



2007

*Tending the Gardens of Citizenship: Child Saving in Toronto 1880s-1920s.* Xiaobei Chen. Reviewed by John M. Herrick.

John M. Herrick  
*Michigan State University*

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



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Herrick, John M. (2007) "*Tending the Gardens of Citizenship: Child Saving in Toronto 1880s-1920s.* Xiaobei Chen. Reviewed by John M. Herrick," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 34 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol34/iss1/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [maira.bundza@wmich.edu](mailto:maira.bundza@wmich.edu).



Xiaobei Chen, *Tending the Gardens of Citizenship: Child Saving in Toronto 1880s-1920s*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005. \$50.00 hardcover.

At its website, the Child Welfare League of America is described as “an association of more than 900 private and public agencies that assist more than 3.5 million abused and neglected children and their families each year....” Its counterpart in Canada, the Canadian Child Welfare League assists an array of agencies offering services to vulnerable Canadian children and families. Given the centrality of child and family welfare in contemporary social services, Xiaobei Chen’s revisionist history is welcomed. Informed by the prodigious scholarship of the postmodernist philosopher Michel Foucault, she explores the complex trajectories and meanings of child protection in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and concludes with a provocative essay on early 21<sup>st</sup> century Ontario child protection. Her work is a welcome addition to the pioneering scholarship which deepened understanding of how Western societies assisted vulnerable and dependent children within contexts of changing power relationships. It complements the research of Anthony Platt, who in the 1960s wrote about child savers in the United States and the invention of delinquency and the pioneering work of Philippe Aries on the evolution of childhood and family life.

Primary sources, such as the records of the Toronto Children’s Aid Society and the papers of J.J. Kelso, a prominent Canadian child welfare pioneer, reveal the gender and Eurocentric dimensions of child saving. Most work done to save neglected children was led by men but carried out by women. The society justified intervention into the lives of families who neglected their children by not providing appropriate guidance and discipline by using gardening metaphors which taught that children, like plants, needed careful tending and cultivation in order become reliable, responsible Christian adults and good citizens. In effect, children had socially constructed citizenship rights to sound nurturing. The disciplinary message to parents was clear: if they did not cultivate good habits in their children the society might remove them from their homes.

The social class dimensions of early child saving are apparent and important. Middle and upper class child savers did not expect their wards to assume upward trajectories of social mobility. They guided children to become reliable and dependable working class citizens: boys would be factory or farm workers; girls, household servants. To carry out its work and to ensure parents would comply with its orders, the society used new helping technologies such as case record keeping, reports, home visits, a shelter for neglected children and a detention room for delinquents. These innovations enforced discipline and parental compliance. The history of the children's shelter which opened in 1892 is instructive for contemporary child welfare professionals. Initially, the shelter provided temporary refuge for children who were removed from their parents or for those who voluntarily sought refuge. As time went on, children remained in the shelter for more than the recommended one month and the society was criticized for assuming parental child rearing responsibilities. Eventually, the society eliminated the residential shelter, ending a community resource which has no contemporary counterpart. Today, foster homes have become the preferred placement for children needing placement because of abuse or neglect.

Adhering to her mentor Foucault's dictum that history can inform the present, the last chapter is a provocative analysis of child protection in Ontario at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In contrast to early child savers who believed their work was an investment in good citizenship building and that children had rights to community support, today it is assumed that children have narrow, individualized citizenship rights, exemplified by preoccupation with the right to personal safety.

Lurid accounts of child abuse in Canada and the United States focus on children as victims of parental abuse and neglect. Chen argues that this individualizes the phenomenon of abuse, leading to a nearly exclusive focus on perpetrators, who are often impoverished single parents and their punishment, rather than on the broader social issue of childhood poverty or other marginalization factors which contribute to children's and parents' vulnerability. The early child saving vision of children and parents as persons who could be guided to become morally responsible citizens seems to have been

abandoned. In Ontario reports and recommendations to attack child abuse do not advocate revisions of child protection policies and services that would change the current emphasis on punishment of abusers. Societal preoccupation with personal safety and punishment trumps efforts to create a sense of collective responsibility for social problems such as the vision of the early child savers who saw child protection, rather than punishment, as an obligation of a moral and just society. A vision of the collective good could allow investments in supportive infrastructures such as day care which could reduce the stress of parenting and perhaps reduce child abuse and neglect. This book is an insightful comparative history of how communities at different times conceptualized children's citizenship rights and how those ideas have informed child protection.

John M. Herrick  
Michigan State University

Michàlle Mor Barak, *Managing Diversity: Towards a Globally Inclusive Workplace*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005. \$49.95 papercover.

This book extends knowledge on issues of diversity in the workplace into a global context. The focus is interdisciplinary, drawing on research and theory from the academic disciplines of social psychology, sociology, and economics, as well as from the human resource and employment literatures. The chapters tackle issues of central importance to those interested in considering the inter-relationships among social policy, social work, and employment in today's world economy.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section sets the "macro" context for conducting business in the world today. Detailed data and analyses are presented on cross-national trends in social policy, population growth and migration, socioeconomic indicators, and educational levels. The second section considers "micro/mezzo" dimensions of diversity, which include individual and inter-group experiences. These chapters look at workforce diversity from different social psychological perspectives, including prejudice and