



December 2003

Settlement Houses Under Siege: The Struggle to Sustain Community Organizations in New York City. Michael Fabricant and Robert Fisher. Reviewed by Bill Buffum.

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Recommended Citation

Buffum, Bill (2003) "*Settlement Houses Under Siege: The Struggle to Sustain Community Organizations in New York City.* Michael Fabricant and Robert Fisher. Reviewed by Bill Buffum.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 30 : Iss. 4 , Article 11.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol30/iss4/11>

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Book Reviews

Michael Fabricant and Robert Fisher, *Settlement Houses Under Siege: The Struggle to Sustain Community Organizations in New York City*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. \$49.50 hardcover, \$23.40 papercover.

Robert Fisher and Michael Fabricant, two prominent historians of community organization, have produced an important scholarly work, which sheds new light on the struggles of settlement houses, and offers direction for community-based agencies and organizations. While the focus of the book is on settlements in New York City, the plight that Fabricant and Fisher document is not dissimilar to the struggles of non-profits across the country, all of which have experienced the constraints inherent in the quest for financial survival during several decades of conservatism in the United States.

What is unique about Fabricant and Fisher's research is that they modified traditional historical records research to include qualitative interviews with more than one hundred persons who actually experienced the stressful conditions, which over time moved settlements from activist centers to more traditional social service organizations. The authors begin by setting the context of the Settlement Movement with its emphasis on collaboration, community building, and social action; and while that discussion seems idealized, it does establish the importance of their emphasis on building a true sense of community among the low-income immigrant populations that were the focus for settlements. It was this community building emphasis that did bring collective power to people who alone would have had little hope for better lives. The very success of progressive settlement leaders contributed to the decline in voluntary support from wealthy philanthropists, and necessitated a shift towards government support. The trend towards public funding extends to the present time, which is characterized by performance contracting and narrowly conscripted and insecure grants. These trends are well documented elsewhere in the social work literature.

The core of the Fabricant and Fisher book is in the second part in which they report about their interviews with settlement workers. The authors in an appendix adequately detail the qualitative method that they used, although the reader will not immediately see the ways that interview content was analyzed to produce the research findings. Unlike the moving stories told by Studds Terkel, the comments of the settlement workers do not adequately convey the pain, anguish, and sense of victimization which their statements suggest they experienced. This is likely a result of the author's need to remain objective, as academics must.

If the meat of the book is in part two, then the heart is in part three. Here the authors' commitments are clearly seen as they explain their observations and conclusions culminating in an enthusiastic and compelling call for renewed efforts to build communities as the primary way to restore the promise of America. The fiscal control, which comes from contracting, privatization, and corporate involvement, brings external control, policy directions set by funders, and top-down control structures within organizations that deliver social services. The necessary focus on productivity and measurable performance outcomes, neglects the processes that are so vital for community building. Fabricant and Fisher argue that people—especially low-income people—need greater social connectedness, opportunity to develop shared meanings through common stories and patterns of interacting, their music, art, and life experience. They need to share their hope and their frustrations and anger. Such sharing is a process that can result in the development of a group identity and grass-roots activation.

Is the possibility for enhancing 'local capital' a possibility? Can the Settlement Movement return to its original purposes? Fabricant and Fisher are optimistic as they point out that the struggle never actually ended, and many front-line workers continuously work to build community and democratic participation to this day. This is the message to us all, I believe. If we agree that strength in people comes largely from their membership in viable communities, through their affiliation, by becoming one with another, then the struggle is worthwhile. Fabricant and Fisher have given us an excellent problem analysis with an understanding about the underlying causes. Now, the challenge is ours to search

for strategies and directions that might lead towards durable solutions.

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James O. Billups, (Ed.), *Faithful Angels: Portraits of International Social Work Notables*. Washington, DC: NASW Press, 2002. \$34.99 paperback.

Most social workers, social work educators, and even scholars of social work history have little knowledge of the global history of the profession. The names of the most eminent historical figures in social work's development in Europe, such as Alice Salomon and Rene Sand, are largely unknown in the United States. *Faithful Angels: Portraits of International Social Work Notables*, edited by the late James Billups, will spark readers' interest in the worldwide history of social work through the diverse and sometimes inspirational life stories of social work leaders presented in the volume.

Billups conducted in-depth interviews with 15 notable social workers from six continents. Using oral history methodology, he reports the interviews in the words of the subjects. As explained in the preface, the author used the reputational method to identify the notables in the book, drawing upon the advice of social workers with expertise in international social work. All interviewees had retired from their regular full-time positions by the time of the interviews, although many remain active in various professional activities. In addition, all had made "exceptional professional contributions to social work and to people's well-being in their own country and beyond during a major part of the second half of the twentieth century" (p. xi).

Each of the fifteen chapters begins with a brief biographical summary, followed by the text of the interview. The interviews address early experiences that influenced career directions, professional experiences, accomplishments, philosophies, and hopes for the future. The notables are: Gloria Abate (Peru), Angelina Almanzor (Philippines), Seno Cornely (Brazil), Armaity Desai (India), Sattareh Farman-Farmaian (Iran), Aida Gindy (Egypt), Harriet Jakobsson (Sweden), Robin Huws Jones (England), Katherine Kendall (USA), John Lawrence (Australia), Esinet