

STATE OF THE ART

The Racial Origins of Foster Home Care

Black Family Responsibility in the Early Welfare State, New York City, 1930s–1960s

Michaela Christy Simmons*

Department of Sociology, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA

*Corresponding author. Email: mcs2021@stanford.edu

Abstract

Black family values and behavior have long been at the center of policy solutions to intergenerational poverty. But in the early twentieth century, the Black family took on paradoxical significance as a solution to child poverty and neglect through the foster family. This was part of a broad realignment in child protection that upheld the “Home” as the best place for children—yet the concept came to mean something different for White and Black youth. Using New York City as a case by which to study broad transformations in child protection ideology and local child welfare response, I find that in the 1930s substitute care underwent a dramatic transformation with many White children cared for in their own homes or in therapeutic institutions, while previously excluded Black youth gained disproportionate access through race-matched foster families. Though a seemingly progressive approach, I argue that the prioritization of the foster home over the biological home illuminates how the family was envisioned as a solution to poverty in the context of racial inequality. Child welfare workers imagined that patterns of placement in race-matched foster families could be manipulated to overcome segregation and exclusion from the emerging welfare state. But as more non-White children entered substitute care, the conditions of poverty and distress in segregated communities necessitated a return to congregate care for “hard-to-place” minority youth as Black families seemingly failed to take care of their own. This case is important because it highlights the way in which official foster care systems emerged not as an extension of Black kinship care strategies, but as an experimental solution to dependency and neglect that mobilized the Black family to resolve the many consequences of state abandonment.

Keywords: Foster Care; Poverty; The Black Family; Child Protection; Family Responsibility

Introduction

In 1943, New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia declared that “the worst mother [was] better than the best institution” (*New York Times* 1943). As part of a ceremony commemorating the opening of a child care center for working mothers in Harlem, the statement marked the culmination of decades of advancement that endorsed the family as the best place to raise a child. This attitude echoed President Roosevelt’s infamous 1909 White House Conference proclamation that “the home should not be broken up for reasons of poverty.” Only where child removal was necessary was the “carefully selected foster home... the best substitute for the natural home...” (Children’s Bureau 1967, p. 4). These

© The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Hutchins Center for African and African American Research. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

statements, nearly three decades apart, signaled the dramatic shift away from institutional care toward the preservation of family and home life. In this time, child protection underwent a massive rearrangement of services—with the fall of institutions, the rise of foster home care, and an overarching emphasis on family integrity. Yet, racial disparity quickly emerged in placement patterns with White children lingering in institutional care, while Black children were disproportionately cared for in foster homes. Why, at the height of Jim Crow segregation and racial exclusion in child welfare, were Black youth disproportionately incorporated into what was perceived as the best method of care?

Historians suggest that the shift from institutional care to foster family care in the early twentieth century was caused, in part, by changing ideas about the social development of children (English 1984). Institutions, often reserved for White-ethnic children, had been the main form of care for orphaned, homeless, and neglected youth in the 1800s. In these regimented settings, hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of children were cared for under the same roof; they ate, learned, and slept communally. But as the pressures of urbanization and industrialism threatened family decline and children took on increasingly sentimental value, Progressive Era reformers began to argue that families—even if impoverished—were essential to the development of young children (Vandepol 1982; Zelizer 1985). Compensated foster family care emerged as a best approximation of family life and proved to be a more cost-effective solution to child protection (Jones 1993; Rymph 2017). Yet scholars have overlooked the racial disparity that emerged in this shift from institutional to home-based care, and consequently, the racial politics of this historical transformation.

The implicit assumption is that as non-White youth began to enter substitute care,¹ they simply became part of a pre-existing system of foster home care² that had already come to overshadow institutional care. But this article argues that the changes in methods of care at this moment in history were much broader than a move away from institutions—rather they signaled a shift in valuations of family along racial lines during the first half of the twentieth century. Using archival data from the Domestic Relations Courts and child placement agencies in New York City, this article argues that while the “Home” undoubtedly became the best place for children, the concept came to mean something different for White and Black youth. In a dramatic turnaround between the 1930s and 1960s, White New York City children were increasingly cared for in their own homes or therapeutic institutions, while previously excluded Black youth gained disproportionate access to substitute care through race-matched foster families. In effect, “Home” became the biological family for White youth, whereas the *foster* home became a solution to Black child dependency.

This article situates the divergent return to the “Home” in the emerging welfare state of the early twentieth century. New Deal reformers credited the Social Security Act of 1935 with promoting the “security of the American home and the protection of the family life of wage earners,” creating the “foundation upon which the welfare of American children ... [rested]” (Committee on Economic Security 1934). Yet, racial inequality was woven into wage-earner protections through the exclusion of agricultural and domestic workers (Brown 1999; Katznelson 2005; Quadagno 1994). Though Black reformers argued for greater shares of New Deal benefits (Hubert 1933), it became clear that socioeconomic investment in Black communities was not part of the New Deal plan, nor could local social workers be expected to solve the “Negro Problem.” As Black child dependency became a seemingly unresolvable crisis in the North, the *substitute* home emerged as a viable solution. I find that child welfare workers envisioned foster home placement with middle-class Black families as a way to provide children with needed resources. In this way, official foster care systems emerged not as an extension of Black kinship care strategies, but as an experimental solution to Black child dependency in the context of exclusion from the emerging welfare state.

The obstacles faced in this early era set the stage for fiercely contested debates about the best place for children, given the perceived inability of the Black community to care for

their own. This historical case highlights critical questions about the direction of racial justice in child welfare and emphasizes the need for economic investment and redistribution in conjunction with cultural preservation strategies reliant on race-matching. As Dorothy Roberts (2002) argues, the injuries sustained within foster care are not eliminated by care within one's own community; the disproportionate use of any form of foster care contributes to a loss of control over Black family life. In fact, in subsequent decades, as exclusion gave way to overinclusion, the conditions of poverty and distress in segregated communities necessitated a return to congregate care for "hard-to-place" minority youth. Paralleling political discourse in other historical arenas, the failures of race-matched foster home care affixed "blame" on Black families for their failure to meet the needs of child dependency (Taylor 2019, p. 228). The emergence of a racially disparate foster care system is not solely rooted in the policing of Black families nor the coincident use of a new method of care. Rather, this study offers insight into a moment in history when valuations of the "Home" diverged as a solution to White and Black family poverty, setting the stage for racialized ideas about autonomy and responsibility for children's well-being.

