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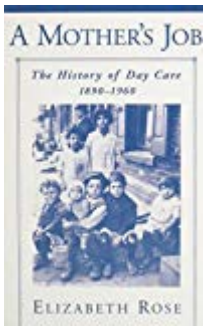
Sonya Michel. *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy.* New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1999. xii + 410 pp. $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-05951-9.



Elizabeth Rose. *A Mother's Job: The History of Day Care 1890-1960.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. xi + 275 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-511112-5.

Reviewed by Kriste Lindenmeyer

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At first glance it might appear that Sonya Michel and Elizabeth Rose are unlucky scholars who simultaneously published the same book. To the contrary: Michel's and Rose's works are complementary and well-documented studies that each make a distinct contribution to the history of day care in the United States. Together they reveal a complex story that aids those interested in this topic and the related histories of social welfare, public policy, education, childhood, family, and women. Michel and Rose began their studies as Ph.D. dissertations, but both works have benefited from extensive revision.[1] Each also builds on the previously published work of scholars such as Barbara Beatty, Mary Frances Berry, Hamilton Cravens, Susan Hartmann, Molly Ladd-Taylor, and others touching on the history of day care as an issue within larger themes.[2] But Michel and Rose provide the first comprehensive examinations of the history of day care in the U.S. Both authors also address why, despite a long history of need, the United States has no national day care policy.

As her title accurately suggests, Sonya Michel traces the development of day care policy at the national level from the 1790s to the present by examining the writings of policy makers and the records of institutions. Michel reveals a history where women's rights and children's interests often collided. She concludes that despite a growing population of wage-earning mothers in America by the early twentieth century, state-supported

day care became negatively linked to poverty, and therefore class and race. Rose, using Philadelphia as a case study, centers on the delivery of child care from 1890 to 1960. Using the records of two Philadelphia day care centers (Wharton Centre and Neighborhood Center Day Nursery), Rose shows which mothers used day care facilities and what those centers were like. She concludes that shifting attitudes about motherhood, charity, and the needs of children by day care providers and mothers were strong forces shaping the actual delivery of services.

In a recent editorial in The Chronicle of Higher Education, Ruth Rosen notes that women now comprise half of many university departments. But she laments, the numbers do not constitute equality for women in academia because "colleges and universities [are organized] around the male experience. Now that there is a critical mass of women, we need to reconsider the lack of child care . . . and other 'normal' patterns . . . as though women mattered" (original emphasis). Sonya Michel would certainly agree. Children's Interests/ Mothers' Rights examines the history of day care in the United States as part of American women's efforts to access full "social citizenship." Defined by political theorist T. H. Marshall in his 1950 book, Citizenship and Social Class, Michel explains that full social citizenship requires unrestricted access to economic participation.3 In other words, poverty-stricken individuals, or those denied full access to the wage marketplace, are unable to participate as full citizens. For Michel, universal government sponsored child care is a requirement that would afford "women a degree of economic independence" and therefore full social citizenship (p.2). But, Michel argues, from the outset the effort to establish affordable quality child care in the U.S. was a failure. She sees "the history of child care in America [as] one of rights withheld," as well as a story of "maternalist invention," or, in other words, the history of "working mothers' efforts to find care for their children when formal or institutional services were unavailable." Michel concludes that the lack of universal government funded child care in the U.S. does not result simply from a "male conspiracy" to keep women out of the paid labor force. Instead, this circumstance is a product of "a politics of maternalism" advocated by male and female policy makers who "accepted the notion that mothers properly belonged at home with their children" (p.3). Within this discourse, "the presence of mothers in the workforce is presented not as a normal feature of advanced market economies but as a 'social problem'; thus children's interests are implicitly positioned in opposition to women's rights"(p.3). For Michel, this explains why "universal child care, organized and supported by the government, remain[s] an elusive social good in the United States"(p.1).

Both Michel and Rose conclude that early child care was limited and many working-class mothers chose to avoid the heavy handed morality dispensed by institutional providers. During the Progressive Era professional child care organizations (such as the National Federation of Day Nurseries and the Association of Day Nurseries of New York City) were established and private nursery schools became the elite child care facilities. Divisions between advocates of custodial and developmental care split child care interests. On top of that, the establishment and growth of mothers' pensions reinforced the idea that the best child care was provided by mothers who remained at home full-time. Even when the federal government sponsored Works Progress Administration nursery schools in the 1930s and expanded day care as a war-time necessity during World War II, the U.S. Children's Bureau maintained that stay-at-home mothers provided the best care for young children. There was no long-term commitment to child care as an enhancement of women's employment opportunities or for children's development.

Efforts to retain child care services largely failed in the United States, but were expanded in other nations during the post-World War II peri-

od. According to Michel, this divergence grew by the1970s and 1980s, leaving the United States far behind. Michel ends her book by doing a comparative analysis of day care's development in Sweden, Japan, Australia, Canada, and France. She maintains that especially in Australia and Canada, "a combination of strong movements of child care advocates, parents, and feminists, supported by labor, who were committed to the principle of universal child care, and the conjunction of these movements with a sustained period of left-liberal (or social democratic hegemony) created a government commitment to affordable and high quality day care." In the United States, "never having enjoyed the benefits of universal child care outside wartime, Americans appear to have become inured by the constant struggle to find adequate services in a fragmented system based on competition and inequality" (pp. 295-96). For Michel, philosophical and turf divisions within the child care movement and connected advocacies fueled American policy makers' predisposition to glorify motherhood, "whether actual or potential" and therefore limit women's access to full citizenship by neglecting affordable-high-quality day care.

