

Workers at the Bottom

Caring by the Hour. Women, Work, and Organizing at Duke Medical Center. KAREN BRODKIN SACKS. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1988. xii, 239 pp. \$29.95; paper, \$11.95.

It is rare to pick up a newspaper these days without encountering a story about the astronomical rise in the cost of hospital care. To contain costs Medicare and Medicaid in 1983 instituted formulas that detached size of payments from the actual kind and amount of treatment. These and other changes have encouraged hospitals to do less and release patients earlier. The effects of cost cutting on the quality of patient care have generated much debate as they bring to the boil the long-simmering conflict between hospital administrators (as advocates of managerial efficiency) and doctors (as defenders of physician autonomy).

Lost from view, and the subject of *Caring by the Hour*, are the effects of changing economics on the largest group in the hospital, namely the service, technical, and clerical workers who do much of the routine labor of delivering care, preparing food, cleaning rooms and laboratories, carrying out tests, and maintaining the all-important medical records. They are among the lowest paid in the labor market, yet work under high stress: closely monitored, on duty nights and weekends, and lodged at the bottom of the hospital pecking order. Not coincidentally, they are overwhelmingly female and disproportionately minority-race.

During the 1970s, spurred by the civil rights movement and the mounting discrepancy between the growing wealth and power of the institutions they worked in and the erosion of their own conditions, hospital workers began to organize. *Caring by the Hour* relates the 15-year struggle of service, clerical, and technical workers to unionize the Duke University Medical Center; it is a case study that illuminates the larger patterns of the industrialization of health care and the rise of hospital unionization. Karen Sacks skillfully weaves a historical narrative with detailed ethnographic observations of the workers' daily routines. The result is a rich, multi-layered account that moves seamlessly between the national health care scene, changes at the Duke Center, and the workers' experiences.

The book is organized chronologically. The first section traces the development of

the medical center and its work force. Founded during the Depression by the Duke Foundation, the Hospital and Medical Center tried to combine 20th-century notions of business-like administration with 19th-century ideals of public charity. Massive growth in the postwar years, supported by massive federal funding, brought increased specialization, finer division of tasks, and scientific management. Care was transformed into an assembly-line operation.

Black workers, who constituted nearly half of the work force, were subjected to a combination of paternalism, racism, and pressure for productivity, neatly captured in their term for Duke—"the plantation." Despite expanded employment and proliferating specialties, race segregation remained an enduring feature at Duke, as in hospitals elsewhere. Prior to the Civil Rights era blacks were excluded from all areas except food services and cleaning. Today these jobs remain almost exclusively black preserves, though blacks are also employed as licensed practical nurses and in some "back room" clerical jobs, as ward secretaries (officially, data terminal operators, or DTOs) and medical records clerks. Office secretaries and registered nurses are mostly white women, and technicians are predominately white men and women. The black food and cleaning service workers at Duke, inspired by the

Civil Rights movement, successfully unionized in 1972.

The second and longest section is devoted to two subsequent drives to unionize a broad segment of black and white workers. The focus is on black women, especially the DTOs who formed the core of activists. Sacks asks why black women were so active, how they organized themselves, and why the drives were narrowly defeated. Sacks challenges conventional theorizing about social movements and offers fresh interpretations. In her view worker militance originates in "work cultures," defined as the "understanding and values about work and workplace social relations that co-workers share and reinforce among themselves." The work culture of the DTOs was oppositional to management; in particular it opposed management and professional definitions of them as unskilled workers. Sacks details the "invisible" skills that DTOs (and other lower-level workers) must exercise to carry out their jobs. Contradicting the conception of work and family as separate spheres (public and private) is the DTOs' use of kin and family-based networks to organize the workplace. Finally, the women are found to exercise a heretofore unrecognized form of leadership, not as public spokesmen but as "centerwomen," who mediate and crystallize the group consensus needed for concerted action.

The defeat of the union can be laid to many factors beyond the workers' control. Most damaging ultimately was the racial division among workers—whites would not support a black-led union in the first drive and black workers remained unmobilized in the second drive, which was aimed at un-



Duke University workers in a picket line. [From the dust jacket of *Caring by the Hour*]

committed white workers.

In the last section Sacks examines the "rollbacks" of the 1980s. The rise of HMOs, nursing facilities, and for-profit hospitals, which "creamed" the top, left the money-losing parts of health care to the nonprofit hospital. As cost-cutting was intensified, fewer workers had to do more work under closer supervision. Food and cleaning services were contracted out to vendors employing nonunion part-time workers. (Ironically, many employees of the most advanced medical center in the region had no medical insurance.) Technicians and nurses, also pressured by speedup, responded by trying to professionalize; their aim was to resist the addition of nonprofessional tasks to their jobs and the parceling out of some of their duties to lower-paid workers. At the same time increased credentialism cut off avenues for advancement through on-the-job training. The result was a bifurcated work force: an upper tier of largely white college-educated professionals and a lower tier of racially mixed technical, nursing, clerical, and service workers. Though not sanguine about the decline in activism, Sacks suggests that the potential for organizing still resides in the everyday work culture and social networks of workers. More could have been said about the rise of militancy among nurses.