Historical Valuations of the "Home"

The structural underpinnings of child welfare have long been shaped by the racial politics of public assistance. In early American history, the main way of protecting and caring for impoverished and neglected children was to separate them from their families and place them in institutions (Hacsi 1997). In 1874, New York City banned direct aid that would assist families within their own home (Kaplan 1978). This forced struggling parents to turn to publicly funded institutions for temporary child care during times of marital breakdown, job loss, or illness (Ramey 2012). A vast network of private religious institutions and foster agencies grew in this context, acting as a coercive arm of the underdeveloped welfare system. But racial politics also greatly informed their growth as various religious denominations competed to lay claim to impoverished and immigrant White-ethnic children as future citizens (Creagh 2012; Gordon 1988).

Yet Black youth were excluded from the perceived benefits of institutional care and largely relegated to a few underfunded colored orphan asylums, as well as extended family and community resources (Billingsley and Giovannoni, 1972; Mabee 1974). Those who fell through these safety nets were instead cared for in almshouses, workhouses, and jails alongside adults (Frey 1981). Racial ideas about children's capacity for rehabilitation and social development greatly informed methods of care (Ward 2012). This was an era defined by a certain relationship to the home—one in which children, particularly those of White-ethnic immigrants, were best cared for in separate settings where they could be socialized according to American norms and behaviors. The value of placing both dependent and delinquent children outside the home has been reserved for White children in various historical moments where rehabilitation is valued (Schlossman 2012).

By the Progressive Era, the politics of public assistance began to shift. Reflecting the rise of psychology, as well as understandings of infant mortality and child development, the value of institutions came under fire (English 1984). Reformers across the country began to fight for public assistance programs that would enable children to be cared for in their own homes (Gordon 1994). In 1915, New York City joined the rest of the country in implementing mothers' pensions, cash benefits originally aimed at 'worthy' widows, but expanded to include all single mothers in 1924. But benefits were set at rates directly proportional to the cost of institutional care, rendering them too meager to provide adequate support (Igra 2006). Furthermore, mothers' pensions were not far reaching; by 1933, the majority (87%) of NYC pensions were granted only to widows (Carstens 1936). Nationwide statistics from 1931 showed that just 3% of mothers' pensions were awarded to

Black families (U.S. Children's Bureau 1933). Black children were less likely to qualify for home-based care supported by mothers' pensions than the children of White mothers (Tanenhaus 2001).

While historical scholarship makes clear that institutions became outmoded as ideas about childhood and family changed, the structural underpinnings of the child welfare system were deeply shaped by the racial politics of public assistance. Mothers' pensions were a vital first step in the establishment of the "Home" as the best place for children, but without an expansive social welfare system, orphanages continued to be a leading form of child-care through the 1930s (Hacsi 1997; Jones 1993). It was not until the New Deal that the social safety net truly cemented the superiority of the biological family. Yet, as quickly as the natal home became the best place for children, with foster home care as a close second, racial placement patterns began to diverge. In order to understand why Black youth were disproportionately incorporated into foster home care, it is critical to examine the politics of race, poverty, and family responsibility within the emerging welfare state.

Theorizing Race and Family Within the Emerging Welfare State

At the heart of the shift from institutions to foster family care was a change in the policy approach to family poverty. The Black family has often been at the center of social policy aimed at eliminating poverty. As early as Reconstruction, programs like the Freedman's Bureau worked to introduce former slaves to the ethos of family responsibility. Motivated foremost by a fear that former slaves, particularly women and children, were at risk of becoming public burdens, agents were authorized to perform marriages, dissolve informal unions, track down spouses, and otherwise police family relationships (Cooper 2017). Nearly a century later, the Moynihan Report set off decades of research centering the Black family as the root of intergenerational poverty (Furstenberg 2007; Gans 2011). This concern with family values informs poverty policy, from fatherhood programs to marriage initiatives to child support legislation (Haney and March, 2003; Haney 2018; Hays 2003; Parolin 2021). But the rise of a racially disproportionate foster care system offers a different perspective of how the Black family has been imagined as a benevolent solution to structural poverty, segregation, and the lasting effects of discrimination.

The emphasis on family as the root of poverty is part of what Melinda Cooper (2017) calls "family responsibility." She argues that in America, there is a deeply rooted idea that the family, rather than the state, should serve as the primary source of economic security. In Poor Law tradition, this has meant that before a dependent person can become eligible for public benefits, it must be proven that no other relatives can shoulder the economic burden. This arrangement helps manage dependency by shifting the burden of risk, responsibility, and care to the family—a space where altruism, as well as natural and legal obligation, are presumed to guarantee self-sufficiency. But the Social Security Act (SSA) of 1935 radically transformed the country's approach to poverty, shifting responsibility from the family to the state. Reformers argued that the SSA could "truthfully be described as a child welfare measure" (Committee on Economic Security 1934; see also Curran 2013). After the SSA Amendment of 1939, responsibility for both White male workers *and* their dependents was transferred to the state as the spouses and minor dependents of covered workers became eligible for insurance benefits (Cooper 2017; see also Brown 1999). The patchwork of "Old-age and survivors' insurance ... [w]orkmen's compensation, railroad retirement benefits, unemployment insurance, and disability insurance [helped] protect all eligible children against economic hazards which families face" (New York 1951, p. 16). Social insurance

signaled a new approach to defining and addressing family poverty—from child separation to family preservation.

But racial inequality was woven into the New Deal welfare state (Brown 1999; Katznelson 2005; Lieberman 1998; Quadagno 1994) and by extension policies of “family security” (Rymph 2017). Because of occupational exclusions and rising unemployment rates (Greene 1993), fewer African Americans in New York qualified for social insurance provisions (Trafton and Feinroth, 1944; see also Fox 2012 for national figures). Instead, Black families were increasingly channeled into public assistance programs, particularly Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), which offered cash benefits to impoverished single mothers. By 1938, Black children were nearly one-quarter of those assisted by ADC in New York (Sterner et al., 1943). On its face, the direct cash benefits of ADC offered Black families in the urban north a stake in family security. Not only were ADC payments comparable between White and Black families in New York (Sterner et al., 1943), ADC recipients could expect to earn slightly more than the predominantly White female recipients of survivor’s benefits (\$46.52 and \$43.87 respectively) (Marquard 1943). Despite this parity, the channeling of Black families away from social insurance and into public assistance left an indelible mark on family security.

