

One leaves this study appropriately in awe of the extraordinary spirit and achievements of this female cohort. A transitional generation, confronted by terribly difficult dilemmas of identity, culture and economic survival, they used a mixture of personal, ethnic-community and workplace resources to establish a foothold in the New World.

— Noel J. Kent
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Cheryl Lynn Greenberg. *“Or Does it Explode?” Black Harlem in the Great Depression.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 317 pp., \$35.00 cloth.

Or Does it Explode? is a meticulously researched study of the social, economic, and political status of Harlem from the 1920s to the 1940s, with a major emphasis on the Depression years.

The book is divided into eight chapters dealing with conditions in Harlem before, during, and after the Depression. In addition, chapters are devoted to work during the Depression, various community organizations, sources of relief, and the “Don’t buy where you can’t work” campaign.

The major focus of this study is archival and institutional data, much of which are statistical. In addition, anecdotes from novels, newspaper articles, speeches, agency files, and legal documents add richness. Greenberg’s discussion of the Harlem riots of 1935 and 1943 are especially powerful.

While Harlem was a product of racial segregation, the author goes to great lengths to inform her readers about the wide diversity that existed in the community. She shows the effects of class, gender, nationality, ideology, politics, and religion in shaping the nature of Harlem life, and how various groups—ministers, communists, Republicans, Black Nationalists and more—sometimes joined together and sometimes conflicted in their approaches to the problems facing Harlemites: “Not always in opposition, these groups alternatively merged and split in a complex reflection of race, class, and gender dynamics in the shadow of poverty and powerlessness.”

We also learn of the complex relations between Harlem residents and the institutions of the larger society—labor unions, charitable organizations, religious groups, the media, and various levels of government.

While Harlem suffered greatly during the Depression years, the author argues that the community experienced positive outcomes as a result of the tumultuous 1930s. These were partly due to the social mobilization that occurred during the period and partly as a result of the social and economic effects of the New Deal: “As a result of the Depression, Black professionals served their communities with greater commitment than before, children remained in school longer, Blacks received better medical care, and government aid was easier to obtain.”

Of special value is the book’s relevance to current debates regarding topics such as black nationalism, welfare, class differences in the African American

community, police brutality, and black/Jewish relations. Along these lines, the author asserts that social welfare benefits did not destroy the black family, that families were flexible and mutually supportive, and that a broad array of citizens with different interests became involved in movements for social change.

Because of its heavy reliance on institutional data and statistics, some parts of *Or Does it Explode?* are dry. The author might have added life to the book by interviewing politicians, activists, business owners, and Harlem residents about their experience during the Depression in the manner that makes Studs Terkel's books so gripping.

Nevertheless, "*Or Does It Explode?*" *Black Harlem in the Great Depression* is a well-written and detailed book that is a valuable resource for scholars interested in Harlem life, race relations, ethnic politics, and the Great Depression.

— Steve Gold
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Joseph Hobbs. *Bedouin Life in the Egyptian Wilderness*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992) 165 pp., \$25.00.

It is not often that a person can pick up a book and read it with clarity and understanding, especially ethnographic materials that attempt to describe peoples of various cultural orientations. Joseph Hobbs has managed to accomplish this task in an enlightening manner.

Hobbs's book on the Macaza Bedouins is extensive yet concise in its presentation of the lifestyle, habits, history, environment, and beliefs of these pastoral nomads who make their home in the deserts of Egypt and Southwest Asia. It is noted that these mainly Arabic-speaking people and their culture are a direct manifestation of their interaction in their arid environment. This is not unusual given the limited rainfall that occurs in their homeland and their astute ability to maximize the utility of their surroundings. This position is presented consistently by the author throughout the text.

It is more than evident that Bedouin Khushman, through their incessant movement around the desert, have assisted in documenting new varieties and species of both plants and animals. In addition, these family oriented people have managed to exist practically in the same manner as their ancestors. Although the Bedouins lack a Western perspective of the world, it should not be suggested that these people are not civilized. Hobbs acknowledges that this opinion is often assumed when traditional nomadic cultures are observed.

Historically, the Bedouin are suggested to have descended from twenty or so clans or family units. The basic family lineage is reflective of a basic patriarchal system. It is for this reason that these people adapt so well to desert life. The Bedouin consider themselves as being a part of the desert, which in turn is the center of the Universe.

Khushman traditions have been documented and maintained since the times of dynastic Egypt. Modern periods saw the Bedouin survive the colonial
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