by challenges to the definition of citizenship from women, blacks, and Native Americans in the mid-nineteenth century and beyond. All this is discussed by Brown in an erudite and readable narrative.

The significance of *The Strength of a People* transcends its function as a scholarly history. In a thoughtful and modest epilogue, in which the author makes clear that he is stepping outside his customary role of historian, Brown reflects on the idea of an informed citizenry within the context of the troubled state of American democracy today. In fact, his book can be read as a companion piece to other recent volumes that focus on the problems of American democracy at the end of the twentieth century, including works such as Robert H. Wiebe's *Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy* (1995) and Lawrence K. Grossman's *The Electronic Republic: Reshaping Democracy in the Information Age* (1995). Indeed, the subject of Brown's book is at the heart of much that is central to Wiebe's and Grossman's concerns. How can American democracy be revitalized in our time (Wiebe), how will it be shaped by the new information age (Grossman), and what is the role of an informed citizenry in this brave new world?

If the idea of an informed citizenry is not fixed but dynamic, how will the idea function in a presumably open society geared to instantaneous access to information? Will the age of democratized electronic information promote a responsible citizenry, or will it contribute to a more rapid fragmentation of society—toward the disuniting of America? Will the citizenry's ease of electronic access and response to information lend itself to a tyranny of the majority or to a stalemate of conflicting minorities? Certainly if education is presumed to be vital to an informed and responsible citizenry, it would appear that the current lack of reform in American education augurs ill for the future.

Although a brief essay on sources would have been helpful, Brown has written a thoroughly researched and carefully documented book. Both the text and the thirty-five pages of notes reveal a firm grasp of early American historiography, as well as an informed reading of pertinent primary sources. Certainly Brown's *Strength of a People* provides the necessary historical perspective for the idea of an informed citizenry in America, and also reinforces the need for the highest civic responsibility on the part of educators, librarians, archivists, and information managers. It also points to the need for the cultivation of civic virtue in an America that is increasingly strained by the tensions of multiculturalism, failing institutions, and an apparent inability to reform its educational system. Brown's book serves as both a valuable history lesson and a warning for the future.—*Gerald F. Roberts, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky.*

*Nonacademic Writing: Social Theory and Technology.* Eds. Ann Hill Duin and Craig J. Hansen. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Pubs., 1996. 376p. $29.95, acid-free paper. (ISBN 0-8058-1628-3.)

Odd as it might sound, most of the writing done in academe is nonacademic, especially by those of us in service and administrative roles. By "nonacademic," these editors mean writing "that gets something done, that matters," that will not appear in the scholarly or popular media. It means writing that is specialized for a technical audience (e.g., memos and annotations). And it means the kinds of writing done by workers in business and other real-world locations.

Why put together a book about it? (1) Nonacademic writing, according to these editors and their twenty-three chapter authors (many of them graduate students or junior faculty), is important for shaping the communication and cultural patterns of our work sites. (2) It bears closer

watching, presumably because technology increasingly shapes how nonacademic writing is done (even, perhaps, how writers think). (3) The part of academe responsible for teaching aspects of technical writing (with some 200 degree/certificate programs) has had too little apparent success: Studies suggest that employees who can write well are increasingly difficult to find; the second leading deficiency among job candidates (beyond problems of interpersonal sorts) is a lack of writing skills.
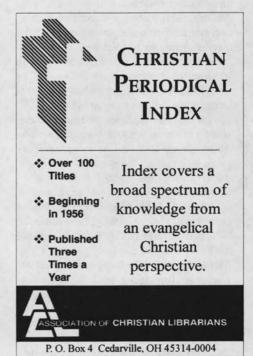
At first glance, this book seems promising and exciting. All of us, I think, would like to learn more about this ubiquitous, necessary activity. And most of us, I suspect, would like to be part of a higher education that effectively teaches and improves nonacademic writing. To an extent, this edited book helps readers see the way to making these changes. There are chapters on: how to apply a sociotechnology to the study of nonacademic writing (i.e., it takes the whole communication, technological, and social pattern into account); how to apply research to the problem; how sexism haunts the technology undergirding nonacademic writing; problems of translating what we do in classrooms to the workplace; how nonacademic writing influences broad social institutions; and how technologies such as hypertext might modify our usual notions of things such as authorship.

