

Book Review

Mobilizing New York: AIDS, Antipoverty, and Feminist Activism. By Tamar W. Carroll. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. 304 pages. Paperback, \$34.95

Tamar Carroll opens her book, *Mobilizing New York*, by describing a 1991 demonstration in which the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Women's Health Action and Mobilization (WHAM!) placed a banner reading "No Choice, No Liberty" over the Statue of Liberty's face: a pro-choice gesture as grand and visible as the city's most recognizable monument itself. Carroll uses this example to demonstrate New York's "long history of direct action" (3). With its diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, and political makeup, as well as numerous eminent landmarks of American culture and power, New York has easily become a locus for social movements. Many large-scale demonstrations have had their roots in New York City, from the Progressive Era reforms of the late 1800s to the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011.

Given this rich history, it is unsurprising that Carroll uses New York City as her backdrop for discussing notable grassroots activism in the late twentieth century. She contends that the organizations that most effectively enacted change were those that not only used resources to mobilize marginalized people directly but also enabled coalition building among various identity groups. To illustrate her point, Carroll examines three case studies: the creation of the anti-poverty organization Mobilization for Youth, the class-conscious feminism of Brooklyn's National Congress of Neighborhood Women, and ACT UP and WHAM!'s fight for bodily autonomy during the AIDS crisis. The text draws upon a wide variety of historical resources, including over fifty oral histories Carroll herself collected, as well as archived oral histories, historical records, and newspaper clippings.

In part one of *Mobilizing New York*, Carroll describes the antipoverty efforts of Mobilization for Youth (MFY), an organization born out of efforts from the Kennedy administration to diminish juvenile delinquency, primarily in Manhattan's Lower East Side. The program adopted principles of "maximum feasible participation," prioritizing the involvement of poor people in decision making for antipoverty programs (10). It also hired paraprofessionals, neighborhood residents who were valued for their knowledge of the area, allowing for greater cooperation between the largely white, middle-class social workers and the African American and Puerto Rican constituents. Through its open

relationship with neighborhood residents, MFY facilitated political coalition building and skills training for African American and Puerto Rican mothers, empowering them to utilize such direct action tactics as boycotts and rent strikes to demand better education for their children. Even with MFY's dissolution in the late 1960s, its programs left a lasting legacy through its support of the Black Arts Movement, eventually setting a model for President Johnson's Economic Opportunity Act.

Part two of Carroll's book follows one of MFY's social workers, Janet Peterson, to the Williamsburg-Greenpoint area of Brooklyn. In a time when New York City's fiscal crisis resulted in job loss for the middle class as well as spending cuts to social services and housing, racial tensions between African Americans, Latinos, and white ethnics were high. Inspired by the principles of maximum feasible participation, Peterson set out to help working class women in the neighborhood through the cofounding the National Congress of Neighborhood Women in 1974. Given the strong ethnic tensions in the area, as well as cultural differences between "professional staff" and local women, Peterson utilized a model of identity-based consciousness-raising which "interrogated" intersections of markers of identity to create "identity-based organizing" and gave neighborhood women decision-making power (104). The result was not only a strong interracial coalition of politically engaged women but also a community that embraced diverse definitions of feminism/femininity through the lens of race, ethnicity, and class status.

In the last part of the book, Carroll lays out the sociopolitical geography of a 1980s New York City—one where little public funds were available for social service administration and an increasingly conservative government backed the interests of banking, finance, and the Religious Right. The ignored crisis of the AIDS epidemic incited a coalition of largely queer-identified people, later known as ACT UP, to demand access to health care and sexual privacy. Utilizing large scale art projects and street theater, ACT UP created a community that was united not by neighborhood, as MFY and NCNW had been, but by a common goal and shared consciousness. Nevertheless, ACT UP similarly benefited from cross-cultural coalition building. Affinity groups such as ACT UP's Women's Caucus and the Majority Action Committee worked to ensure that the needs of women and people of color, groups that were traditionally excluded from the "AIDS advocacy," were heard and met. The work of these groups led to the development of the first HIV medications as well as advocacy that continues today around issues of homelessness, poverty, and HIV. Furthermore, ACT UP's work with WHAM!, a reproductive rights group with similarly grandiose demonstrations, allowed for increased pro-choice activism during an era of antiabortion violence.

Throughout each of these examples, oral history narratives are woven in among various other sources of historical data: photographs of protests, newspaper clippings, and flyers, for example. Carroll's oral histories themselves play a

strong supporting role in her exploration of an intersectional, grassroots approach to political activism. While many of the previous histories on groups such as MFY and NCNW focus on the sociologists and professionals, this work draws in testimonies from many of the grassroots and neighborhood activists themselves. Carroll also makes a point of including a demographically diverse group of voices, showing how the experience of grassroots activism varied for each of the different players involved. Through utilizing oral histories to highlight voices of marginalized people, Carroll was able to recenter the discussion of grassroots activism around those who have shaped it and needed it the most. *Mobilizing New York* is a testament to the power of people's voices and the importance of acknowledging the whole, intersectional aspect of their identities to build communities and create change.

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