

2006

War on the Family: Mothers in Prison and the Families They Leave Behind. Renny Golden.

Amy C. Conley
University of California, Berkeley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Conley, Amy C. (2006) "War on the Family: Mothers in Prison and the Families They Leave Behind. Renny Golden.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 33: Iss. 3, Article 19.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.3196>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol33/iss3/19>

This Book Note is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



particularly the United States. He shows that the neoconservative influence has been most effective in the United States and, with impressive detail, he examines the struggle over multiculturalism in various spheres of American life. His analysis also ranges over other approaches that offer an alternative to the neoconservative orthodoxy. His ability to summarize these theoretical perspectives is not only impressive but helpful to anyone who is not familiar with this literature. The book makes a significant contribution to understanding the complexities of cultural diversity in the industrial nations today and should be widely consulted.

Renny Golden, *War on the Family: Mothers in Prison and the Families They Leave Behind*. New York: Routledge, 2005. \$22.95 papercover.

Blending ethnography and social commentary, *War on the Family* powerfully chronicles the lives of incarcerated women and their families, and the many injustices that beset them. Mandatory minimum sentencing laws for drug convictions have directly lead to dramatic growth in female incarceration rates, leading to the separation of women from their families. Their children are often placed in the care of relatives or the state. With policy changes that regulate kinship care and limit reunification timelines, it is incumbent upon child welfare workers and other social workers to gain a better understanding of this disproportionately affected population. The body of literature documenting the needs and strengths of incarcerated women and their children is small but growing, from studies on children's development to the social and economic needs of women post-incarceration. Golden's book makes a unique contribution by introducing the stories of individual mothers and families and drawing lessons from shared themes.

The issue of incarceration and maternal separation is explored from multiple angles. Golden provides background on the changes in social policies and criminal law that have become increasingly less supportive and more punitive towards minorities. The effects of these policies are evident in

the recounted experiences of mothers and their children. While the names change, the stories are resoundingly similar: the road to incarceration begins in a childhood and youth marked by abandonment, sexual abuse, and poverty. Intergenerational patterns of incarceration, substance abuse, and violence is part of the cause, but the real villain is a system of oppression and surveillance that sends a message to underprivileged children of color that they are expendable. The majority of the women Golden interviewed internalized the blame for their situations without recognizing the macro forces at play in their lives. These women's tales of survival are a testament to their resilience and an appeal for a different world for their children.

War on the Family is an engaging read, informing the reader through a well-crafted balance of analysis and anecdote. While Golden's narration can slip into dramatic phrasing and pontification at times, few readers will fail to be moved by her descriptions of mothers' suffering, children's anguish, or the redemptive power of love. Golden closes with on tone of hope, noting model programs which provide aid to current and former female inmates and their children as well as advocacy programs which seek to change the status quo. Doubtless, Golden's book will win more advocates to her cause, the belief that "we do not need more programs to change these young people's lives, but rather programs to change an oppressive social order."

Amy C. Conley, *University of California, Berkeley*

David Howe, *Child Abuse and Neglect: Attachment, Development and Intervention*. New York, Palgrave, 2005. \$ 94.00 hardcover.

In the field of child maltreatment, too often theory and practice exist in separate realms and are not considered together. It is therefore a pleasure to see David Howe's new book. This excellent work is a much-needed, eminently-readable discussion of developmental attachment theory, its interplay with issues of child maltreatment, and related practice implications.