Social insurance benefits, by themselves, were not a solution to poverty, but they signaled a new relationship to the state—they offered predominantly White families a greater degree of economic security and freedom from family regulation. Because social insurance was not means-tested, the vast majority of beneficiaries relied on other forms of income, including employment, public assistance, earnings from federal work programs, and assistance from private agencies. For White families on the verge of economic or personal crisis, social insurance not only enabled them to avoid destitution but offered possibilities for economic mobility. In contrast, recipients of assistance tended to rely exclusively on benefits due to eligibility requirements resulting in lower overall incomes (Fisher 1944). Relegated to ADC, Black women in particular “came to be treated as dependent persons who required supervision and protection rather than as bearers of rights” (Mettler 2018, p. 24). Compared to White family security, families of color continued to be subject to a distinct form of governance surrounding issues of family responsibility, including being expected to track down absent husbands for assistance, establishing paternity, proving home suitability, and otherwise opening up their lives to state investigation (Igra 2006; Lawrence-Webb 1997; Mink 1996).

This article makes the case that the rise of foster care was rooted in the diverging nature of state support for the family. The shift from institutions to foster home care reflected a change in ideas about where children from impoverished families were best reared and what role government responsibility played in supporting the family. The following case captures how local officials crafted solutions to the social problem of Black child dependency in the absence of state support. At a time when the dependents of White men enjoyed the benefits of federal initiatives of family integrity, Black families faced unyielding insecurity and an escalation of government intrusion into their private lives. To stem the tide of rising Black family insecurity, child protection turned away from the biological home and instead toward the *substitute* home. The foster family was an alternative method of care that called for the retraction of public responsibility during a moment of expansive state support for family security. This case offers insight into how New York City actors, both conservative and liberal, mobilized the Black family to resolve the many consequences of state abandonment—segregation, poverty, and discrimination—with lasting implications for the development of child protection.

Methodology

By the 1930s, a multidimensional set of changes regarding how to best care for children occurred, including the declining willingness of the state to finance children's institutions, the developing significance of the natal home, and a growing economic contract securing White families. This article traces what this meant on the ground for minority children in New York City. New York is an important case because it was, and continues to be, incredibly influential in the child welfare sphere. In 1933, it had the largest substitute care population (50,921), comprising 17% of the national population (United States 1935). Statistics also show that the post-war decades were marked by a "trend toward increasing proportions of nonwhite children in the public child welfare caseload" (Jeter 1963, p. 132). New York City offers insight into the impact national-level policies had on the ground and, importantly, illuminates how social workers crafted solutions to child dependency in the wake of mass transformations in American social policy after the depression.

To explore these issues, this article relies on records from prominent child welfare reformers and agencies in New York City, as well as state- and national-level rhetoric in official government reports, conferences, and news outlets. For local materials, I examined the archival collection of a prominent judge in the Domestic Relations Court named Justine Wise Polier. Appointed in 1935, Polier was inspired by "an activist judicial philosophy," and she, alongside other progressive judges, worked to reform child welfare (JWP Finding Aid). Her archival collection (JWP) intimately preserves the work of the court during these years, capturing the opinions and decisions of numerous judges, as well as others in the child welfare network, including agency directors, social workers, probation officers, and psychiatrists. The documented actions of front-line workers in this era help illuminate the way in which one of the largest child protection systems in America crafted solutions to the emerging Black child welfare crisis.

This article also relies on archival materials from the Citizens' Committee for Children, which were part of the Gerald E. Markowitz and David Rosner Papers (GMRP) held at the Columbia University Library. Established as a non-profit organization in 1945, participants saw themselves as regulators of New York City government initiatives. They worked to produce research, publish reports, and make policy and program recommendations, particularly around issues of substitute care. Additional support was provided by records from three long standing New York City substitute care agencies, including the Riverdale Children's Association (RCA), an institutional and foster care agency for Black youth whose records are held among the Rockefeller Family Archives, the Negro Service Bureau which was a foster care agency housed within the Children's Aid Society (CAS), and the Sheltering Arms Children's Service (SACS), an integrated foster care agency. These agencies were part of a decentralized network of non-profit child caring organizations that received city funding for the care of children (Child Welfare League of America 1945).

Though New York City local politics likely shaped the reception of Black youth in substitute care, the city's approach also reflected broader state- and nation-wide trends in best methods of care. In order to understand these forces, I also examined Annual Reports from the Domestic Relations Court, the Board of Social Welfare, and the National Social Welfare Conference (NCSW) papers, as well as news articles from *The New York Times*, *New York Amsterdam News*, and the *Afro-American*. These documents lend insight into the aims, responsibilities, and concerns of the Children's Court and Social Welfare Department, as well as public and social welfare opinion about the best practices for children's care. By combining the local, state, and national records, this article captures both the color-blind logics of official child welfare rhetoric around family, poverty, and responsibility, as well as their implementation on the ground in a city well-defined by the color-line.

The Black Child Welfare Crisis, 1910s–1930s

The Black child welfare crisis emerged as New York City made progress in broadly realigning child care methods to support the “Home.” At the turn of the century, most children were cared for in large-scale institutions, but by the 1930s, the city succeeded in shifting to family-based care. But as methods changed, so too did the racial nature of substitute care.

By 1917, almost 40% of children in out-of-home care were housed in institutions with populations that ranged from 101–400 and another third were in settings with 401–1000 (New York 1918). To manage such large populations, institutions routinized daily life and required conformity in clothing, haircuts, and speech (Bonapart 1934). A 1916 New York state investigation found these institutions to be unfit for child development; sleeping areas were overrun with vermin, methods of punishment were antiquated, and children were given little education outside of religious instruction (New York 1916). As a result, the Children’s Home Bureau was established in 1917 to select children out of institutions and place them in foster homes of matching religion. But these initiatives were quickly reversed under the subsequent administration, and in 1918 the Bureau was discontinued.³ Reformist efforts were thwarted by religious factions in both the political and child welfare sphere.

It was not until the 1930s that New York showed significant gains in the shift to home-based care, reflecting nation-wide initiatives to support the family. Child welfare advocates agreed that “the first line of defense for children [was] in their own homes” (Murphy 1934, p. 123). But for those who still required out-of-home care, foster homes were a best approximation. By the mid-1930s, the Division of Child Welfare reported that the state had made a drastic shift away from institutional care. Between 1911 and 1935, the number of children in institutional settings decreased by 27%, from 32,475 to 23,667. Meanwhile, remunerated foster home care increased by nearly 436%, from a population of 3783 in 1911 to 20,286 in 1935 (New York 1937). The dramatic increase in foster family care was not caused by the development of competing foster agencies; in fact, by the late 1930s, only a handful had been established in New York.⁴ Rather, a single foster care agency was able to handle thousands of cases—more than any one institution every could or should. But as reformers celebrated the successful return to home-based care, Black child welfare was quickly becoming a crisis.

