

Bryant emphasizes that this book is "solution oriented" and has included Clinton's Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898 in an appendix as evidence of new social policy to address environmental inequities. But the call for environmental justice underscored in these works, the movement that has emerged over these issues, public policy and, consequently, many of these authors' recommendations are in their formative phases. The "solutions" discussed in this book express tenets of communitarian participatory democracy, "social democracy" as one author puts it, to be combined with ideas for long-term social and political restructuring, new emphases in planning and extensive social programs as important means to achieve environmental justice. Many of the suggestions, however, appear far from the focus of most present political considerations. In a political climate permeated by calls for reduced budgets at local, state and federal levels, the allocation of resources for effectively developing and implementing the social programs and policies advocated by these authors seems improbable and, at present, the workability of many of the recommendations is questionable. However, there are elements in many of the recommendations that emphasize community-based actions. It is here where the author's ideas for social and political change appear to hold the most promise.

Perhaps a better characterization of this book is expressed in the foreword by Charles Moody. He suggests that the ideas presented here should be viewed as a *challenge* to policy makers and citizens alike to think and act responsibly about the environment and civil rights. Tentative solutions are suggested in this book. Now the feasibility and potential for implementation of these projects needs to be thoroughly assessed with careful consideration of the resources available to carry them out. More work must also be done to map out issues that remain uncharted and questions that remain unanswered. For instance the relative effects of race and class on the distribution of environmental hazards remain vague. While these concerns are of particular sociological import, they should not take away from the authors' more pertinent emphases on addressing the conditions leading to environmental inequities and attempting to correct them.

This book and its 1992 companion should be considered essential reading for anyone interested in issues of race, class, social policy, development and environmentalism. Some of the leading authors in the areas of environmental racism, inequality and policy bring important ideas into this work and raise vital questions about the condition environmental policy and civil rights. The clarity with which the arguments are presented, the intelligent editing and the significance of the issues covered should result in a wide readership among scholars, activists, policy-makers and possibly the general public.

University of Kansas

Robert Futrell

References

Bryant, Bunyan and Paul Mohai. 1992. *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards: A Time for Discourse*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press

Lives in the Balance: Youth, Poverty, and Education in Watts, by Ann C. Diver-Stamnes. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995. 172 pp.

In *Lives in the Balance*, Diver-Stamnes guides us on a voyage into the riveting, oftentimes shocking and saddening realities of inner-city life for today's youth in Watts. Throughout this journey we are introduced to many individuals for whom poverty and violence are a constant in their lives, and their stories challenge us to confront our own assumptions and (mis)conceptions regarding life in the inner-city.

Diver-Stamnes combines her own experience as a high-school teacher in Watts with current research from a variety of disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, and education, to dispute interpretations of poverty which blame the victims for their circumstances. In contrast to a "culture of poverty" approach, the perspective here is remarkably social-structural. Major issues such as academic achievement, gangs, substance abuse, and families are explored with an eye towards understanding how major social institutions have failed a significant percentage of our population. Each of these issues is discussed individually and in relation to one another. Inequalities in the public education system play an important part in understanding how poverty is perpetuated. While gang membership and substance abuse are often simplistically viewed as indicators of "bad kids," this book digs deeper and examines social as well as personal reasons behind such behavior. Families are also discussed at length, with much attention being given to numerous ways of "doing family" that bring into question the assumptions and consequences of contemporary social policy concerning family.

While the majority of the book examines recent past and present aspects of these issues and some connections among them, the last chapters look toward the future and social change. The Watts riots of the 1960s and 1990s illustrate the tragedy and despair that can result from inattention to massive social and political inequalities. The book gives a resounding call to address these inequalities before a third violent uprising occurs. Although many scholars are quick to point out the problems they find with contemporary society, Diver-Stamnes takes the necessary step forward and offers suggestions for change. She offers mostly long-term solutions for improving family life, academic success, employment opportunities, stress, and mental and physical health. The emphasis is on addressing problems in these areas simultaneously, as "any viable solutions must involve the whole cloth rather than the separate threads" (Diver-Stamnes 1995:148).

It is this final section on suggestions for change that I find particularly impressive. By arguing what she perceives to be major obstacles for youth in Watts and then calling for specific remedies to alleviate these problems, the author challenges readers as social actors to work for social change. While much of the work focuses on how the economic and educational systems have failed the people of Watts, the final message is empowering, reminding us that individuals through collective action can make a difference. Overall, these final suggestions are sound, but I wonder how feasible they would be to implement

considering the current political climate. While these solutions may not be practical now, this book can inspire us to fight for social change.

