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Studies, Programs, and Good Intentions

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_The University and the Urban Crisis;
Volume 2, Community Psychology Series,
Edited by Howard Mitchell and Daniel Adelson;
Behavioral Publications, N.Y., 216 pp., August 1974._

This small book sponsored by the Division of Community Psychology of the American Psychological Association, presents thirteen university-based personnel who consider the unique position of the university in sharing its expertise for solving the social problems of the urban community.

Howard E. Mitchell has brought together writings from a group of psychologists, university administrators, and a social psychiatrist who present their field experiences and viewpoints of the urban crisis.

The individual papers reflect a seriousness of purpose through attempting to develop a viable theory of community psychology. Given the opportunity of providing these “valuable” services in intervention projects throughout the country, the process becomes questionable when one considers the 1966 results of a Louis Harris poll which shows that public confidence in higher education was at the 61% level then as compared to a low of 33% in 1972.

Part I consists of the inaugural address of Warren G. Bennis at the University of Cincinnati. Part II develops the historical background of the Human Resources Center, University of Pennsylvania and proceeds with two more papers describing a program which was designed to develop leadership skills with educationally privileged women and the other, with leaders of disadvantaged communities.
This section of the book then concludes in describing the way in which Temple University has worked with the urban crisis and the role of professionals in a system coping with the values of society and the community as a whole.

Part III includes the work of those who are directly involved in the training of psychologists and the dilemmas which are experienced due to the use of inappropriate organizational base. Corbett and Levine then present suggestions for community service models that facilitate teaching and learning through service. For those professionals who have little or no experience in university involvement with the community, this is an important contribution and practical guideline analyzing the ways in which benefits could be derived from a systemized analysis of the university and the community to be served. However, in this section, Ira Goldenberg's paper, which was presented to the American Psychological Association on September 5, 1971, critically evaluates community psychology programs by formulating three important implications in the development of academically based community psychology programs:

1. That we begin to take very seriously the socio-political implications of the conditions which gave rise to the community health movement in the first place.

2. That we begin to devote our time and energy to the task of developing alternative and institutional models in which the rhetoric accompanying the concept of community health is translated into a viable internal reality rather than some on-going mythology that is, at once, both soothing to its creators and infuriating to people in the community.

3. That we commit ourselves to studying, understanding, and changing our own settings (i.e., the university), and to accepting the risks that will invariably follow all such attempts.

Part IV "A Social Psychiatrist's Point of View" by Leonard J. Duhl is an exceptionally perceptive and humanistic approach. He stresses the need for a core of competent scholars who are capable of recognizing multiple avenues and alternatives in considering solutions to problems faced by our institutions, government and society.

Part V which is merely some demographic materials relating to Philadelphia and its institutions of higher learning seemed to be an afterthought and therefore of little value to those readers who are not directly involved with the programs in that area.

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Throughout the 1960's the university community envisioned itself in the forefront of educational and social reform. Federal programs and funding encouraged this concept. As we review the past and evaluate the 1970's, the idea that we would achieve equality in education and lessen the problems in society has never really been fulfilled and
the balloon of optimism has burst. We can now ask the question: Even with all of these efforts, why has the state of the nation, the schools, and society deteriorated to the point that we must cope with the current query of what went wrong?

Studies, programs, and good intentions, such as those presented in this book, appear to have little effect upon the quality of life throughout the nation. Perhaps it is a note of warning when Leonard Duhl stresses that unless the university actively considers to become a part of the total social scene, change may be our "twentieth or twenty-first century dinosaur."

The University and Urban Crisis is a readable book. It should prove of interest to inexperienced professionals, college students, and people who would like to obtain a quick review of a few university-community based programs. Its main deficiency is a lack of continuity and ineffective transitions from one essay or speech to another.

On page 12 in the preface the editor indicates that the purpose of Volume II is to assist in the development of "a viable theory of community psychology and/or a better definition of community psychology." If such a purpose was intended, then it becomes apparent that the voluminous contributions by sociologists and cultural anthropologists have been ignored.

While we do appreciate the American Psychological Association's willingness to share many of these experiences, the urban crisis, like the academic crisis, can only be mitigated when scholarly publications acknowledge the inter-relationships between fields of study and knowledge. Because this review is being prepared for a journal devoted to inter- and trans-disciplinary interests, I feel an obligation to criticize the lack of acknowledgement of the linkages between disciplines as well as the need for employing a cooperative base for the dilemma within the university and the urban crisis. The example by Frank Corbett and Murray Levine comes closest to an interdisciplinary approach in "University Involvement in the Community."

In recent years, the professional literature has been proliferated with materials pertaining to higher education and yet, in references submitted at the end of each portion of the book, the most current reference was dated 1971. This is indeed an incomplete representation of materials pertinent to those becoming increasingly aware of the university and urban crisis.

This book provides some ideas which raise many questions. Those in community psychology need to focus on the issues set forth in the paper by Leonard Duhl as well as the contributions of a trans-disciplinary approach to the university and the urban crisis before a viable theory of community psychology can be developed.

G. M. Greenberg