The problem was rooted in the widespread unwillingness of long-standing child-caring institutions to accept Black children. Children were legally required to be placed in agencies that aligned with their family’s religious faith; because most African Americans were Protestant, the responsibility fell mainly to Protestant institutions. There was a deeply embedded sense that each religious group should take care of their own. In an environment where meals, classrooms, and even beds were shared, racial and religious cohesion appeared justified. Many agencies felt that “the Negro group itself [should] assume some responsibility for handling” Black children’s care.⁵ However, migration meant that Black churches were not as well-developed in the North, and services developed by the African American community often lacked funding. Meanwhile, philanthropists were wary of investing in institutions for Black children, even those run by White professionals, as one representative of a major fund warned: “the whole situation in Harlem is a very black one. It seems the Catholics and Hebrews take very good care of their colored youth but the Protestants have been very lax.” The representative was disinclined to recommend a donation because of the “hopelessness of the situation.”⁶

Since few institutions had been developed for them since the start of the Great Migration, officials found it hard to place the children referred by struggling parents. When placement was deemed necessary, social workers and probation officers “shopped around” for vacancies at private sectarian agencies while the child waited in a temporary

shelter. Case workers did not purposefully channel dependent and neglected Black children into foster agencies. In fact, the placement process was a negotiation between social workers and agencies. Institutions were quite autonomous and could reject children who did not “fit” their program because of their religion, age, gender, or race. If a child’s case was not accepted by any agency, they continued to wait in shelter care. Black youth were reported to wait 40% longer in temporary shelters than White youth, and because few institutions accepted them, judges were known to dismiss cases in which it was assumed no agency would accept them (New York 1933).

By the 1920s, the Children’s Court reported that there was a “tremendous rise” in the number of neglected Black children, “but not in the facilities made available for their care.”⁷ This was a moment in history when Black youth faced an “unyielding bloc of public disinterest and opposition” to social service programs (Jones 1921, p. 147). But it was also a historical moment defined by a new relationship to the family. As the city advocated for the preservation of family life, the significance of “Home” began to diverge along racial lines.

The Quiet Accommodation of Racial Diversity in Foster Care, 1930s

By the mid-1930s, racial tension boiled over in the city with the Harlem Riot of 1935, which began as a case of “juvenile pilfering” and ended with the killing of an innocent Black boy by police officers. The unrest this event unleashed reflected growing resentment over the conditions of discrimination and poverty faced by Black Harlemites (New York 1969). As advocacy groups called for a better approach to the Black child welfare and delinquency crisis, a different solution to Black children’s needs quietly came to the fore—foster home care. In this section, I show that in many ways, race-matched foster family care was progressive—offering a service to a previously excluded racial group, prioritizing the home and modern methods of care, and upholding the Black family as important to the cultural and social development of children. Yet during this moment of expansive state support for the family, the reliance on foster family care represented an alternative vision of responsibility for child dependency and neglect.

Practices of kinship care were long-standing in the African American community, and though social workers claimed to have “not expected third cousins and aunts-in-law to have any feeling of responsibility toward children in their families needing care,” they worked to formalize these “homespun” arrangements (Stevens 1945, p. 178). While staff at institutions frequently complained about “race riots” and the threats integration caused to their way of life,⁸ race-matched foster care proved less disruptive to racial boundaries. Compared to institutions, foster care agencies usually had much more flexible intake policies since children could be matched with a race appropriate family, rather than requiring a child to fit the program. As Edith Baylor of the Children’s Aid Association wrote, “Homes are available in infinite variety, supplying families differing in personnel, temperament, relationships, and opportunities. In other words, there is possible great flexibility and plasticity” (Baylor 1928, p. 378). And importantly, foster agencies could supervise a considerable number of cases. As long as families could be found, foster care could expand or contract as necessary.

While private child caring institutions flagrantly discriminated against Black youth, reformers quietly, and without much resistance, organized race-matched foster home care as an “experimental” solution to Black exclusion. A racial breakdown of the shift reveals a paradox: despite official child welfare preference for foster home care, White children were more likely to be cared for in institutions, while Black youth were most likely to be cared for in foster homes. By 1936, only 32% of African American children in out-of-home care in New York City were cared for in institutions, while 68% were cared for in remunerated foster homes. Inversely, more White children were cared for in institutions (60%)

compared to foster homes (40%). The disparity was greatest in Protestant agencies where Black youth made up roughly a quarter of children in care. Of all Black Protestant youth in substitute care, roughly 30% were cared for in institutions, while 68% were cared for in foster homes. By contrast, 78% of White Protestant youth were cared for in institutions, while only 15% were in foster homes.⁹

By the mid-1930s, institutions remained segregated while many foster care agencies quietly and willingly integrated their programs. The Negro Service Bureau epitomized an interracial approach to the “Negro problem.” Developed in 1936 by White welfare officials to address Black delinquency, the Bureau was staffed by Black social welfare professionals who worked to raise their own funds, used their connections to find foster families, and worked to prove that they were “competent.”¹⁰ Meanwhile, other foster agencies integrated Black youth into their predominantly White programs without much fanfare, hiring Black social workers to build networks of foster families. Only a handful of Black children were in “integrated institutions;” by contrast, almost half (48%) of Black children in substitute care were placed in foster homes by “mixed-race agencies.”¹¹ One such agency, the New York City Foster Home Service (NYCFHS) maintained a 50/50 ratio of Black and White infants throughout the late 1930s, years before integration was legally required.¹² The Court was cognizant of the accessibility foster families provided Black youth. In 1940, the Children’s Court evaluated a sample of Black and White neglect cases. In almost one-quarter of White cases, the Clinic recommended institutional care, compared to only 12% of Black cases. By contrast, they recommended foster care in 21% of White cases and 43% of Black cases (New York 1940). In many ways, the rise of race-matched foster family care represented a push toward equal access in a climate of segregation, especially at a time when judges often felt their only recourse was to return a child home or send them to a State Training School (Simmons 2020).

