

about children and family that underlay policy, the quality and quantity of evidence presented varies considerably. For example, early state institutions are described with detail that draws the reader into the plight of residents. However, policy decided in Washington, D.C. in the 1970s and 1980s is summarized as in a textbook with the experience of children and reformers almost absent from the telling.

Gittens identifies certain issues as important but then neglects to develop them with the social history for which a reader might wish. She criticizes reformers' willingness to discount parents' perspective, yet *Poor Relations* itself pays inconsistent attention to parents. While she notes the historic impact of race in differentiating children's experiences, more might have been said about child welfare work organized by communities of color and about ongoing racial stereotypes that have influenced discussion about intervention in family life. What is obvious throughout, however, is Gittens's concern for youngsters and her hope that Illinois and other states will not repeat past errors as they design child welfare solutions for the future.

When the Nation Was in Need: Blacks in the Women's Army Corps during World War II, by Martha S. Putney. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992. x, 241 pp. Illustrations, tables, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY KARLA EKQUIST, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

From the birth of the United States to the present, women have contributed their time, labor, and skill to the nation's wars. Such contributions, including the essential labors of camp followers, nurses, and women who went into combat, have been ignored by scholars until relatively recently. In *When the Nation Was in Need*, Martha Putney looks at the experiences of the African-American women who volunteered to serve in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and the Women's Army Corps. She also examines the impact of these women on the military and the nation. Finally, she discusses the legislation that helped shape the character and role of the WAC and details the conditions, attitudes, and expectations associated with the African-American volunteers.

After the creation of the WAAC in May 1942, the first women volunteers were sent to the first WAAC training center, located at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. The forty African-American women who arrived in this first wave represented the army's quota, 10.6 percent. Although training centers were also established in Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, Louisiana, and Arkansas, most African-American WAACS/WACs were either stationed at Fort Des Moines or received their training there.

African-American leaders and organizations warned that segregation would preclude more qualified African-American women from joining the Corps. Civilian African-American leaders, such as Mary McLeod Bethune, assisted black WAC officers and recruiters by urging African-American women to volunteer. Despite such efforts, however, recruitment was difficult. Many who volunteered had been poorly educated in the segregated South. Putney notes that "the military failed to keep its pledge to many black WACs that it would not discriminate in job assignments and would accord them equal rights and privileges" (119). The WACs responded to such treatment by communicating about the problems with both army and civilian leaders, striking, and resigning from the service. Field commanders were generally unwilling to request African Americans for service; when they were given field assignments, however, they worked as secretaries, mail clerks, medical assistants and technicians, and parachute inspectors.

When the Nation Was in Need is a good general examination of the African-American WACs and their experiences, an in-depth look neglected in the official history of the WAC (*The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978*, by Bettie J. Morden [1990]). Putney clearly shows the reactivity of the WAC in matters of race. Although the quota for African-American WACs was 10.6 percent of total WAC enlistment, enlistment of African-American women never reached that level.

Due to the breadth of the topic, perhaps, the author does not manage to address many of the day-to-day happenings and experiences in the life of an African-American WAC. More detailed studies of individual black WAC units, posts to which they were assigned, and daily routines and happenings would provide an added dimension to the topic. The book is, however, interesting and well written and provides statistics concerning the numbers of black WACs, names of officers, and unit assignments. Of further value are the sources listed in the bibliography.

Harry S. Truman: A Life, by Robert H. Ferrell. Missouri Biography Series. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994. xiv, 501 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JAMES E. MCMILLAN, CENTRAL COLLEGE

With *Harry S. Truman: A Life*, Robert H. Ferrell caps his career with his ninth work, and first full biography, on the American president whom he terms "the right man for his time . . . one of the best choices fate could have provided" (xi-xii).

Truman's most unlikely prepresidential background began on the "non-descriptive" prairies of Missouri where lack of "feasts for the

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