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Social Work in the 21st Century. Michael Reisch and Eileen Gambrill. Reviewed by Daniel Harkness, Boise State University

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possibilities. It is well-written, easily understood by most readers including undergraduate and graduate students in social work and very timely. Social Security is a topic that should be of interest to all human service professionals. If this book is not required in a course on social policy, at least some of its chapters should be put on reserve. *Social Security in the 21st Century* is an important book, one that is worth reading and studying.

Howard Jacob Karger
University of Houston

Michael Reisch and Eileen Gambrill, *Social Work in the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1997. \$29.95 papercover.

Like a whirlwind, the Millennium is coming. Capitalism has won the Cold War, hands down, and we don't know what's next. MIT economist Lester Thurow heralds five forces of change shaping the future of the world: (1) the end of Communism, (2) the advent and growth of human brainpower industries, (3) a human demography characterized by dislocation, diversity, aging, and growth; (4) the subordination of national interests for shares in the global economy, and (5) the emergence of a multipolar world without a dominant power.

The forecast for the United States is hard—losing our position as the world's dominant economic, political, and military power. Although official estimates of unemployment hover around 5–6 percent, Thurow estimates that true unemployment in the United States is roughly 18 percent of the population, with an additional 14 percent underemployment, marginalizing nearly one-sixth of the nation. As we enter the post-modern era, will we become more like Europe, Africa, or Asia?

The Millennium will bring the second century of the social work profession. As we approach our second century, we are changing too. The Occupational Outlook Quarterly predicts better-than-average growth in social work jobs for the foreseeable future. But government at all levels is downsizing, privatizing human services. Social workers have left public service in droves for the private sector, to be squeezed in the constricting coils of managed care. Forty-four percent of the profession now practice

with a baccalaureate degree, but baccalaureate social work membership is only five percent of NASW. With the resignation and retirement of our elders, our profession is growing younger as the nation ages.

What's around the corner? Forty-two of our finest minds take up those questions in *Social Work in the 21st Century*, divining the future under five important headings: (1) The External Environment, (2) Policy Issues, (3) Practice Issues, (4) Theory, Knowledge, and Values, and (5) The Social Work Profession. The only consensus is change.

Population growth and the globalization of national and regional economies will change the external environment of social work practice. By 2050, The United States will have a population of 392 million persons. In only fifty years, nearly half of the nation will be Hispanic, black, Asian, or American Indian, and white children will lose their majority-group status as early as 2030. The proportion of persons aged 65 and over will grow by nearly 70 percent, and the proportion of children will shrink to below one-quarter of the population. The dependency ratio—that is, the ratio of children (0 to 17) and the elderly (65 and older) to the working-age population (18 to 64)—will increase in fifty years by 22 percent. In 2050, there will be 78.1 children and elderly per 100 persons of working age. Proportionally, we will have fewer people supporting more dependents. As our nation accepts a lower standard of living for our vulnerable citizens in order to increase our market share in the global economy, our children are competing with the elderly for scarce resources, and our children are losing. Mark Stern argues that “the poor themselves have made a set of postmodern’ choices about their lifestyle and domestic situation that have increased their risk of poverty—a startling shift from the cultural patterns of earlier in the century.” Clearly, poor children are an exception to the post-modern rule.

Stern goes on to say that “Americans have collectively made a set of choices to allow certain social groupings to remain in poverty,” anticipating “the declining significance of a purely materialistic conception of poverty” in the post-industrial world. Reframing what it means to be poor may have a corollary in child welfare.. Duncan Lindsey and Julia Henly project that reports of child abuse will continue to grow by about 250,000 per year,

reaching four million reports of abuse by the Millennium. If the trend of the past 20 years continue, child abuse will need to be reframed as well. In fact, the evidence on family preservation suggests that child welfare was reframed some time ago. If we reframe poverty, should we reframe child welfare too?

David Stoesz believes that the end of social work is near. Perhaps he's right, but the conventional wisdom of *Social Work in the 21st Century* is that opportunities for social work practice will continue to grow in gerontology, health care, and the work place. However, the essential tension in our future is a reflection of a pluralistic profession in a complex society, a value-based profession in a market-place society. Are we here to fight for social justice, or make a living? Is adaptation a virtue, or a sin? Do we know any thing, or not? *Social Work in the 21st Century* is unsettling, and a brilliant portrait of a profession on the ropes. But we have much to be proud of, and this book is highly recommended as a sampling of our best.

Daniel Harkness
Boise State University

Paolo Freire, *Letters to Christina: Reflections on my Life and Work*.
London: Routledge, 1996. \$ 16.95 paperback.

For both those readers who have known and revered the unique contributions of Paolo Freire to an international literature on personal, community and political empowerment, and for those to whom this text is the first encounter with that brilliant educator, this book is a gift and a legacy. Paulo Friere died at the end of April, 1997. In this work published a year before his death, Freire responded to a request from his niece Christina: "I would like," she said, "for you to write me letters about your life, your childhood, and, little by little, about the trajectory that led you to become the educator you are now."¹ Freire's reflections, in response to Christina, reveal the depth of consciousness that can be achieved through the methods of self critical questioning to promote self awareness and world transformation which Freire developed, practiced and then taught:

The more I return to my distant childhood, the more I realize that there is always something there worth knowing . . . For me to return