

Book Reviews

Sisneros, J., Stakeman, C., Joyner, M. C., and Schmitz, C. (2008). Critical Multicultural Social Work. Chicago: Lyceum Books, Inc. <http://www.lyceumbooks.com> Reviewed by Peggy Pittman-Munke, PhD, MSW

The authors bring varied and impressive credentials from both academe and professional practice to the task of writing. Jose Sisneros, PhD, has 32 years of professional social work practice experience and now is an associate professor at New Mexico Highlands University. Catherine Stakemore, PhD, is the executive director of the NASW Maine Chapter. Mildred Joyner, MSW, is professor of social work and director/chairperson of the Undergraduate Social Work Program at West Chester University. Cathryne Schmitz, PhD, is professor and director/chairperson of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Sisernos, Stakeman, and Schmitz have also focused on global and international issues and bring this perspective as well to their book. Joyner brings an additional perspective as a consultant for higher, secondary and elementary education, and for business and human service agencies in the area of race relations.

The authors explore multicultural social work practice from a critical perspective. This is the first book to do so explicitly. The authors provide not only a history and a basic framework for examining and evaluating issues of diversity, but also guided self-reflection to enable practitioners to become more aware and sensitive as they work with clients. All of the authors have impressive practice backgrounds and are able to move beyond the mere examination of categories of oppression and diversity to an understanding that identity is fluid and shifting across categories of diversity, including race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, and ability/disability. They work from an empowerment perspective and a recognition of the strengths that the various elements of diversity bring to the table. Techniques and tools that enable the reader, whether practitioner or student, to recognize her/his own perspective and find meaning and importance in what s/he is learning are major strengths of this book.

The authors point out that one issue in social work education is that, although there has been an emphasis on diversity and on oppression, there has yet to be an explicit educational framework that includes oppression and diversity. This book was written to remedy this deficiency. Another issue with the way both diversity and oppression content are currently taught is that there has been no easily accessible work to prepare social workers for exploration of multicultural practice from a critical perspective, although there have been many books on cross-cultural

Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, Volume 5, Number 3, 2008 -page 50

practice and cultural competency. This book links multiculturalism, anti-oppression work, and social justice practice, making it particularly important to readers of this journal. The first chapter focuses on oppression and on the basic theoretical frameworks for evaluating multiple issues of diversity and unequal access to power. The remainder of the book shifts the focus to self-reflection through an examination, analysis, and deconstruction of specific oppressed groups within a multicultural context. This context emphasizes the structural and power dynamics of oppression of each group. Another important contribution of this book is the interweaving of class and economics in an understandable clear fashion into the discussion of structural and power dynamics.

The authors use the metaphor of a web to present the complexity of intersection between race and ethnicity, gender, sex, sexual orientation, ability/disability, and readers are forced to think critically about these dynamics in relation to class and economic situation as they create their own web. This forces the reader to understand that multiple oppressions are not simply additive in their effects, although this is horrific enough. The final chapter moves the reader into the areas of practice in which these issues are more likely to surface and demonstrates how the tenets of critical multiculturalism can be best applied.

I found especially helpful that the authors lead the reader to understand the differing world views and hidden assumptions that produce many of the views of both people in the dominant culture and of those who are members of an oppressed group. I especially liked the fact that the authors recognized the unique culture, family, community, and history of each of the readers. The case examples taken from many different settings pay tribute to the richness of experiences of the book's authors. The application of a critical framework aids the reader to take a critical analysis of oppression and institutional injustices as well as the impact of privilege, and the processes for achieving real change. This is where this book performs signal service. Helping the reader to shift the focus from his/her own world view to that of the other is as important as helping the reader understand that change not only is possible but must and can happen. This book provides the reader with the tools to begin this change. These tools are what makes this book so important to readers both in the academic world and in the practice world. These tools give us the ability to begin to create a world that is in keeping with the tenets of the *NASW Code of Ethics*, one in which oppression is addressed and social justice becomes a focus.

This book should be read by every practitioner and is useful for both graduate and undergraduate classes related to diversity, oppression, and multiculturalism. The reference list

pulls together an impressive group of references spanning social justice, cultural competency, oppression, and diversity should readers wish for further information to deepen and enrich their knowledge in these areas.