measure, Hopper has produced a vivid ethnographic portrait.

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