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## *On Their Own: What Happens to Kids When they Age Out of the Foster Care System?* Martha Shirk and Gary Strangler.

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to result in greater rates of child welfare involvement for minorities. Researchers are concerned with parsing out the roots of disproportionality so that they may be addressed through policy and programmatic interventions.

In this regard, *Child Welfare Revisited: An Africentric Perspective* takes a fresh look at an old problem. This book examines the disproportionate involvement of African American children in the child welfare system through a different lens: one that is "Africentric" instead of "Eurocentric." The Africentric perspective takes as its reference point the strengths, values, and history of African Americans and their tradition of self-help. The book's authors, over twenty in all, each add something to the Africentric framework. The first section provides a background, reviewing the demography of African American families, theories of institutional racism in the child welfare system, and impact of child welfare policies on African American families. The next several chapters in section two explore African American family dynamics. Practitioners may find of particular value the practice model laid out in chapter four. The final section posits the need for holistic interventions, necessitated by the connections between child welfare and a host of social problems such as substance abuse, homelessness, and HIV/AIDS. Several recent holistically-oriented innovations in child welfare are highlighted, including family decision making. In the conclusion, the editors urge reforms in child welfare that are Africentric and just good practice—preventative and integrated services at the community level.

This book was written with practitioners in mind, and each chapter provides highly relevant information to inform practice with African American families. An enjoyable and fluid read, the book can also be approached chapter by chapter for reference on particular issues. In the ongoing quest to discover and address the causes of disproportionality, the authors of this helpful book contribute an original perspective and offer much food for thought.

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

Martha Shirk and Gary Strangler, *On their Own: What Happens to Kids when they Age Out of the Foster Care System?* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004. \$24.95 hardcover.

The plight of the 25,000 young people who turn 18 or 21 while in foster care each year, and thus “age out”, is just beginning to gain public attention. Although most Americans do not believe their children are capable of supporting themselves until the age 25 or older, these young people, who come from some of the most disadvantaged backgrounds, are expected to be fully independent at an early age. The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 expanded independent living services for this vulnerable population, but it falls short of providing the resources necessary for a true safety net.

In this book, Martha Shirk and Gary Strangler provide an account of the lives of ten former foster youth and give an inside look into what happens to young people after foster care services end. The rich descriptions reveal how each young person’s well-being is intricately tied to the resources and limitations of his or her social environment. The importance of social supports, independent living services, and individual strengths permeate these stories. For many of the youth discussed in this book, the positive impact of just a few caring adults was evident. For example, Holly, with the ongoing support of her social worker and others, was completing her Master’s degree at the time of the book’s publication, despite the abuse she suffered as a child and many changes in her living situation. The lack of a caring adult was equally influential in determining outcomes. Reggie, a young man with developmental disabilities and psychotic symptoms, was asked to leave a youth shelter on his 18th birthday with no plan for aftercare, carrying his belonging in plastic bags as he went to school. He was found dead less than four months later.

Independent living services can also be instrumental in supporting good outcomes. Children’s Village in New York proved to be an excellent fit for Lamar, who moved through the program’s varying levels of independence, then graduated from college, married, bought his own home, and started a business. Lamar’s two brothers, however, were more difficult to engage in the Children’s Village setting. One died in a car accident while on a drug run, and the other was in prison at the time of the book’s publication. Some of the youth demonstrated extraordinary leadership. Giselle, who immigrated on her own to the United States from the Caribbean at age 15 to avoid her father’s sexual abuse, flourished

as a writer and peer mentor once she found a paying position at a foster youth advocacy organization. She then became guardian to her younger sister, saving her from her father's abuse as well, and traveled back to her homeland to make television appearances about sexual abuse.

The book provides vivid detail about these young people and others, and is an excellent addition to the emerging literature on this topic. Given the heterogeneity of pathways to adulthood in this population, an understanding of individual lives and experiences is valuable. Practitioners will appreciate the attention given to the interventions that proved helpful in specific situations, and policymakers will gain further insight into how policies differentially affect each young person.

*Sarah Taylor, University of California, Berkeley*

Harvey Blatt, *America's Environmental Report Card: Are we Making the Grade*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004. \$27.95 hardcover.

The terms associated with environmental degradation and public safety such as global warming, toxic waste, air and water pollution, drought, and chemical sensitivities are a part of the lexicon in all modern societies. However, it is not clear that these terms are properly understood by ordinary people. This lack of understanding can lead to confusion about the seriousness of environmental issues facing the United States and the rest of the world. The book, *America's Environmental Report Card: Are We Making the Grade*, offers understandable definitions and descriptions of many of the major environmental issues. Using humor and a conversational manner the author attempts to personalize environmental issues, asking readers to examine the current state of affairs and think about the things that can be done to reduce environmental degradation.

The book consists of ten chapters covering a variety of environmental issues. The first two chapters focus on issues related to water. Chapter one examines how much fresh water exists in the United States and how we use, and waste water. Chapter two examines floods, revealing accounts of the way housing developments located in flood plains are subsidized by taxpayers. Chapter three covers the accumulation and disposal of household