

Book Reviews

Randy Shiels has noted (*And the band played on*, p. 596), by the time President Reagan delivered his first speech on the epidemic, “36,058 Americans had been diagnosed with the disease; 20,849 had died”.

Some of the essays in the book do attempt to explain aspects of this extraordinary moral climate. Paula A. Treichler’s piece on ‘AIDS, gender and bio-medical discourse’ is powerfully argued, and exhaustively documented (158 notes, covering 32 pages), and traces the ways in which medical discourse constructed sexuality and gender in such a way that women were at first invisible in the AIDS crisis, precisely because it was defined as a gay disease. Dennis Altman offers a characteristically sharp account of the paradoxical ways in which the male gay community has simultaneously been stigmatized and legitimized by the crisis. Allan Brandt brings to bear his extensive knowledge of past responses to sexually transmitted diseases to reflect on the social policy implications of AIDS.

What is lacking, however, is an essay, or essays, which attempt to situate AIDS in our historical present. Susan Sontag (in *AIDS and its metaphors*, p. 92) has argued that the AIDS crisis is evidence “of a world in which nothing is regional, local, limited; in which everything that can circulate does; and every problem is, or is destined to become, worldwide”. Is AIDS then the first post-modern disease? Perhaps the editors can explore this and related questions in a further collection. This volume is a valuable start, but it only scrapes the surface of the complex historical phenomenon we know as “AIDS”.

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DARLENE CLARK HINE, *Black women in white: racial conflict and cooperation in the nursing profession, 1890–1950*, Blacks in Diaspora Series, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. xxiii, 264, illus., \$35.00, \$12.95 (paperback).

This work reflects an impressive amount of research pertaining to a huge number of individuals, institutions and organizations throughout the length and breadth of the United States involved in the issue of the entry of black women into nursing. Unfortunately for this very reason it tends to get bogged down in detail which makes it very difficult to see the subject as a whole. While one can perceive the necessity of having the factual details relating to the difficulties facing black women entering the nursing profession and how they actually achieved this aim, a little more analysis would have been welcome. To what extent was the experience of black women reflected in that of other ethnic groups, or indeed by that of lower-class white women? Were there tensions between different groups of the black community, apart from the male/female doctor/nurse tension, which Professor Hine does address? Did black women as nurses, especially in the public health area, feel any tensions over their role as bearers of values identified with the dominant culture into their own community? Professor Hine mentions the notorious case of Eunice Rivers, the black public-health nurse who was for over 40 years involved with the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, in which treatment was deliberately withheld from black patients, and does describe her motives as “complex”. The structure of the book, however, means that one paragraph is devoted to this intriguing subject and then the career possibilities and restrictions facing black nurses generally in the public health field are returned to. The conflicts between perceptions of nursing as the ideal fulfilment of the womanly role and its development as a career with increasing professionalization providing an opportunity for social mobility rarely open to women, plus the development of intraprofessional hierarchies, render nursing an area rife with ambiguities and ambivalence. The particular relationship of these to the experience of black women nurses in America is to be found only in the interstices of accounts of the rise of nurse training facilities, organizational history, the exclusionist policies and attitudes of white nurses, and the contributions of outstanding individuals, which by their very nature do not meld into one coherent narrative: they are many stories, not one. Professor Hine is to be commended for her monumental labours in bringing together this essential source book for what one hopes will be further analytical studies.

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