On the whole *Lives in the Balance* takes a very critical look at what are considered some of today's most distressing social problems. The approach the author adopts allows readers to hear students' voices, giving the text life and making it quite engrossing. It also mixes research findings from numerous fields, giving the reading audience a multitude of insights into these issues. While her doctorate is in educational psychology, I find her analysis surprisingly sociological.

It is in the few places that the author drops the critical sociological approach that I feel uncomfortable. In these instances she seems to lose sight of the context in which these issues are taking place. The most disturbing instance of this is in regard to families. Throughout the book reference is made to dysfunctional families, quite a loaded and ambiguous term. Along with challenging other misconceptions and stereotypes Diver-Stamnes should challenge this label that is often applied to families simply because they vary from the "traditional" middle-class family form. She also argues for "a shift in values" (Diver-Stamnes 1995:130) as part of her plan for improving the lives of inner-city youth. Again, I find this notion quite unsettling. When we begin to argue whose values should dominate we are discussing who has the power to define what is good and bad. In a world where having children is one of the few positive aspects of everyday life, it is hard to image that stigmatizing teenage mothers would be a positive shift for either young women or their children.

While I find these few instances problematic, they are exactly that, a few instances, and should not overshadow the wonderful aspects of this work. The text is very well written and is both easy to understand and to read. The book's length and subject matter seem quite appropriate for undergraduate classes and especially well-suited to sociology courses in areas such as social problems, social stratification, education, and minority group relations. This examination of Watts would complement courses considering or using Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* or MacLeod's *Ain't No Makin' It*. *Lives in the Balance* challenges us to see beyond the stereotypes of inner-city youths and empowers us to strive to make a difference.

University of Kansas

Donna F. Bobbitt

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Kozol, Jonathan. 1991. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York, New York: HarperPerennial.

MacLeod, Jay. 1995. *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspiration & Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Lives in the Balance: Youth, Poverty, and Education in Watts, by Ann C. Diver-Stamnes. New York: State University of New York Press, 1995. 172 pp.

This is a timely book because it gives concrete meaning to the current debate about proposals to cut spending on social programs in order to "balance the budget." In the book, we see in concrete terms why such social programs are needed by Watts high school students and their families. The clear implication is that such programs are needed to compensate for the absence of opportunities for Watts residents and others at the bottom of America's increasingly elongated social and economic ladders. The reader is left with the uneasy conclusion that the cost to society of not opening opportunities to them will be increasing signs of race and class antagonism of the sort that occurred in South Central Los Angeles after the Rodney King verdict.

Ann Diver-Stamnes is a Professor of Education at Humboldt State University who, before assuming that position, taught at Medgar High School (a pseudonym) in Watts. She chose to do so because she considered the experience "...my apprenticeship prior to applying for a position at a university. If I were to become a teacher of prospective teachers, I felt I had to become the best classroom teacher I could be, and I wanted to be tested and forged in as challenging and meaningful a teaching environment as possible; Medgar High fit that description." *Lives in the Balance* is based on her experience at Medgar High. But the book is far more than simply a descriptive first-person account of the experience. The author has done social analysis in the tradition of what C. Wright Mills called "the sociological imagination," in which the analyst shows the capacity to (in Mills' words) "shift from one perspective to another--from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to ... national budgets...between 'personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure.'"

At the outset, Diver-Stamnes sets the tone of her social analysis approach by critiquing the "blaming the victim" approach to social problems, which is all too common in this society. She says,

"A basic premise of this society is that individuals can succeed given sufficient effort; in other words, a common view is that people can 'make it' in the United States if they try hard enough. If they do not succeed, their failure is viewed as having been caused by lack of effort, and so those who are the least successful are blamed for the failure."

In contrast, Diver-Stamnes proposes (as one of her former Medgar High students implored her do) "tell people how it really is here." She proposes to analyze the causes of the plight of inner city residents like her students and their families. These reside in the conditions of society which generate inner city poverty. By skillfully shuttling back and forth between stories about her students' life experiences and data about the school system, the inner city economy, etc., the author analyzes the causes of six kinds of Millsian "personal troubles of milieu" which afflict Watts residents. These are academic failure,