Nor was this racial disparity unique to New York—this pattern paralleled national trends. Census data from 1933 revealed that the “most significant difference in the type of care provided for children of different races was the predominant use of boarding homes for Negro children and of institutions for children of other races” (Hanna 1936, p. 249). At a moment in history when Black youth faced open discrimination in child welfare, they were disproportionately incorporated into the most advanced child care setting. While it stands to reason that foster care agencies could manage the care of thousands of children, which helps explain their ability to absorb the growing dependent Black child population at this time, they also managed to care for both Black and White children without crossing racial boundaries.

Importantly, race-matched foster family care enabled a semblance of community control ensuring that Black adults had key roles as providers in child welfare, even if agencies were often run by White officials. Social welfare professionals praised race-matching practices because they felt it reduced prejudice. It was “gratifying,” one African American social worker wrote, to “be able to provide for the colored children . . . the same opportunity for development that the white worker can” (Palmer 1932, p. 317). Black social workers emphasized physical features, religion, and culture in their home finding practices. As Edward Dalton wrote, “cultural and racial characteristics” were important as families desired “a child who [would] fit into their family group . . . In Negro families color is an important factor, and has greater psychological importance than is usually reputed to it” (Dalton 1942, p. 270). While segregated case-load policies were considered “demoralizing” and “undemocratic” in other institutional realms, like the court and probation, race-matching in foster care was largely unquestioned (Kaye 1946; *New York Amsterdam News* 1946).

But race implicitly played a role in sorting the resources offered by substitute care. Take the case of Ronald,¹³ a foundling who was deemed “[in]eligible for adoption” because his

race was unknown. At two years old, he was sent to the New York Foster Home Care program, and a “later examination by the City hospital failed to discover any traces of colored blood.” He was placed with a White foster family, but when the foster mother “suspected [the] child to be colored,” she surrendered him at the age of five. The agency then decided to try him out in “an unusually fine colored home, where the whole family [was] so light that they refuse[d] to board even a medium dark child.” The foster mother, however, felt the “child [was] not colored... as his features ha[d] more or less the Italian caste.” The case worker noted that “careful watch” was needed, and that Ronald should be “transferred at once [if] any proof of his being white [was] obtained.” As such, he was subjected to many clinical visits, and after a year, the foster mother decided to give Ronald up citing that he was “too much trouble.” New ‘evidence’ revealed there was “no negro parentage,” but a re-examination at Bellevue Mental Clinic “unhesitatingly” reported that Ronald was “colored” but could pass for White, and so it was recommended that he be placed “in a white home because of the possible advantage of more intelligent training.” Yet, a year later, at the age of six, Ronald was discharged to Five Points House of Industry, an institution for dependent and neglected White children. While his chances of adoption were thwarted by questions of racial heritage, he was eventually determined to be “passing,” enabling admission to an institution rather than foster care.¹⁴

Ronald’s case reveals much about how racial inclusion was imagined in the developing child protection system. In many ways, foster family care represented a progressive solution of racial access to substitute care. But while race-matched foster families enabled more direct involvement of the Black community, they also signaled an emphasis in child protection that put the work of solving Black poverty onto the private family. This raised conflict over the advantages afforded by Whiteness, as stated overtly in Ronald’s case, from the perceived higher “intellectual training,” to ‘better’ moral standards, to the material benefits of living in neighborhoods with playgrounds and low crime rates. The role of color was couched in arguments about the good of the child, but as Linda Gordon (1999) notes in *The Great Orphan Abduction*, child saving efforts defend racial boundaries in ways that exclude or afford children and caretakers with “the privileges of whiteness” (p. 311). Foster home care was a strategy of addressing Black child dependency that called upon the disenfranchised African American community to “take care of their own” without ensuring access to the economic and social resources necessary to do so, as I will show in the next section.

Privatized Care in a Blighted Community, 1930s

In an atmosphere of racial responsibility, many agencies questioned whether Black foster families could be found. For years, agencies used this as an excuse to not provide services to Black children. In this section, I show that after the Depression, the state of Black family stability ran counter to the emphasis on foster family care. As segregated areas of the city became more associated with blight and deprivation, reformers sought to place Black youth in the suburbs. The racialized use of foster family care illuminates an assumption in child welfare that configurations of foster placement can be used to lessen segregation and its consequences.

Boarding homes were licensed by the State Department of Social Welfare, but in most cases, local child placing agencies assumed responsibility for setting standards (Breese 1936). Home-finders looked for families with stay-at-home mothers and working fathers, who lived in bright, spacious, clean homes in neighborhoods with low transiency and crime rates. Ideal parents were “unselfish and disinterested,” because “the foster parents in the boarding home [were] really agency workers.” This perspective helped rationalize the use of board payments, which were “no more mercenary in nature than [...] that of the salaried

social worker” (Baylor 1928, pp. 377-378). While foster care rates covered the cost of children’s clothing, room and board, and medical care, foster parents were often expected to have the resources to invest more in the child beyond the bare minimum. As Edith Baylor wrote, the “sum received for board barely covers the actual expense involved” (1928, p. 378). Guidelines for home finding focused primarily on economic self-sufficiency; specifically, New York law prohibited the placement of foster children in families receiving public relief (Breese 1936).

But the Depression had decimated Black families, particularly the middle class. In Harlem, where African Americans represented over 90% of the population, roughly 43% of families were on relief by 1933 (Greene 1993). Black activists urged recognition of the socioeconomic barriers to fostering. The NAACP highlighted the “economic disabilities of the Negro which require[d] both parents to be away from home and thus unable to give proper supervision and training of their children.”¹⁵ Black women already worked at greater rates than White women, but the depression had forced over three-quarters into the workforce (77.6%), especially domestic labor which required them to work outside the home (Greene 1993). Scholars have found that African American foster care agencies were more accepting of a variety of family forms when choosing foster families (Curran 2006). But while women’s employment and marital history was flexible, the structural conditions of Black family life during the Depression still generated a crisis of care.

