



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

---

Volume 38  
Issue 4 December

Article 12

---

2011

**Review of *Child Protection Systems: International Trends and Orientations*. Neil Gilbert, Nigel Parton, & Marit Skivenes, (Eds.).  
Reviewed by Dorinda N. Noble.**

Dorinda N. Noble  
Texas State University, San Marco

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



Part of the Social Work Commons

---

**Recommended Citation**

Noble, Dorinda N. (2011) "Review of *Child Protection Systems: International Trends and Orientations*. Neil Gilbert, Nigel Parton, & Marit Skivenes, (Eds.). Reviewed by Dorinda N. Noble.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 38: Iss. 4, Article 12.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.3639>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol38/iss4/12>

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](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

chapters do comment on the immediate effects of financial collapse and recession. What the authors are unable to comment on is the longer-term impacts of these phenomena. The book provides an excellent baseline for another study on those themes. Now more than ever, researchers and scholars need to work as advocates in social policy; Dr. Goldberg's career of solid work in this area is an excellent example for young scholars.

*Jennifer R. Zelnick, Touro College Graduate School of Social Work*

Neil Gilbert, Nigel Parton, & Marit Skivenes, Eds. (2011). *Child Protection Systems: International Trends and Orientations*. New York: Oxford University Press, \$55.00 (hardcover).

*Child Protection Systems* is a well-written, thought-provoking work that updates *Combatting Child Abuse: International Perspectives and Trends* (1997, N. Gilbert, Ed.). *Child Protection Systems* tracks changes over the last 10-15 years to the child protection systems of the U.S., Canada, England, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. All these nations have expanded their child protection systems, both in scope and in cost. Despite each system's unique character, all have been influenced by globalization, capital and labor mobility, and economic interdependence among nations. Furthermore, all are touched by growing neo-liberal attitudes, which increasingly reject the collective "welfare state" idea in favor of the stance that individuals must be self-reliant, approaching their lives as a "do-it-yourself" project. Almost all ten countries have dealt with gripping cases that provoked media and public outcry, and generated new or refined child protection laws. The editors assert that data related to out-of-home placements from the various nations are hard to compare because of differences in the way they are collected and assessed, as well as because of differences in how they variously define common terms. That said, the trend in out-of-home placements generally appears to be moving up. With the exception of the U.S., all these nations have adopted and are influenced by the U.N. Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Gilbert's 1997 edited book identified two primary orientations of child protection: child protection (exemplified in the U.S., Canada, and England), and family service (notably demonstrated in Denmark and the Netherlands). The child protection attitude views child abuse as deviant acts from which children must be protected; responses tend to be legalistic and adversarial. The family service orientation identifies abuse as a problem of family dysfunction which is best addressed by help and support in partnership with the family. In this volume, the editors added a third pattern to child protection systems: the child-focused orientation, which sees the child as an individual with a relationship to the state. Hence, the approach may be opposed to the parents. This orientation is concerned with the child's total well-being. Child-focused elements are emerging in policies of all the countries studied, such as in Finland, which is creating a "child-friendly" society. Also shaping all these nations' child policies is the idea that a nation is strategically wise to "invest" in its children so that they will be healthy, educated, and prepared to assume the nation's social and economic challenges.

In each nation's system, social workers are important. Norway, for instance, mandates specific education for child protection workers, many of whom are social workers. Because of media attention on high-profile abuse cases, a child-death case may expose the child protection employee to professional and social problems. Child protection systems in all ten nations are becoming more bureaucratized and more dependent on standardized tools. All these issues may discourage child protection workers and cause them to leave the field.

With the exception of Denmark, foster care is the most preferred alternative placement. Because Denmark and other Nordic countries tend to use out-of-home placements for troubled teenagers, the use of creative residential placements (such as those providing transition services for teens approaching adulthood) is more accepted than in the U.S. (In fact, the chapter on the U.S. system did not address residential care.) While the U.S. and England encourage adoption as an alternative, adoption is not used often in the other countries, and it is not allowed in Finland.

This book is an excellent tool for graduate students and professionals to compare and contrast child protection systems,

how those systems reflect a society's history and cultural thinking, and how systems address the world-wide problem of child abuse and neglect.

*Dorinda N. Noble, School of Social Work  
Texas State University-San Marco*

Tony Judt (2010). *Ill Fares the Land*. New York: The Penguin Press, \$25.95 (hardcover), \$15 (paperback).

Written as a critique of contemporary Western politics and economies as well as a call to revisit the social welfare commitments of the post World War II period in Europe and the United States, Tony Judt wrote the essays in this book as he was paralyzed and dying of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS); he died in August, 2010 at the age of 61. Widely acknowledged as the leading historian of 20th century European history, Judt was also a social and political critic whose essays were frequently published in *The New York Review of Books* and other journals both in the U.S. and Britain, where he was born, studied and taught before assuming an endowed position at NYU.

The title of the book is taken from a 1770 poem by Oliver Goldsmith: "Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,/Where wealth accumulates, and men decay." Judt details the several ways in which contemporary Western societies have experienced a decline in economic and social well-being as a consequence of having abandoned the vigorous economic and political commitments to the welfare state at mid-20th century. The erosion of good jobs, beginning in the 1970s, combined with changes in tax policies that favor the wealthy, has had dire consequences for sustaining welfare state programs that, among other things, reduced inequality and strengthened the social contract among the citizenry. Growing inequality is singled out as the most serious contemporary problem (p. 184). These developments are most acute in the U.S. and Britain and escalated under and following the Reagan and Thatcher regimes, but the populace in continental Europe, he suggested (clairvoyantly, considering the current economic difficulties there), was not well served by the advent of the European Union.

Judt begins each essay with a quote, many taken from