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Review of *The Politics of Child Abuse in America*. Lela B. Costin, Howard Jacob Karger and David Stoesz. Reviewed by Jill Duerr-Berrick, University of California, Berkeley.

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standings that limit clinical social work to long-term psychotherapeutic activities. For this reason, Dorfman's book covers clinical social work practice from a broad array of practice settings such as schools, medical settings, child protective services and courts. The book also highlights the many roles that clinical social workers function in, such as broker, advocate, enabler, case manager. Clinical social work and the roles of clinical social workers have grown and expanded. Dorfman's portrayal of clinical social work encompassing several direct practice fields is likely to ring true in the experience of current day practitioners and students. The book provides a useful framework for preparing for the day-to-day practice activities of clinical social workers. Dorfman's approach further adds a broader appeal to the book's contents for those who teach more generalist practice.

To summarize, Rachelle Dorfman has written a useful and "hands on" beginning practice text for social workers who provide direct services. Its brevity and practicality will likely appeal to the student reader. The book is traditional in its approach but current. Dorfman has captured the best of the past traditions in clinical social work practice and integrated them with the current day practice contexts and concerns. The definition, practice, and current vision of clinical social work practice are apparent in its pages. I would not hesitate to use this book as a supplementary text in practice classes.

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Lela B. Costin, Howard Jacob Karger and David Stoesz, *The Politics of Child Abuse in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. \$29.95 hardcover.

Lela Costin, Howard Karger, and David Stoesz have written a lively and persuasive book that condemns the current child welfare system for failing the children it is charged to protect; sheltering adults who assault and batter youngsters; and losing its soul to the shifting styles of public consciousness. In *The Politics of Child Abuse in America*, the authors join the ranks of other scholars who have recently exposed the multiple shortcomings of

the child welfare system and who have called for the replacement of children's services with a newly developed service structure (e.g., Lindsey, 1994 and Pelton, 1992). Costin, Karger, and Stoesz call their new approach the Children's Authority.

The book was published on the heels of the Elisa Izquierdo case of New York City (Van Biema, 1995), a sad tale of the child welfare system at, perhaps, its worst. A very young child, unable to defend herself against her mentally ill mother, was killed after her circumstances were exposed repeatedly to child welfare authorities. The case typifies child welfare services gone wrong, echoing common themes found throughout the book: (1) child welfare does not have a clear mission to protect children; (2) child welfare does not handle parents as severely as circumstances sometimes warrant; (3) child welfare is inundated with more requests for help than it can possibly handle, resulting in low morale, high staff turnover, and ultimately, faulty judgments; (4) child welfare workers have impossibly large caseloads that do not permit them to accurately assess children's conditions; (5) child welfare services are devoid of well-tested technologies that are routinely effective in reversing long-standing patterns of dysfunctional behavior; and (6) child welfare services are grossly under-funded if the public expects protection for children already harmed by their parents, along with support for all children ever at-risk of harm. Just as Elisa Izquierdo's case may take on mythical attributes as it continues to stir public debate, Costin, Karger, and Stoesz begin their book tracing the history of public attention for child abuse and neglect from the legend of Mary Ellen, to the battered child syndrome, and beyond. The book provides important reading for students of child welfare policy; professionals who are searching for an anchor for their sentiments of dismay in the field will find these authors have given the topic of child welfare practice and politics very thoughtful attention.

The authors cover a variety of topics in this volume. They begin by describing the growing child abuse "industry" that profits from the victimization of others through psychotherapy, legal fees, and media attention. Chapter 2 offers a fresh look at the history of child welfare services in the U.S. Most students of social work are schooled in the lesson of Mary Ellen, a poor girl whose abuse triggered a movement to protect children from

their caregivers. But Costin, Karger and Stoesz point out that the history of child welfare services has been built as much upon a "legend" about Mary Ellen, than upon actual fact. The effects of the media then, as now, helped to exploit public sympathies and largely shaped a social agenda much larger than what could have been accomplished by children's advocates alone.

In later chapters the authors very rapidly take the reader through three decades of intense activity in children's services. The result is a series of conclusions that are rather hastily drawn, and a provocative but not altogether fair treatment of several issues. For example, the authors correctly state that by the 1990s few service technologies had been developed that were well-researched and that definitively changed the life-course for children and families; and they are certainly correct that more should have been done in previous decades to develop better information about effective service strategies, yet their conclusions are strongly overstated. The authors indicate that social work failed to "contain" the deviancy associated with child abuse and neglect as effectively as "the initiatives of the more successful disciplines of the period" (p.131). What initiatives are these? The great majority of social service programs have shown minimal to very modest changes in targeted behaviors in strictly controlled experimental research. These programs point to the intransigence of many social problems; child welfare services, too, are not magic pills that "fix" dysfunctional families.

For a time, family preservation services appeared to be a magic pill, however. With the dawn of intensive preservation services, the authors show how the political left and the right found common ground without intention. The left applauded family preservation for its preventive focus and its effort to maintain children with their parents; the right found favor with the approach because it reduced the intrusive arm of the government in the lives of families. Here, and throughout the book, the authors do an excellent job of portraying the unique confluence of political ideologies that helped to form a fleeting, but important moment in the evolution of child welfare. From the "child savers" of the early twentieth century, to the preservationists of recent years, the political pendulum has swung in both directions. With this book, Costin, Karger, and Stoesz push the pendulum back toward the

center, forcing the profession to critically examine the direction and purpose of child welfare services.

The Politics of Child Abuse in America is an important book for child welfare professionals and policy makers on the eve of the 21st century. Recent evidence that shows the confusion prominent in the field can be found in California where legislation was introduced in 1996 to remind child welfare workers about their fundamental mission to protect children from harm and to secure their safety (SB 1516, Solis). When, after almost a century of providing public child welfare services, the mission of the field must be codified in law, books that open debate about the future direction of child welfare must be given serious consideration.

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Ronald K. Bullis, *Spirituality in Social Work Practice*. Washington, D.C. Taylor and Francis, 1996 \$24.95 papercover

The role of spirituality in social work practice has been extensively explored. This is evident by the large body of literature on the subject. Yet, *Spirituality in Social Work Practice*, written by Ronald K. Bullis, transcends the traditional approach to subject, and offers a unique synthesis of spiritual values and social work practice methods. This synthesis, according to Bullis, is best achieved through the implementation of a cross-cultural approach to the healing process, which includes the knowledge and application of various spiritual values in providing services for clients. Throughout his book, Bullis builds on empirical research to demonstrate ways in which social work practitioners are currently incorporating spiritual techniques in developing assessments and intervention strategies for their clients. He also