Perhaps the most persistent social condition cited by child welfare reformers was housing. The absence of fair housing laws enabled landlords to take advantage of the artificially restricted housing market, charging higher rental rates in segregated areas. Many families paid over 50% of their income for rentals or began sharing their home with boarders or extended family members in houses that were considered “unsanitary and dilapidated, and some[times] totally unfit for human habitation” (New York 1969, p. 70). In addition, the NAACP argued that segregated areas lacked basic resources for children: there was a “lack of recreational and play spaces in Harlem, the Bedford-Stuyvesant area in Brooklyn and other congested areas in which Negroes [were] forced to live.” They requested that “funds” be directed toward the development of “more play grounds and recreational centers” for healthy child development.¹⁶

As quickly and quietly as foster family care became a pathway of racial inclusion, the system crumbled under increasing demand and the limited resources of African Americans. The Court reported that there was “literally no places to... send Negro children.”¹⁷ With agencies closing intake, reformers argued that it was “imperative that adequate foster homes ... be found for these children so that they may grow up in the community, rather than be institutionalized.”¹⁸ Yet, many integrated foster agencies, like the NYCFHS, reported closing intake because of insufficient funds and the inability “to find colored foster homes in excess of [their] needs.”¹⁹ A 1937 memorandum requesting funding for a placement bureau for Black children argued that statistics on the labor and wages of African Americans “brings out all too clearly the impossibility of any financial reserves within the Negro group itself on which to call for the provision of privately financed social services.”²⁰

Given the blighted conditions of Black communities in the city, some agencies saw foster placement as an opportunity to de-concentrate segregation and distribute children to areas with more resources. Reformers reasoned that there needed to be “fuller exploitation of the boarding out field.” The Children’s Aid Society argued that the smaller communities in metropolitan New York offer[ed] possibilities along this line. Practically every one of them [had] some Negro families. They [were] likely to be more self-sustaining than the families concentrated in Harlem, Jamaica, Long Island.” They reasoned that “[b]y scattering these children in small communities over a wider territory the resistance on the part of the public schools, etc., etc., [would be] lessened” and a greater sense of integration would be

accomplished.²¹ While most Black families could not choose where to live, agencies had the power to move Black children to other areas of the city—to socially engineer access to resources and safer communities.

However, suburban communities resisted these plans and actively worked to conserve essential resources for White children. By the late 1930s, a number of agencies in the city placed youth in Black foster homes in New Rochelle. But White residents had become concerned by the rapid growth of the African American population there. The placement of Black foster children in New Rochelle disrupted school segregation patterns and, as a result, the Board of Education erected a “sweeping ban” that ruled that all non-resident children were barred from free education in the elementary and secondary schools. A newspaper reported that the “ruling was directed at all neglected children brought here from New York City, but the blow fell hardest on the destitute Negro youngsters,” particularly the “score of destitute and neglected Harlem children.” Black children were removed from the school, “along with a negligible number of Jewish and white children,” and could not be re-admitted until tuition was paid. The deputy welfare commissioner declared that if the ruling stood, the state would remove the children and “place them in institutions,” and the “destitute and neglected Harlem children [would] be returned to the slums instead of receiving home care and education in suburban communities” (Poston 1940).

While strategies of integration were thwarted by the intransigence of White suburban residents, the majority of Black children were placed in homes in socially and economically disenfranchised areas of New York City rather than the suburbs. In a draft report on racial discrimination, Judge Polier of the Domestic Relations Court noted that there was limited use of the “residential Negro districts.” Instead, over 400 Black youth had been placed in a “small area near Jamaica.”²² This area was “one of the poorer sections of New York City” and was approximately 75% African American. “Most of the homes [were] small, poor, two-family houses,” crime was high, and “there [were] no parks, and ... no appropriate play space[s] for the children” (Levenson 1936, p. 360). As Polier’s report noted, the placement of so many children in one small district “cast grave doubt as to the earnestness or good judgement used in seeking such homes.”²³ Black children were fostered into a few segregated neighborhoods with little resources—indeed lacking the same resources that child welfare officials claimed caused neglect and dependency in the first place.

Avoiding Institutional Integration Through Foster Care, 1940s

By the late 1930s, Welfare Commissioner William Hodson described the shortage of foster homes and institutional facilities for Black children as “the No. 1 child welfare problem of the city” (*New York Amsterdam News* 1939). While many foster care agencies willingly practiced integration in the 1930s, interracial activists recognized that Black foster families alone could not solve the crisis, and so they fought for city-wide integration of child-care facilities. But as racial integration became legally required in the early 1940s, institutions began to exclude Black youth on new terms other than race. In this section, I show how institutions resisted integration, and how the network of child welfare agencies mobilized the Black foster family as a means for racial accommodation in the absence of a broader commitment to Black community needs.

The City-Wide Citizens’ Committee was critical to the integration of child welfare in New York City. Developed in 1941 as a response to the lack of momentum after the Harlem Riot of 1935, they were an interracial organization of activists that sought to develop solutions to the crumbling social and economic conditions of Harlem. In 1942, they helped pass the Race Discrimination Amendment, the first integration legislation in New York City child welfare. The act decreed that only agencies that accepted a

“reasonable proportion” of children from all races could receive public funds. Institutions protested the amendment, claiming that “boarding-home agencies were practicing discrimination if Negro children were placed only in Negro boarding (foster) homes.”²⁴ But the Department of Child Welfare lauded the “valuable service performed” by foster agencies, even if such services practiced race-matching.²⁵ Because of the strong opposition to the care of Black and White children under the same roof, five institutions refused to comply. A newspaper reported that “[s]pokesmen from the five institutions involved asserted it was not practical nor a wise policy to have Negro and white children in the same home and that it was “too difficult” to try and solve the problem” (*New Amsterdam Star-News* 1942).

Other institutions yielded to the legal mandate in exchange for continued access to public funds, but increasingly distinguished between “normal” children and “emotionally disturbed” city children. Agencies like the Jennie Clarkson Home opened their doors to “city children” after the 1942 Race Discrimination Amendment, “offer[ing] its services to Negro and white children.” The “city children” brought with them “problems of emotional disturbances” compared to the children “from average normal homes” (Vakharia 1948, p. 42). This distinction mirrored national social welfare rhetoric. Child welfare reformers at the national level advocated for a dual system of care, one that “offer[ed] both institutional and foster home care for children” (Tyson 1940, p. 176). Foster homes would be used for the “normal child” and young children, while institutions would be used as temporary facilities for therapeutic rehabilitation. Already by the mid-1930s, child welfare organizations reported that many institutions had “develop[ed] foster home service as an adjunct to their care or as a substitute for it” (Breese 1936, p. 3). But in an inverse of this logic, institutions claimed “city children,” primarily Black youth, possessed emotional and behavioral problems which made them unsuitable for institutions.

