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Youth-Led Community Organizing: Theory and Action.
Melvin Delgado and Lee Staples. Reviewed by
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Although the book's central message may not be entirely new, readers will discover that it contains a great deal of useful information about recent trends in social work and social welfare in Britain today. Of particular interest are chapters dealing with New Labor's approach to social welfare and the way the government uses the market to implement its social policies. In addition to tracing the expansion of commercial provision, the author discusses the way the nonprofit sector has been transformed and the growing influence of consumerism which has expanded through, for example, the use of direct payments and individual care budgets. The way these policies are being implemented in Britain provides fascinating insights into the shift that has taken place since the 1980s in British social policy which previously championed "welfare statism" and was regarded by many as a commendable example of collective provision.

The book also outlines a strategy for responding to the challenges facing social work in Britain today. Many of the author's observations will also be of relevance to social work in the United States and other countries. Tracing the history of social work radicalism, Ferguson questions whether current approaches to critical social work, such as postmodernism, actually offer a sound basis for action. His analysis of the postmodernist position is incisive and pointed, although it is not clear that his own Marxist alternative provides a sufficient basis for mobilizing professional support for a renewed vision of professional practice that addresses the problems of heightened inequality, persistent poverty and unmet needs. Nevertheless, this readable and challenging book is a refreshing addition to the literature and deserves to be widely read.

James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley

Melvin Delgado and Lee Staples, *Youth-Led Community Organizing: Theory and Action*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. \$19.95 papercover.

The contemporary Community Youth Development Movement, initiated in the early 1990s, is a form of youth activism which is gaining in popularity and has a growing

body of literature consisting of essays, reports, case studies, monographs and books on a range of activities in agencies and organizations, communities and civic life. However, it is helpful to note that youth activism in the United States has its roots in the more than one hundred-year old labor strikes organized by Appalachian child laborers in the coal mines and child newspaper carriers and extended through the mid-1960s with civil rights activities. Contemporary youth development activities include not only social activism, but a range of activities focused on the public good including youth philanthropy, partnerships with adults, Americorp, 4-H and youth artistic or cultural activities. This book by Delgado and Staples, which is grounded in social and economic justice perspectives, adds to this growing body of contemporary literature. Our understanding of a modern day movement based on a strengths perspective as opposed to a deficit model of youth development is expanded. Youth-led community organizing sharpens our understanding of the potential contributions youth development adds to civic life.

Delgado and Staples present a theoretical and social action-oriented approach to youth-led organizing with an analytical framework based on guiding principles and informed by existing research, an approach characteristic of Delgado's earlier prolific writings and focus for capacity enhancement. Social action and task group development perspectives characteristic of Staples' earlier work are reflected in the discussion on the stages for implementing youth-led organizing. Participatory democracy and the leadership development emphasis characteristic of the youth movement are also described in their theoretical frameworks. A case study from the Boston community Youth First in Jackson Square is presented as an exemplar from the field which represents a successful change strategy as defined by the Innovations Center for Community and Youth Development. As noted by the authors, the case study approach provides an applied perspective for the practitioner. The Jackson Square youth effort is focused on creating a safe, drug and gang-free community and is representative of the social action and civic contributions emanating from the youth development movement. The authors describe the historical development of Youth First with a commentary and

analysis. Youth First is an outstanding example of the social change capabilities among urban youth in the Boston community. Unlike, for example, the artistic efforts of *Flix 4 Peace*—a group of youth learning a craft while developing consciousness-raising film festival features about urban issues such as youth violence—Youth First is, by and large, focused on community improvement and better service provision through social action and positive social change.

As noted in the book's epilogue, lack of resources and tensions with adult decision makers are examples of challenges associated with youth social activism. However, the idealism and optimism that youth bring to civic life far outweigh the challenges. Community engagement has taken a prominent role in contemporary macro practice, and youth-led community organizing is an outstanding exemplar. Delgado and Staples provide invaluable information which enriches our understanding of the world-wide youth development movement and its contemporary manifestation.

Wilma Peebles-Wilkins, Boston University

James C. Riley, *Low Income, Social Growth and Good Health: A History of Twelve Countries*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007. \$24.95 paperback.

Organized around both chronological and topical lines, the detailed case studies presented in this book examine the progress in life expectancy in twelve countries: Japan and Korea; Sri Lanka; Panama and Costa Rica; Cuba and Jamaica; the Soviet Union and China; Oman; and Venezuela and Mexico. Riley asserts that it was through the pursuit of social development rather than economic development that these low-income countries found ways to grow their own forms of social capital, even though their people had little capacity for spending on things other than the basic necessities of life and their governments lacked the revenues to fund costly social programs. Instead, these countries chose social growth in five particular areas: public health; education; basic health care; people's understanding of the health risks they faced; and people's participation in the effort to improve their own lives.