In sum, the book makes an important contribution to our understanding of the effects of the changing economy of health care on the working lives of ordinary women and men. Written with grace and passion, it is accessible to a broad audience including specialists in health care, academicians, and workers.

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Participants in Anthropology

Women Anthropologists. Autobiographical Dictionary. UTE GACS, AISHA KHAN, JERRIE MCINTIRE, and RUTH WEINBERG, Eds. Greenwood, Westport, CT, 1988. xx. 428 pp. \$55.

This is an unusual volume in that it was planned and carried out by students. The editors (three have M.A. degrees in anthropology from San Francisco State University; the fourth is a Ph.D. candidate at the City University of New York Graduate Center) felt that the contributions of women anthropologists were given short shrift in most anthropology courses. This book is their attempt to right the situation. The result is a remarkably interesting volume which be-

longs on the shelf of everyone engaged in the teaching of anthropology or the study of its history.

Fifty-eight women are included in this dictionary, all of them in the Anglo-American tradition, their activities spanning a hundred years. The list is intended to be representative, not exhaustive, and in the best traditions of feminist scholarship it is deliberately non-hierarchical. Theodora Kroeber, Carobeth Laird, and Gitel Steed are given nearly as much space as Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Elsie Clews Parsons. The editors specifically reject any attempt to rank achievement or significance by the traditional criteria of publications, prestigious positions, or theoretical contributions. They are interested rather in the wide range of women's contributions to anthropology and in the variety of skills and situations represented. This book is feminist also in its interest in the webs of connectedness between the subjects and their friends, family members (including husbands), professional mentors, and informants or colleagues in the field. Instead of the heroic tradition of Great Men in anthropology, we have here materials for sociological analysis of some of the women who have been drawn to the discipline. The unstated assumption (which seems to me absolutely correct) is that we will only understand what anthropology is about and how it came to be what it is if we look at the activities of all of those who have been engaged in it.

The range of interests among women anthropologists is wide. This volume includes patrons (Sara Y. Stevenson, Vera Rubin, Elsie Clews Parsons), dancers and writers (Katherine Dunham, Frances Gillmor, Theodora Kroeber, Zora Neale Hurston), minority women (Hurston, Vera Mae Green, Ella Deloria, Irene Diggs), and political activists (Hilda Kuper, Eleanor Burke Leacock, Gene Weltfish). There are superb essays on the first generation of women in American anthropology (Frances Densmore, Alice Fletcher, Zelia Nuttall, Erminnie Smith, Matilda Coxe Stevenson) and on the best-known of later generations (Mead, Benedict, Parsons, Hortense Powdermaker, Gladys Reichard, Ruth Bunzel). In general the better entries are by authors who have some time perspective on their subjects and have been able to draw on previous historical research. Almost half of the women included (24 out of 58) are active today. Many of the authors writing on these women had their cooperation and occasionally mirror too closely the subject's point of view on controversies in which she was engaged. Yet even these less than objective accounts will be valuable resources for students and future historians.

The distribution across fields and between countries is uneven, as might be expected. The volume includes two physical anthropologists (Alice Brues and Ruth Sawtell Wallis) and nine archeologists (Frederica de Laguna, Isabel Kelly, Dorothy Keur, Mary Leakey, Zelia Nuttall, Lila O'Neale, Tatiana Proskouriakoff, Sara Y. Stevenson, H. Marie Wormington). All the others are social or cultural anthropologists. Ten women belong to the British tradition in anthropology, the rest to the American. Every knowledgeable reader will begin to think of women who have been omitted, but the very fact that we will be thinking about women who might have been included is evidence that the book will in part at least have accomplished its purpose.

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Sedimentary Studies

Desert Sediments. Ancient and Modern. L. E. FROSTICK and I. REID, Eds. Published for the Geological Society by Blackwell Scientific, Palo Alto, CA, 1987. xiv, 401 pp., illus. \$125. Geological Society Special Publication no. 35. Based on a meeting, London, May 1986.

Subtropical deserts cover about a third of the earth's surface. Their sedimentary processes are characterized by episodic transfers of sediments by ephemeral streams and by dust- and sandstorms. Evaporation exceeds precipitation, so evaporites and chemical precipitates accumulate in soils and near-surface sediments. Ancient desert sediments occur throughout the geologic record, especially in formations of Permian to Jurassic age. Interpretation of their depositional environments requires an understanding of the nature and formation of modern desert sediments.

This volume comprises 24 papers presented at a meeting of the Geological Society of London. The papers go some way to correct the impression that aeolian activity dominates sedimentary processes in deserts and that desert sediments consist mainly of the deposits of sand dunes. Three-fourths of the papers are concerned primarily with modern desert sediments and processes, often making no reference to the rock record. The remainder are divided equally between studies of Quaternary sediments and those dealing with ancient sediments. All the papers are based on work carried out in the Old World deserts, and their overall standard is remarkably high for such a volume.