Such was the case for the Five Points House in New York, a private “dual care” program. A 1953 investigation into the “ethnic ratios” of their agency raised the question of whether recent admissions “represented a real change in attitude on the[ir] part.” The agency denied accusations of racial discrimination, claiming that the problem was a lack of facilities for the care of the “emotionally disturbed child.” Case supervisors felt “court children presented too many problems,” and that “the City...often...failed to recognize the adverse effect of such children being placed with other children who do not fall into that category.”²⁶ At the time of the report, it was revealed that of the recent admissions, social workers placed nine White children in the institution and only one White child in a foster home. By contrast, no Black children were placed in the institution, while eight were placed in foster homes. This disparity suggests that the agency utilized parts of its program—foster family care—in order to circumvent institutional integration. Despite the framing of institutions as therapeutic adjuncts to foster care, in practice, institutions were more often utilized for “normal” White children.²⁷

Though the Race Discrimination Amendment legalized racial access to institutional settings, Black Protestant children’s presence in institutions dropped by 43% between 1936 and 1946.²⁸ The Department of Welfare reported that by 1946 there was “a striking difference in the percentage of white children compared to the Negro children in institutions,” particularly among the Protestant faith.²⁹ The Citizens’ Committee for Children (CCC), an interracial children’s advocacy organization, argued that the racial disparity in placement patterns made “apparent that some institutions continue[d] to give only token compliance with the Anti-Discrimination Amendment.”³⁰

By the mid-1940s, foster family care became the de facto system of care for Black youth. A little more than half (53%) of the 1617 White Protestant youth received care in foster homes, while 47% received care in institutions. By contrast, 85% of the 1548 Black Protestant children received care in foster homes, while only 15% were in institutions.³¹

These patterns continued into the mid-1950s, when nearly three-quarters of Black Protestant youth remained in foster care, while “approximately half of the white children [were still] in institutional placement.”³² A report by the Department of Welfare asked whether this meant that “[the] Negro children [were] receiving more adequate care than [the] white children,” given the ideological favoritism of foster home care, but they concluded: “No, not entirely. It means, rather, that many Negro children who need group care are not receiving it.”³³ But an unaccounted group of Black youth *were* receiving group care, just not in traditional, long-term institutions.

The Racial Myth of Institutional Decline, 1940s–1950s

In the 1940s and 1950s, White youth quietly disappeared from the substitute care system and as they did, institutions declined in importance. Meanwhile, child welfare leaders continued to emphasize foster family care as a solution to the Black child welfare crisis, even as it became clear that without vast structural investment, there would not be enough foster families. By now, foster home care had become a solution to Black children’s needs that appealed to both interracial liberal reformers, who had long been fighting for expanded racial access to child protection, and racist conservatives who fought to keep substitute care segregated. In this section, I show that the dearth of Black and Puerto Rican foster homes was met with a renewed interest in congregate care for minority children—the temporary institutional shelter.

After the depression and the development of the welfare state, the White substitute care population declined dramatically. Though White youth made up 87.8% (20,203) of children in substitute care in 1937, their proportion declined in subsequent decades.³⁴ By 1957, White youth were only 54.9% (9414) of the substitute care population of New York City.³⁵ Declines occurred among all religious faiths, including Jewish and Catholic agencies, but the racial transformation was most prominent among the Protestant agencies which declined by 26% between 1940 and 1950 (New York 1951). Throughout these decades, White youth were increasingly cared for in their own homes, a trend child welfare workers attributed to state policies that preserved the family home.

As the White substitute care population decreased, many institutions closed resulting in a “marked loss of facilities,” according to the Department of Welfare.³⁶ Between 1940 and 1949, 18% fewer children lived in institutions in New York (New York 1951). Much of this decline was among White children. City data revealed that while White foster care rates remained relatively stable between 1936 and 1946, the number of White children in Protestant institutions declined from 3261 to only 760.³⁷ Institutions reduced the population served in order to create “individualized program[s] in small group living settings.”³⁸ Capacity in some institutions was “cut in half in order to provide better care for the children served.”³⁹ The shift to therapeutic services helped distinguish them from the increasingly racialized nature of foster family care. In the 1950s, the Welfare and Health Council reported that the clientele of institutions had changed markedly. Once “composed exclusively of the indigent,” many institutions began charging for services such that over the years more middle- and upper-income families began “placing children in some of the specialized children’s institutions, such as residential treatment centers” (Welfare and Health Council 1957, p. i).

While predominantly White institutions closed in favor of smaller therapeutic programs, the few remaining institutions for Black children were seen as costly and mismanaged. One such agency, Riverdale, a long-time Black institution, was closed after an investigation in 1945 by the State Board of Social Welfare which concluded that the institution “ought to revamp their whole set-up and conduct a foster home care program.” As the primary institution for Black children in New York City, Riverdale was simply too

“difficult to operate and expensive to administer.”⁴⁰ The institution was “just hopeless to continue the present job.”⁴¹ The closure was seen as positive given the “bleak” provisions of the institution. Administrators reasoned that foster home care would provide “community contact for older children,” which they considered “almost as vital to life development as the mother-person relationship for younger children, i.e., a location near schools, museums, playgrounds, etc., permitting participation in activities merging into the life fabric outside the agency.”⁴² However, such integration into the social fabric first required recruitment of Black foster families, and second, required communities with access to resources.

As institutions declined overall, and especially for Black youth, child welfare reformers continued to uphold foster home care as a promising method of desegregation. Recommendations for foster care placement continued to center around “consideration ... [of] community integration in non-segregated areas in the City.”⁴³ Yet boarding agencies struggled to find Black foster families. After WWII, “boarding homes [were] lost faster than they could be found.”⁴⁴ By the late 1940s, the Assistant Chief Probation Officer sent a letter to all Case Supervisors in the Children’s Court saying that “[t]here [was] a dearth of negro homes ... [so] it [would] be futile to refer negro children to the Foster Home Program.”⁴⁵ Even in the suburbs, social welfare agencies reported difficulty finding families: the Department of Welfare in Westchester reported that “For every one white child placed ... for adoption or foster care... there [were] 10 white families ready to take the child. But for every Negro family willing and able to adopt, there [were] 10 Negro children” (Tynes 1962). The county’s Home Finding Unit cited low earning power and inadequate housing among Black families as a primary reason for this disparity.

