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Review of: *It Just Ain't Fair: The Ethics of Health Care for African Americans* (Annette Dula & Sara Goering eds.)

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Book Reviews

It Just Ain't Fair: The Ethics of Health Care for African Americans (Annette Dula & Sara Goering eds., Praeger 1994) About the editors and contributors, acknowledgements, bibliography, foreword by Mark Siegler, index, notes. L.C. 93-43780, ISBN 0-275-94494-8. [336 pp. Paper \$19.95. P.O. Box 5007, Westport CT 06881-5007.]

In their book, Dula and Goering try to focus attention on experiences of African Americans, a historically under-served group,¹ through essays that describe the experiences and perceptions of predominately black physicians, professors, bioethicists, administrators and other health care professionals. They state that its objective is:² to facilitate a dialogue among African Americans, medical ethicists and those working in African-American communities; and to help shape the development of medical ethics so that it no longer reflects the dominance and arrogance of any one group.

They also attempt to redress a lack of literature on disparities in health care and the need for specialized consideration of underserved groups³ and seek to provide a basis for "reforming the traditional ethical framework that in an effort to be impartial and colorblind fails to see particular groups in their unique social contexts."⁴

The first part of this book discusses medical ethics within a political context; the second, disparities in access; the third, ethical responsibilities and the health profession; and the fourth, community involvement as a practical way to effect reform — identifying a few specific programs that encourage reform within African American communities. Generally, it accuses those in health care of creating a system that, e.g., "may result in decisions by African Americans... to rely only on alternatives or home remedies instead."⁵

1 At 4.

2 At 8.

3 At 7.

4 At 4.

5 *Id.*

The book's premise is that too little attention is paid to differences in values and beliefs of African Americans as compared to those deemed responsible for flaws in the current dispensation of health care. For example, the Introduction recounts an experience of Dula's African American uncle who was admitted to an emergency room for treatment of chest pains.⁶ When his family looked at his medical records, they were upset to find him recorded as an alcohol abuser, when in fact he did not drink, and his ethnicity recorded as "Indian."

Dula and Goering fulfill their promise of promoting awareness of inequitable health care treatment of African Americans in the U.S. by detailing disenfranchisement through the writings of medical professionals and ethicists. They also fulfill their goal of facilitating dialogue by filling a perceived void of scholarly works and creating an impetus for response.

It *Just Ain't Fair* shows, e.g., "the health experiences of real people,"⁷ but it inadequately develops a basis for reforming the current medical system. While it notes various local efforts, e.g., community-based organ donor education programs,⁸ the editors fail ultimately to delineate a way of redressing the problem at the higher levels of the system that they fault for existing inequities. To accomplish fully their goal of "providing a basis for reforming the traditional ethical framework,"⁹ it seems that its editors could have more coherently organized what appear to be scattered reform efforts. Anyone associated with health care should find this book illuminating. However, I failed to find a next step proposed and believe that readers looking for recommended solutions to the identified needs for unbiased care will be frustrated.

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⁶ At 1-2.

⁷ At 4.

⁸ At 234.

⁹ At 4.

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