

Book Review

Diversity and Philanthropy: Expanding the Circle of Giving by Lilya Wagner

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Wagner, L. (2016). *Diversity and Philanthropy: Expanding the Circle of Giving*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO. \$60.00 (hard cover), ISBN: 978-1-4408-4044-9.

In her book, *Diversity and Philanthropy: Expanding the Circle of Giving*, author Lilya Wagner argues that greater awareness of the effect of culture on philanthropy is important both in the United States and abroad. As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this book is to “provide cross-cultural insights that can enhance nonprofit and fundraising practice” (p. xix). The book brings together information from research and experiences in cross-cultural philanthropy, therefore providing a rich resource to those, especially nonprofit practitioners and volunteers, seeking greater understanding of the differences in philanthropy among diverse cultures.

Wagner provides two reasons for the need to understand philanthropy as a global practice. The first is that nonprofits play a critical role in the shaping of a local civil society because of shifting social and political developments, which are often supported and accomplished through philanthropy. Second, as population groups migrate and establish themselves in places other than their countries of origin, understanding international philanthropic practices and traditions helps define cross-cultural philanthropy. It is this second point that is a continual theme of the book. Wagner’s point is that changing demographics makes it important for nonprofit leaders everywhere to be proficient in cross-cultural philanthropy, and she argues that a “one size fits all” approach to philanthropy and fundraising results in lost opportunities for nonprofit organizations.

In chapter one, Wagner discusses the concepts of philanthropy and culture. The premise of the chapter is cultural awareness begins with understanding what defines philanthropy and culture. Robert Payton, the founding director of the Center on Philanthropy at IU, defined philanthropy as “voluntary action for the public good.” This has been the widely accepted definition of philanthropy in the United States, but philanthropy is interpreted differently among other countries, cultures, and populations, which, in turn, shapes how people respond to fundraising appeals. In the United States, a long-held myth regarding minorities, or people of color, has been that they do not give. Citing *The Chronical of Philanthropy*, Wagner shares that “African Americans give 25 percent more of their discretionary income to charity than whites (p. 53).” The chapter titled “African Roots and American Practices” focuses on the history, motivations, attitudes, and preferences for giving among African Americans. One point made is that African Americans traditionally have not viewed their participation in giving as philanthropy. If this discussion is used to create a definition of philanthropy in the African-American tradition, the definition may be an obligation to support and assist family and community through the giving of time, money, and material items. While the differences between the two definitions offered may seem like a matter of semantics to some, Wagner makes the point that an examination of philanthropy as shaped by culture is valuable for providing a foundation or framework for the practice of giving.

A deeper discussion of the need for a global perspective is provided in the next chapter, which in effect sets up the following chapters’ focus on specific groups, populations, and cultures. Stating

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that culture is most easily explained as a people's way of life, Wagner adds that some cultural meanings are easily recognized, while others are more subtle requiring careful observations in order to come to conclusions about the culture itself. Chapters three through eight offer insights into specific cultures in regard to fundraising practices. As culture shapes behaviors and practices, Wagner offers that a basic understanding of cultural differences may allow organizations and their personnel to function more productively.

The ensuing discussions of giving traditions of Spanish-speaking people, Africans, African Americans, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Arab Americans, Jewish traditions, and native people provide information on ways of giving as well as types of causes traditionally preferred within these cultures and groups. Additionally, suggestions for choice of fundraising strategies for prospects and donors within each group are offered. It is important for the potential reader to understand that this book is not intended as a primer on how to raise money from specific cultures, groups and populations, rather the book offers "cautious generalizations" regarding "identity-based philanthropy." Some of these generalizations are that definitions and concepts of philanthropy matter; community is significant; and customs and traditions that are part of an ethnic identity affect philanthropy. The discussions of each specific culture, group or population underscore these points. For those who seek a deeper investigation of the specific cultures, groups, or populations presented in the book, Wagner provides a list of additional readings at the end of each chapter providing the reader with a rich resource for further study.

Another interesting feature of this book are the personal perspectives offered at the end of the chapters. These perspectives are authored by academics, practitioners, philanthropists, consultants, community and social leaders, and nonprofit professionals. Each essay offers a unique perspective on topics related to the information presented in the proceeding chapter. Following the chapter on the culturally proficient professional and nonprofit, Adam Martinez, EdD, presents a personal reflection of how he sees himself as a professional, as a fundraiser, as an educator, and as an American of Mexican descent. The essay gives life to Wagner's argument that nonprofit professionals should realize that we need to "broaden the definition of philanthropy to include traditions, preferences, and ways of giving by diverse populations and not attempt to function under the comfortable 'one size fits all' mentality (p. 205)."

Wagner's book indeed achieves its stated purpose. While not exhaustive in scope, the information included does raise awareness of the effect of cultural differences on philanthropy and ultimately on the practice of fundraising. The inclusion of additional sources for recommended readings would be helpful to those who wish to learn more about specific groups, cultures, and populations as well as those who wish to increase cultural awareness and become more culturally competent.

Disclosure Statement

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Author Biography

Kathryn Yandell is a doctoral student at North Carolina State University, with a research focus on nonprofit governance. Kathryn has 25 years' experience in fundraising and is a cofounder of and senior consultant for Gamble Squared LLC, a fundraising consulting firm.

Prior to consulting, she served as senior director of major gifts at the North Carolina Museum of Art where she managed a \$50.6 million campaign. She also has held positions at UNC-CH, Saint Mary's School, and East Carolina University. She has a BS from North Carolina State University and a MBA from Queens University of Charlotte.