

paragraphs, and sentences. It would be challenging to find a paragraph in this book without a well-crafted topic sentence.

For some readers, the book's most significant strengths are also its most significant weaknesses. True to its genre and the aesthetics of historical sociology, the book is history with a social science purpose. Its research question is retroductive (working backward from effect to cause) to better understand our contemporary era of financialization, neoliberalism, and the global financial crisis. If the research process were reversed, for example, searching for visions of financial order in the Early Republic period and then tracing them forward in time, additional potential principles may have appeared salient, such as the structuring role of racial capitalism.

Some readers may wonder whether the book's conceptual unity—three countries, two unique principles of order per country—achieves its elegance at the cost of muting the polyphonic complexity of cultural objects such as “financial order.”

Consider, for example, the question “Why two principles?” Pernell's theoretical apparatus does not require (or even anticipate) two principles of order; instead, it emphasizes the presence of multiple principles of order that are “broad enough to justify a range of policy stances” (p. 241). Indeed, the tables in Chapter Two summarize how these two principles of order bundle multiple sub-elements. I suggest that the most compelling reason for this packaging may be an aesthetic preference for parsimony. Two principles provide a pendulum metaphor (p. 241) that makes the within-country oscillation argument elegant: when two principles are perceived as incompatible, one principle is dominant, the other latent, and a crisis provides an opportunity to trigger a swap. If future scholars were to add a third principle, or principles that enter or leave elite discourses, the pendulum mechanism would become something causally messier. But it would also become analytically finer-grained.

Read generously, *Visions of Financial Order* is a model of what comparative historical sociology can accomplish with cultural

analysis: a concise causal argument derived from elites' own explanatory accounts and comparative ambition disciplined by experts' national historiographies. Read skeptically, it invites us to search for the principles of order that may have been eclipsed by Pernell's aesthetic commitments to her genre. Either way, it is a book that reshapes how we understand the cultural infrastructure of financial governance—and forces comparative historical sociologists to ask whether the price of parsimony is worth paying.

Randles, Jennifer, and Kerry Woodward, eds. 2025. *Policing Not Protecting Families: The Child Welfare System as Poverty Governance*. New York: New York University Press. 386 pp. ISBN: 9781479820610.

Reviewed by: Gillian Slee, *University of Georgia*

In *Policing Not Protecting Families: The Child Welfare System as Poverty Governance*, Jennifer Randles and Kerry Woodward bring together 20 multidisciplinary scholars and practitioners to probe the policies, practices, and outcomes of the American child welfare system. The editors identify how the system has long contradicted its stated principles. Formal policies espouse principles of family unification and well-being. In practice, the child welfare system's reach is long, and outcomes fall short. The child welfare system also exacts uneven tolls, disproportionately borne by low-income populations; Black, American Indian, and Latine families; and mothers.

The volume does a masterful job demonstrating how child welfare outcomes, including child removal and the termination of parental rights, emerge through on-the-ground policies that act on and exacerbate structural inequalities related to race, gender, and class. Divided into five parts, the book opens with a historical chapter and closes with chapters

on potential responses to the challenges of the contemporary child welfare system, including reform or abolition.

The heart of the volume takes shape in three primary sections: "The Child Welfare System as Poverty Governance," "The Child Welfare System and the Left Hand of the State," and "The Child Welfare System and the Right Hand of the State." Organizing the chapters according to the Bourdieusian model of the state's left- and right-hand functions is useful insofar as scholars working on topics in poverty governance can immediately infer the chapters' orientations (social welfare versus often-punitive regulation).

After a historical chapter by Matty Lichtenstein that considers the system's history of "'unseeing' of poverty" and racial discrimination, the book turns to its central task: providing a comprehensive portrait of how the system produces racialized and gendered poverty governance in the contemporary United States. Amy Casselman-Hontalas and Stephanie A. Bryson establish how the United States's reliance on child removal is often a feature rather than a bug. Casselman-Hontalas traces how this reality evolved from efforts to diminish Native families' "right to land" and persists in incentives to secure federal funding, imperiling indigenous families' autonomy and well-being. Bryson leverages a case study to situate the consequences of state preferences for removal as well as class-advantaged placements in human terms.

Chapters by Tina Lee and Kristina Brant help readers understand how the child welfare system's treatment of substance-using parents shapes families across urban and rural areas through responses that target individual behavior without considering root causes (such as poverty) or relational fallout (consequences for kin). Whereas Black and Indigenous poor mothers who use drugs occupy a triply disadvantaged situation (p. 139), even white parents, the authors show, face considerable hurdles when drug-use interventions are not well-tailored to families' needs or accessing resources imperils child custody or reunification. Brant illustrates how

"wholesale institutional avoidance" may persist despite the efforts of new programs or well-intended caseworkers (p. 152), demonstrating how the packaging matters as much as the goods in the development and delivery of resources.

