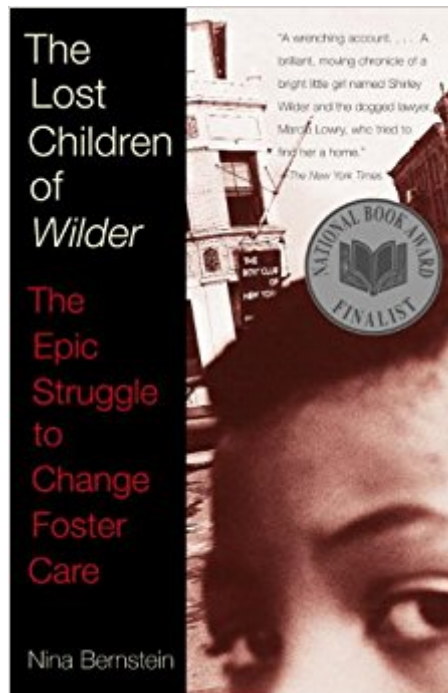




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The Lost Children Of Wilder: The Epic Struggle To Change Foster Care



Synopsis

In 1973, a young ACLU attorney filed a controversial class-action lawsuit that challenged New York City's operation of its foster-care system. The plaintiff was an abused runaway named Shirley Wilder who had suffered from the system's inequities. Wilder, as the case came to be known, was waged for two and a half decades, becoming a battleground for the conflicts of race, religion, and politics that shape America's child-welfare system. *The Lost Children of Wilder* gives us the galvanizing history of this landmark case and the personal story at its core. Nina Bernstein takes us behind the scenes of far-reaching legal and legislative battles, but she also traces the life of Shirley Wilder and her son, Lamont, born when Shirley was only fourteen and relinquished to the very system being challenged in her name. Bernstein's account of Shirley and Lamont's struggles captures the heartbreaking consequences of the child welfare system's best intentions and deepest flaws. In the tradition of *There Are No Children Here*, this is a major achievement of investigative journalism and a tour de force of social observation, a gripping book that will haunt every reader who cares about the needs of children.

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Customer Reviews

The Lost Children of Wilder is a book that is long overdue. Bernstein captures the insidious machinations of the NYC foster care system that purports to care for the well-being of all its homeless, indigent, and too often parentless children, irrespective of their race, creed or religion. I know of the systematic abuse of the NYC foster care system because I was number 1811513 who was serviced out of the Brooklyn Bureau of Social service and Children's Aid Society at 285

Schermerhorn Street. Bernstein has accomplished a herculean task by lifting an airtight lid on an epic silence to speak truth for the many children, like myself, who at a time in our lives were both invisible and voiceless. Rev. Irene Monroe Harvard Divinity School.

The Lost Children of Wilder is a historic account of a person's plight to make changes. This book haunts me, because thirty years after the 1973 lawsuit the foster care system still has many changes to be made and the system is still allowing children to fall through the cracks and die. I cry for Shirley Wilder and Lamont. I cry and pray that as a social worker, I can make a difference and not allow children to fall through the cracks. I'm thankful to Nina Bernstein for dedicating herself to writing a book of this magnitude. With an average 4.5 star rating, all that consider reading this book should take time away from their lives and read this heartbreaking, but truth be told, story of our nation's short falls.

Nina Bernstein's compelling account of the generations of children trapped in the child welfare system kept me up late turning pages...and gave me nightmares of the thousands and thousands of children who are still churning through an overtaxed foster care system that our society doesn't seem to care about. Still almost every week there's another horror story of an abused or neglected kid that fell through the cracks of the "system." This is an absolutely amazing, and realistic account, of what long-term public interest litigation is like. The world needs more people like Marcia Robinson Lowry to fight on behalf of kids, and more journalists like Nina Bernstein, willing to put under bright light the shortcomings that our local governments would rather have swept under the rug.

I recently read this book. I have been a foster care case worker in New York City for four years and I identified with both sides of the Wilder case. Shirley and her son, as well as millions of other children should have been given more than they were, they were forgotten and basically 'thrown away' by the foster care system. BUT, on the other hand, the agencies, the good agencies are only given SO much, and more agencies and services MUST be created, not should be, to better service the children and their families. This is an excellent book, very down to earth, yet detailed. I highly recommend it.

I am a social worker. I have worked in the New York City public child welfare system since the mid-1970's, and have read about and studied the field pretty obsessively for the past 30+ years. If I had to name the single best book I've ever read on the New York City child welfare system, it would

not be one of the many excellent books written by social workers, sociologists, psychologists, attorneys, or even by individuals who grew up in the foster care system. It would be this book, by a consummate journalist, who examines a case that drove child welfare practice in NYC for 20+ years with both exhaustive thoroughness and laser-like focus, weaving a compelling story that is both sobering and instructive. I believe this book should be required reading for all child welfare practitioners and policy-makers. A masterful piece of journalism.

Even though I have had no personal contact with the foster care system, I found the book fascinating as it concurrently details the trial against the system and the private trials of the Wilder family. While reading the book my heart went out not only to the Wilders in the story but the countless, nameless children that are wrapped in a system that is inadequate at best, and often very dangerous, both physically and emotionally. What struck me particularly hard throughout the book, is the reality that there are so many children that have nowhere to turn. We as a society need to find better ways to help these children, who through no fault of their own are so helpless. In order to change the system it is imperative that we understand the problem, and the book does a wonderful job of describing the circumstances children in our foster care system face every day. I believe that religion should be a choice whenever possible, so that the child maintains some contact with a lifestyle familiar to him/her, but I also believe that communities that have a higher proportion of foster care children should be assisted to develop quality programs as well.

This well-written epic study of New York's foster care system reads like a novel. Indeed, the fascinating details about three generations of foster children kept me reading and reading; the book is a cliff-hanger in a way non-fiction seldom is. Shirley and Lamont's compelling stories not only reveal little-known aspects of welfare history, but provide a window of what the sad future may look like if President Bush succeeds with his faith-based welfare initiatives.

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