



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 34

Issue 2 June - Special Issue on Globalization,
Social Justice & Social Welfare

Article 16

2007

Review of *Children and Youth in Adoption, Orphanages and Foster Care: A Historical Handbook and Guide*. Lori Askeland (Ed.).

Reviewed by Albert J. Ellett.

Alberta J. Ellett
University of Georgia

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



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Ellett, Alberta J. (2007) "Review of *Children and Youth in Adoption, Orphanages and Foster Care: A Historical Handbook and Guide*. Lori Askeland (Ed.). Reviewed by Albert J. Ellett.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 34: Iss. 2, Article 16.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.3260>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol34/iss2/16>

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



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

However, this is more reflective of our limited understanding of what works with these juveniles than it is a criticism of this book. On the contrary, *Changing Lives* is an important book with broad appeal and equally broad application. It is wholeheartedly recommended for everyone working in the juvenile and criminal justice systems or for anyone with an interest in delinquency and crime prevention.

Matthew T. Theriot
The University of Tennessee

Lori Askeland (Ed.). *Children and Youth in Adoption, Orphanages and Foster Care: A Historical Handbook and Guide*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006. \$59.95 hardcover.

This book provides an historical and multicultural perspective of issues resulting from children in need of care outside the birth family. The editor and contributors have backgrounds in English, history, and law and they provide somewhat different perspectives than those found in traditional social work. Social work educators who are well versed on the history of child welfare may not find this book informative.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I includes seven essays describing various aspects of the history of child welfare, Part II addresses original documents and Part III, a variety of related resources. This reviewer found the first chapter, about the inclusion of children in need of care outside of their birth families during the Colonial and New Republic period (1605-1850), the most informative. The chapter describes how Native American tribes added non-relative children and adults to meet the needs of continuity and lineage as opposed to meeting the specific needs of children. The influence of the European family and care of U.S. children provided an alternate means of children's care outside the immediate family. Parents most often placed their children in others' homes through apprenticeship arrangements or through indentured servitude. The strength and adaptability of African Americans under the adversity of slavery is described as well. The importance of extended family and tribal communities encouraged taking in

and looking after other children through informal adoption, foster care and fictive kin relationships.

The second chapter describes a change in philosophy that recognized that children's needs are better met in families than in institutions. The orphan trains moved children from orphanages and inner city poverty to farm families, marking the recognized beginning of foster care and adoption in this country. Children's Aid Societies that ran orphan trains recognized early on that not every family was fit and developed a means of checking out perspective families via agents, arguably the first social workers. Because many of these children were not orphans and some were mistreated, the need for a legal arrangement was recognized with Massachusetts passing the first adoption law in 1851.

Chapter three covers a wide variety of child welfare topics during the period from 1930 to 1969. The author describes how sociology and social work developed into discrete disciplines that recognized the need for a workforce with proper education and training. As a result of the Great Depression, it became necessary to reimburse foster families for the care of others' children and Aid to Dependent Children was established to enable widowed and abandoned women to raise their children.

In chapter 4, the authors describe sealed adoption records and the controversies that followed. For example, adult adoptees needed access to health history of and information about birth parents, birth mothers wanted to know what happened to their children, and adoptive parents needed full information about the children they were adopting and health and mental health histories of the biological parents. The history and legal base of large-scale international adoption is thoroughly covered in chapter five. Chapter 6 provides an account the orphan's role in literature.

The chapters in Part II of the book are original documents, including letters from children placed by parents or farm parents who took in children of the orphan trains, the first adoption law, the Child Welfare League of America 1938 standards for adoptions, and the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoptions of 1993. These are interesting writings and add some credibility through documentation to the

discussion in earlier chapters. However, they do not seem necessary since they were described in previous chapters. Chapters in Part III are bibliographies. The references are useful resource material on a wide variety of topics on orphanages, foster care, adoption, multicultural aspects and controversies in adoption practice.

The main value of this book is the synthesis of a great deal of information available in other sources into historical periods and topical categories. The book will probably be of most interest to child welfare practitioners, prospective foster and adoptive parents, and undergraduates who know little about the history of orphanages, foster care and adoption. Quite surprisingly, Lela Costin's extensive work on the history of child welfare in the U.S. and Ruth McRoy's longitudinal study on adoption were not cited in the text, although each author was listed in the bibliography. Research was not included on the outcomes of children in birth, foster and adoptive families. While the largest numbers of adoptions in the U.S. are by step-parents and relatives, these adoptions were only mentioned and should have been discussed in some detail. The odd organization and format of the book were somewhat distracting to this reviewer.

Alberta J. Ellett
University of Georgia

Jeff Ferrell, *Empire of Scrounge: Inside the Urban Underground of Dumpster Diving, Trash Picking and Street Scavenging*. New York: New York University Press, 2006. \$22.00 paperback.

Social workers have discovered ethnography, to the benefit of neither so far. To some it seems an excuse not to worry about rigorous research. To others it seems a way to fancy up open-ended interviews or participant observations, perfectly legitimate methods not in need of cosmetics. Real ethnographers immerse themselves in a culture for months, sometimes years; they don't just visit occasionally. Calling a two-hour interview an ethnography is like calling two notes a symphony or Twinkies® a balanced diet.