Shanta Trivedi and Erin Carrington Smith elucidate how intimate partner violence can exacerbate mothers' victimization, as child removal is often used as a tool of first resort when risk-mitigation or anti-poverty strategies (e.g., via housing assistance) might better serve parents and children. Cyleste C. Collins and Rong Bai provide a complementary assessment of housing assistance, examining housing insecurity as a cause of child removal and barrier to reunification. Their analysis of housing interventions that serve system-involved families points to the limits of existing strategies. Laura Tach, Elizabeth Day, and Brittany Mihalec-Adkins continue in a similar vein by exposing how family drug treatment courts, formally designed to promote substance-use recovery, instead compound the trauma of children and exacerbate parents' disempowerment. Further, Frank Edwards's chapter documents how racialized poverty governance works across the country, linking incarceration and child welfare together with alarming results for Black, American Indian, and Alaskan Native children.

Two back-to-back chapters on the intersection of child welfare with the police and the immigration enforcement system, respectively, expose competing dynamics. Kelley Fong and AshLee Smith consider the tensions associated with the close, voluntary coupling of law enforcement activity with child welfare. On the other hand, Kristina K. Lovato traces how undocumented families are harmed by the decoupled actions of immigration enforcement and child welfare, which "fast-tracks the children of immigrant parents to adoption" (p. 224).

Dee Wilson and Erin Maher as well as Alan J. Dettlaff and Maya Pendleton conclude the volume with competing proposals to reform or abolish the child welfare system. Wilson and Maher advocate for a

comprehensive reimagining of child welfare to address correlated adversity and extend family support through needs-focused interventions that empower parents while promoting child safety. Dettlaff and Pendleton advocate for abolition on the basis that "the system itself is built to harm and oppress marginalized children and families and excels at doing so" (p. 248). They focus in the main on how common proposals for reform, such as addressing racial disproportionality or providing caseworker training, will not resolve underlying causes or racial inequities.

In general, the editors and authors offer compelling arguments about how the system's policies and on-the-ground practices constitute poverty governance. I questioned the usefulness of the umbrella term "neoliberal," which was invoked throughout. The editors indicate that the neoliberal era emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Keeping with conventional understanding, chapters generally identify "neoliberal poverty governance" as a mode of policy that emphasizes market logics and personal responsibility, which reduce the government's implied responsibilities to citizens.

While agreeing with many authors in this volume about the harms of neoliberal policies, I found that the frame distracted from one of the volume's central strengths: establishing how the child welfare system has—since its origins—emphasized personal responsibility, overlooked structural harms, and deemphasized the state's social-welfare obligations. To be clear, this is a minor quibble. Casselman-Hontalas's chapter on Native families' experiences with child welfare speaks to this point in its gentle criticism of a focus on 1996 welfare reforms when she writes, "a more comprehensive examination reveals that the most relevant temporal marker in Indian child welfare is the formation of the United States itself" (pp. 54–55). While authors like Bryson and Lovato demonstrate the consequences of welfare retrenchment, others like Dettlaff and Pendleton, Edwards, and Lichtenstein make clear that the problem is one of *longue durée*. I hope this volume will be read as a comprehensive assessment of how the American

child welfare system operates its historically rooted brand of racialized and gendered poverty governance.

A thrill of this volume lies in how generative each chapter is for reforming or rethinking child welfare and family well-being. The chapters provide strong evidence to mount sharp critiques—of the system's conflation of poverty with neglect, its focus on personal pathologies rather than redressing structural harms, and its promotion of racism, sexism, and classism. Yet the authors fuel a reader's imagination by pitching concrete, feasible policy solutions. For this reason, the fifth section's chapters on abolition, comprehensive reform, and the editors' "structural risk perspective" are particularly well-earned.

This volume will serve as an essential introduction for students and as a source of critical inquiry and imagination for researchers or practitioners. It is a comprehensive, well-argued account of system-involved families' experiences that establishes the child welfare system as a central institution in poverty governance.

Ray, Ranita. 2025. *Slow Violence: Confronting Dark Truths in the American Classroom*. New York: St. Martin's Press. 325 pp. ISBN: 9781250288301.

Reviewed by: Karlyn J. Gorski, *University of Chicago*

"Schools dehumanize children," writes Ranita Ray (p. 98). Indeed, in *Slow Violence: Confronting Dark Truths in the American Classroom*, she makes a compelling case that they do. In referring to "slow violence," she means the psychological and emotional violence that teachers impose on children through their "cruelty, harassment, and negligence," not physical or sexual violence (p. x). Through rich ethnographic profiles of students and teachers in a Las Vegas school she calls Ribbon Grass Elementary, Ray exposes the gradual, invisible, and often contradictory forms this violence takes. By bringing to light