But the appearance is deceiving. In fact, the book turns out to be a long-winded polemic and an impractical, frustrating approach to a practical subject. Ironically, it is the sort of academic writing that may not matter to most of us. One of the earliest and most sensible of chapter authors, Elizabeth Tebeaux, warns about this very thing:

Technical communication researchers, to give academic credibility to their work, have developed their own exclusionary language. This increasingly allusive, political, ideological, and abstract language gives intellectual stature and a sense of erudition to our work, but also alienates nonacademic users of our research.

The rest of this long, difficult series of chapters fits that description all too perfectly.

There are, for instance, excursions into contemporary ethnographic theory ("Working in the reflective and textual tradition at Cambridge, Williams recognized that Lukacs was mistaken when he thought that reification could be totally dominant. . . ."); into feminist scholarship on gender differences in nonacademic writing ("the impulse to personify through metaphor what the program is designed to do for the user . . ."); into architectural design ("The design problem is both rhetorical and semiotic. . . ."); into Marxist/critical theories (which would require us to appreciate group

members as mere tools for the organization). Nowhere are there proven specifics about how to improve nonacademic writing or how to better manage its expanding technology. Nor are there any rules or hints for those of us who would like to make our everyday writing of e-mail, technical manuals, and administrative evaluations more efficient and effective. Instead, one of the chapter authors, Dorothy Winsor, concludes that it cannot be taught by rules—although she offers no practical, tested alternatives. (Curiously, experts who go unmentioned in this and the other chapters *have* demonstrated the worth of simple principles for improving nonacademic writing; e.g., Anthony Trollope, working to improve the reports written by officials of the postal system a century ago, brought about significant changes in the clarity of, and time invested in, administrative writing.)

So would *Nonacademic Writing* make worthwhile reading? Perhaps only to those interested in the theories and philosophy of nonacademic writing and its technology. To me, a psychologist with a private practice for academic and nonacademic writers, this book offered no returns for a difficult read. Those of us who want to "get things done" (to paraphrase the editors) might want to wait for a more nonacademic account of nonacademic writing.—*Robert Boice, State University of New York at Stony Brook.*

*Poverty: A Global View: Handbook on International Poverty Research.* Eds. Else Oyen, S. M. Miller, and Syed Abdus Samad. Oslo, Norway: Scandinavian University Pr., 1996. 620p. $59 (ISBN 82-00-22649-2.)

The United Nations has proclaimed 1996 the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty. This fifth publication from the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP) compiles a prodigious amount of information on alternative poverty conceptualizations, theories, policies, and research, although it is not a handbook in the customary sense of the term nor strictly a comparative treatise on methodologies of poverty research, as the title might suggest. The Programme itself was created through the collaboration of the International Social Science Council (ISSC) and UNESCO's Sector for Social and Human Sciences, both of which provided funds for this monograph along with the Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Techcnische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and the Centre for Health and Social Policy Studies of the University of Bergen, Norway.

*Poverty: A Global View* is appropriate to both social sciences/social welfare and area studies collections. Its twenty-five chapters are organized into six parts, the first and last of which are composed of a total of six chapters providing a comparative review of poverty concepts and theories. The analysis reveals the political nature of social research in general, and how political regimes and institutional bases of research support influence the characterizations of the poor and the etiologies constructed to explain poverty within developed and developing countries. The diffusion of Western (especially U.S.) definitions and measures of poverty around the globe is particularly interesting given the lack of consensus for a standard among researchers and policymakers here. Having adopted the notion of a "poverty line," which demarcates the poor and nonpoor, researchers in other countries have waded into this intractable measurement mire. Taken together, these chapters elucidate the many different conceptions of poverty from absolute to relative need, and from personal to structural explanations.

The remaining central parts of the book provide country-specific poverty research approaches and findings. These four parts focus on, respectively, the Asian region (South Asia, Korea, India, Southeast Asia, China, and New Zealand); the African region (Egypt,