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**Review of *Contesting Community: The Limits and Potential of Local Organizing*. James DeFilippis, Robert Fisher, & Eric Shragge.  
Reviewed by Nancy Giunta.**

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James DeFilippis, Robert Fisher, & Eric Shragge (2010). *Contesting Community: The Limits and Potential of Local Organizing*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. \$25.95 (paperback).

After decades of what seems like inexhaustible growth of neoliberal politics and policies, James DeFilippis, Robert Fisher, and Eric Shragge offer a provocative reflection on the state of community practice and present an insightful analysis of the role of community organizing in promoting social justice and social change efforts. *Contesting Community* looks back at the landscape of community organizing for social change and effectively describes key linkages between local work and broader social movements. The authors fittingly state “this book could not be more timely” (p. 12), an assessment which could not be more true. With the global economy still faltering a year after publication, their analysis of local organizing efforts within a historical, geographical, political, and ideological context remains salient.

There are several analytical perspectives offered throughout the book as it “contextualizes local work” (p. 2). The authors place current community theory and practice into more than a century of historical context, describing the growth of the neoliberal agenda over recent decades. This context helps guide the reader through a geographical perspective by demonstrating linkages between local organizing work and national social movement building. Analyses within political and ideological contexts provide community scholars and practitioners a framework for examining the utility of conflict-driven vs. consensus-driven models of organizing and development work.

The book contains six chapters. The first two provide a framework for understanding the concept of community, both theoretically and in practice. The traditional view of community organizing and its body of scholarly work is referred to in the book as a “canon” of mostly progressive and left-leaning ideas. The authors point out, however, that community work can also take the form of conservative efforts and refer to this body of work as an “anti-canon.”

The third and fourth chapters offer an in-depth examination of contemporary community practice within a post-1980

neoliberal context. The authors present a critical analysis of community theory and practice in an era in which the role of the market is increasing and the role of government is decreasing through decentralization and devolution. They capture the complexity of the relationship between centralized state power and local community efforts and resources, and posit that the social policy and community practice implications of this environment generally support the status quo (i.e., conservative direction) rather than challenge it. They do, however, offer some examples of social justice organizations that have successfully utilized current concepts of communitarianism without losing focus on their progressive vision. Also presented are examples of organizations that have successfully promoted a conservative agenda, demonstrating that local community efforts and larger social movement tactics can be used by both Left and Right interests.

The last two chapters propose how a progressive movement may grow out of present conditions. In chapter five, examples of organizations that counter the neoliberal trends of the past three decades are presented. The last chapter draws six broad lessons to be learned from the journey of community practice and theory described throughout the book. The germane lessons are offered as propositions to guide future community practice and scholarship.

The book is engaging and provocative, raising potential areas for discourse among scholars and practitioners. For example, what is the role of radicalism in the current context—will a more conflict-driven approach move the debate? What could the role of collaboration and partnerships play in a conflict-driven approach? How will technology facilitate or serve as a barrier in challenging current neoliberal policies? How much worse will the economic crisis and resulting disparities get before communities push back against a neoliberal agenda?

As a reader who came of age during the 1980s and 1990s, I found this book to be an enlightening orientation to a significant era in the history of social welfare. The examples interwoven throughout the book illustrate the concepts well. Noticeably absent, however, was any mention of the disability rights movement, despite its significant gains during the 1970s

and 1980s. On the whole, *Contesting Community* is an excellent historical analysis of the evolution of community practice. This book is valuable reading for scholars, graduate students and practitioners in sociology, social work, public administration, public health or political science.

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Elizabeth Beck, Nancy P. Kropf & Pamela Blume Leonard (Eds.) (2011). *Social Work & Restorative Justice: Skills for Dialogue, Peacemaking, and Reconciliation*. New York: Oxford University Press, \$45.00 (hardcover).

The three co-editors of this important and groundbreaking text are affiliated with the School of Social Work at Georgia State University. Elizabeth Beck and Nancy P. Kropf are professors at the University, and Pamela Blume Leonard is the Executive Director of the Council for Restorative Justice which is based in the School of Social Work. It is their understanding and advocacy of restorative justice that comprises the first four chapters of the text. The editors have one overarching goal: to bring restorative justice principles and values, theories, research, and practices closer to the education and practice of social workers. Strengthening the linkage between the social work profession and the restorative justice movement, they argue, will result in mutual gains for both disciplines and innovative solutions to social problems.

The restorative justice movement grew out of community practice models in the 1970s that were seeking to offer alternatives to the dominant criminal justice institutional practices, particularly in the area of juvenile justice. Communities and governments abroad, most notably in New Zealand, and a few community justice centers in the United States, began experimenting with models of victim-offender mediation. The emerging paradigm shift was towards viewing crime as a breakdown in interpersonal relations and community life that required a transformative process that would allow individuals and communities opportunities for healing and restoration. The models of "justice" in the restorative justice movement strive to move away from the purely retribution approach of