Michel's story of day care policy is thorough and includes most of the recent work on social welfare policy development. Nevertheless, it is a little single-minded in its argument focusing on child care as a woman's right linked to equal employment opportunities. Recent studies suggest that access to good early-childhood education should be every child's right as well. For example, an October 22, 1999, New York Times article explains that young adults who attended high quality day care facilities as children "consistently outperform their peers. . . on both cognitive and academic tests, and also were more likely to attend college or hold high-skill jobs."4 A closer evaluation of children's experiences in day care will add to this history. There also needs to be more attention to the kinds of employment actually open to women in the early years of the twentieth century. The Children's Bureau's advocacy of mothers' pensions and Aid to Dependent Children happened at a time when most employment open to working class workers, both male and female, was low paid and dangerous. The Bureau' s reluctance to embrace equal employment opportunities for mothers certainly hindered progress for working women, but it should be understood in the context of the times.

In addition, the diversity of the U.S. population may also shed light on America's reluctance to embrace day care as national policy. Michel notes that during the nineteenth century many working mothers avoided institutional day care because it challenged their own values and maternal philosophy. This reluctance to give child rearing "over to strangers" may be strongest in a diverse nation like the United States. A homogenous population, such as that in Sweden, with a foundation of more closely shared values may make the effort to obtain government sponsored child care much easier. This may also help to explain the very recent movement away from government sponsored social services in nations such as Canada and Australia as the populations in these countries have become more diverse by new waves of immigrants.

Elizabeth Rose's study looks at some of these questions in more detail by examining the actual use of day care by families in two Philadelphia nurseries. Rose skillfully examines the "gradual transformation of day care from a charity for poor single mothers to a socially legitimate need of 'normal' families, and even a potential responsibility of the state." According to Rose, "Day care is simultaneously attached and defended today because, even though its meaning has changed over time, it has never been completely transformed" (p.5). Consistent with Michel's findings, Rose argues that early child care facilities were established for charitable reasons. By the 1910s and 1920s custodial day care was criticized by professional social workers that denounced moth-

ers' employment. During the 1930s and 40s national priorities put pressure on the government to support child care. But, by the 1950s public support waned and day care was again tainted with the label of charity and neglectful mothering.

The strength of Elizabeth Rose's book is her creative use of case studies created by social workers at the day nurseries. The elite women who established the first day care facilities in Philadelphia viewed them as filling an unavoidable gap in mothering among poor working women. The women who used the Philadelphia nurseries for their children viewed their need for day care as "an extension, not an abdication of their responsibilities as mothers." This division between elites and working-class mothers has never been fully reconciled, thereby tainting the use of day care for all women among policy makers and public opinion. Rose's history offers insight into what it means to be a "good mother" and how this has changed over time influenced by race, class, and national priorities. Rose's cautious use of case studies shows who used the facilities and why. She concludes that "by portraying women's mothering work as inherently in conflict with their wage work of mothering, maternalist reformers denied poor and working-class women 's own definitions of motherhood, as well as their need for assistance." As a consequence, "in the attempt to valorize the work of mothering and meet the needs of children, these reformers ended up reducing the options available to women who needed or wanted to support, as well as to care for, their children" (p.9). Rose maintains that day care programs have continued to be stratified by class. "Perhaps the most damaging result of our failure to support day care is that many children spend their days in poor-quality care" (p.217).

Children's Interests/Mothers Rights and A Mother's Job are welcome and needed histories of day care. They fall somewhat short in placing the lack of attention to day care within the larger context of the United States' reluctance to care for its children's education, health, and other needs at the federal level. But, these two books together provide perceptive analysis of the one aspect of the history of childhood and education with links to citizenship, rights, and class that shape so much of the history of social welfare in the United States.

Notes

[1]. For example see Barbara Beatty, ***Preschool Education in America: The Culture of Young Children from the Colonial Era to the Present*** (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995); Mary Frances Berry, ***The Politics of Parenthood: Child Care, Women's Rights, and the Myth of the Good Mother*** (New York: Viking, 1993); Hamilton Cravens, ***Before Head Start: The Iowa Station and America's Children*** (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Susan M. Hartmann, ***The Homefront and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*** (Boston: Twayne, 1982); and Molly Ladd-Taylor, ***Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930*** (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

[2]. Sonya Alice Michel, "Children's Interests/ Mothers' Rights: Women, Professionals, and the American Family, 1920-1945." Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1986; and Elizabeth Rose, "Maternal Work: Day Care in Philadelphia, 1890-1960," Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers State University, 1994.

[3]. Ruth Rosen, "Secrets of the Second Sex in Scholarly Life," The Chronicle of Higher Education (July 30, 1999): A48; T. H. Marshall, ***Citizenship and Social Class*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950; reprint, London: Pluto Press, 1992).

[4]. Jodi Wilgoren, "Quality Day Care, Early Is Tied to Achievements as an Adult," New York Times (October 22, 1999).

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