

The final chapter comprises a series of single headlines under the title of 'Beacons for Policy Makers'. The three U.K. respondents are Professor John Grimley Evans, Professor Margot Jefferys and Eric Midwinter. Their comments are reported to state the need to change the popular view of retirement from a brief prelude to death to the longest period of stability in our lifetime: to recognise that it is in your interest to care about ageing and to recognise that much age-associated disability is due to socio-environmental failings rather than the intrusive and inevitable biological factors. The most interesting question which is not answered is to know which expert made which comment. However, all of them, and many other thoughtful respondents, really have much more important statements to make than these rather trite shorthand notes. The future of the world for an ageing population is a good deal more complex and interesting than the collection suggests.

DAVID HOBMAN

### Age Concern England

Stephen Crystal, *America's Old Age Crisis*, Basic Books, New York, 1982, 232 pp., \$16.50, ISBN 0 465 00124 6.

This is an important and timely book. It is important because of the insights Crystal provides into the contradictory nature and perverse consequences of policy-making affecting elderly persons in the U.S.A. It is timely because of the current and continuing assaults on the structure of benefits and services for America's elderly population launched by the Reagan administration, and because the author sets out a number of reasoned policy alternatives that he believes would resolve the most pressing and critical fiscal and psychosocial components of the 'crisis' in public policy.

Crystal's analysis of the 'crisis' leads him to conclude that the existing array of income maintenance, health care, retirement, and welfare policies are inequitable, inefficient, and insufficient. They tend to isolate the aged from participating in society's central institutions – principally, the workplace and increasingly the family – and they have produced, and/or continue to maintain, two more or less separate and unequal classes of old people. The majority group, the better-off economically, socially and health-wise are largely forced, or seduced, into retirement and subsidised at the expense of the smaller worse-off group – the very old, the poor and the infirm elderly. The author further asserts that the gap in income, health status, and needs between these two groups will continue to widen – at the further expense of the truly needy – unless more appropriate policies are adopted and put into practice; policies that give credence to the differential needs of these groups for income, for health and social care, and for participation in the larger society.

Crystal's approach to the subject matter is straightforward, non-polemical and well reasoned. He skilfully draws upon and blends into his analysis a wide variety of materials and perspectives – sociological, economic, historical, and political – to present his arguments, conclusions and recommendations. He demolishes carefully constructed health, economic and psychosocial 'myths'

about the elderly that he believes serve to maintain the structure of policies and practices favouring the 'better off' majority, argues for greater realism in public policy making, warns against too great reliance on the family unit as a crucial support structure, and is critical of the incrementally developed, patchwork system of benefits. The fact that such funded programmes absorb one-third of the federal budget and additional billions of tax subsidy and non-public dollars is a burden, warns Crystal, that future generations of younger working-age populations may find themselves unable or unwilling to bear. Crystal's prescription for lessening the gap between the 'better off' and 'worse off' groups of elderly persons appears eminently rational, and modest when viewed against the canvas of the 'crisis' he portrays.

Students and close observers of the aged in the U.S. may find in this volume little that is startling or new, or that has not, at least in part, been said elsewhere. Certainly Crystal's recommended policy changes or alternatives will hardly appear novel or even sufficiently far-reaching or deep enough to some. But the main contribution of this work lies, at least to this reviewer, in its comprehensive coverage of the issues, its balanced blend and wide scope of perspective and data sources, and its insistence on coherence and clarity in designing policy and policy objectives, bearing in mind not only short-term outcomes but long-range goals as well.

HOWARD R. KELMAN

State University of New York, Stony Brook, New York

Emily M. Nett (ed.), *Women as Elders*, Resources for Feminist Research, Vol. 11, No. 2, July 1982, 77 pp., ISSN 0707-8412.

Any publication about women and ageing is welcome because the visibility of women in this area – even by comparison with the increasingly acknowledged invisibility of women in areas such as education, arts, medicine, the marketplace and everywhere else – seems to be near zero. Studies of ageing in sociology or gerontology may note sex differences, but rarely differentials. Even more rarely do they take into account the structural inequality of women in relation to men from birth to death and what this might mean when looking at the 'problems' of the 'the aged' or 'the elderly'.

The general assumption is that ageing is a biological/psychological/sociological process which affects men and women much the same. So the conditions of women in the process of ageing have been almost wholly subsumed within those of men (when they have been addressed at all). These sex-blind assumptions persist despite the increased awareness of the universal subordination of women revealed by the work of the Women's Movement and by feminist research. Indeed, as this issue of *Resources for Feminist Research* (a Canadian journal for feminist scholarship) devoted to the subject of women as elders, confirms, feminist research has overlooked the issue of women and ageing as much as research on ageing has obscured the issues of women.

The discussion articles that fill the first half of this volume are excellent in