A report by the Citizens Committee for Children (CCC) suggested that the Black foster care crisis could indicate “that the foster care program ha[d] reached the saturation point.”⁴⁶ The CCC argued that “the inadequate housing provided for minority groups” was the biggest problem in securing foster homes.⁴⁷ “At every point in attempting to solve the foster care problem, we find discrimination against the Negro and Puerto Rican groups central... Until discrimination—particularly in the housing field—is ended, it is very questionable how far child welfare can go in meeting the very critical situation we are in today.”⁴⁸ In response, the city developed the Home Finding Campaign for Black and Puerto Rican children in the late 1950s which narrowed home-finding to New York City’s housing projects. But of the 259 homes interested in fostering, only 8.5% were selected for the intake process. The problem was that the majority (67.7%) did not meet the “basic requirements” of the agencies, mainly because of “inadequate sleeping space, unfavorable family situations, and families receiving public assistance.”⁴⁹ With little access to institutions or foster family care, more and more Black and Puerto Rican youth made their way into other forms of congregate care—temporary shelters.

Early in this crisis, Mayor O’Dwyer announced the formation of a Committee on Child Care to plan for the care of “hard-to-place”—primarily Black and Puerto Rican—youth. Representatives of the three faiths—Jewish, Catholic, Protestant—were asked to weigh in on the best solution, and they proposed “foster homes for temporary care” despite recognition of the dearth of available homes. Unsurprisingly, “after several months only few such homes had been found.” Though the city and private interests had long been aware of the lack of available foster homes in minority communities, reformers’ obstinacy on this issue belied concerns over race-mixing in institutions and resistance to economic investment in Black community resources. Without an increase in foster homes, the religious federations were instead asked to “provide additional temporary shelter space.”⁵⁰ In contrast to long-term institutions, temporary shelter institutions were meant to house children only for a few weeks or months, and as such, they

lacked important resources for child development, including education, recreation, and even adequate supervision.⁵¹ Media sources described temporary institutions as “jails [that were] miscalled shelters.”⁵²

The city increasingly turned to temporary institutional shelters for the care of “hard-to-place” children, resurrecting archaic forms of institutional care. In the 1940s, well-baby wards in hospitals were eliminated at the behest of the child welfare and medical community because of the high mortality risk associated with congregate care. In fact, the City’s Division of Foster Home Care was established in 1949 for precisely that purpose: to “provide homes for the large number of babies awaiting placement... on hospital well-baby wards.” But by the 1950s, the city planned to re-open them because of the difficulty of finding foster homes. In 1956, 333 babies awaited foster home placement, 58% were Black, 27% White, and 15% Puerto Rican.⁵³ The CCC argued that “segregated patterns in housing made available to Negroes in this city have added to the difficulties in finding a sufficient number of foster homes for this group.”⁵⁴ But the Department of Welfare argued that “since all possible ways [had] already been tried and failed, that as an interim solution well-baby wards for 100 babies should be opened.” The CCC expressed horror at the expansion of congregate care, especially after their hard work to eliminate it a decade earlier.⁵⁵ Eventually, they were able to convince the mayor of the need to increase foster care rates by sixty cents a day for the care of infants.

As foster home care became prioritized for younger children, older children faced long waits in temporary shelter institutions. The number of “unallocated” youth with no place to go increased from 560 in 1945 to 1172 in 1956. The “problem [was] most crucial for minority children, who [were] always the ones who wait the longest.”⁵⁶ In the 1950s, the city expanded their development of temporary shelters for the many older minority youth who had little chance of being fostered. But these shelters quickly became overcrowded. When capacity became untenable, annexes were constructed as adjuncts to the shelters, and according to the CCC, these too would be “overflowing within a year.” In 1955, the Department of Welfare was authorized to establish Hillcrest, a congregate institution for the care of 200 school-age children, because of the critical overcrowding at Children’s Center, another temporary institution. But within a couple of years, the overcrowding was so great that the establishment of another temporary shelter was suggested. The director of the CCC wrote of her “heavy-heart[ed]” support for the purchase of a new building to be used for more temporary shelter care: “The house—with its complete lack of play space both inside and out—has always been unsatisfactory as a home for children. It and the neighborhood in which it is situated [is] unsuitable ... These emergency measures are always unsatisfactory and, moreover, vastly expensive...”⁵⁷ Indeed, the Welfare and Health Council reported in a 1956 survey that temporary shelters were the most expensive form of care besides residential treatment facilities (Welfare and Health Council 1957).

As foster homes failed to materialize, the method of caring for Black and Puerto Rican youth grew further from the ideals of family-based solutions, and shifted, instead, closer to the antiquated and overcrowded institutions of prior eras. Though foster home care opened the door to substitute care for minority children, city officials recognized that housing segregation and low wages created substantial racial barriers to both family security and access to foster family care. But they were equally unwilling to help Black, and later Puerto Rican, families achieve a level of stability that would accommodate family-centered care. Ultimately, the city invested in expensive, temporary public shelters for the care of unallocated children, thus ensuring a lack of stable, long-term care, and most importantly, family-based care for the increasingly racialized substitute care population.

Conclusion

In the early twentieth century, American child welfare underwent an important and enduring transformation—the shift from institutions to foster family care. But the racial nature of this shift has largely been overlooked. Though the African American community has a long history of care for dependent children through extended family and community resources, the disproportionate use of race-matched foster families for Black children did not come from an impetus to continue this tradition. Rather, the shift to foster family care—whether driven by changing ideas about child development, benevolence, or economic incentives—was part of a broad realignment in state support of the family home. Race-matched foster care was not only an attempt to socially engineer access to resources and safer communities, but a means by which to resolve tension over institutional integration. But this method of care did little to change the structural conditions which caused many children to need placement away from the home. As more Black and Puerto Rican youth entered the system, foster care failed to attend to the disparate resources of families in segregated areas of the city, leading to a lack of available homes and a return to temporary congregate care.

This study showed that the disproportionate use of foster home care for Black youth was not a progressive moment of racial access, but rather a compromise made by front-line child welfare reformers in the context of changing state support for the family. Proposals to “deinstitutionalize children” were linked to efforts to “create a child-friendly society” based on safe housing, recreation, and importantly, economic support for parents (See Crenson 1998; Zelizer 1985). But racial inequality was woven into the emerging welfare state and by extension projects of family security. Compared to state-sponsored White family protection, Black families were instead channeled into welfare; this not only deepened economic insecurity but facilitated intense government scrutiny of family life. Local child welfare workers could not be expected to remedy racial exclusion from projects of family security. Instead, they prioritized the licensed Black foster family as the site of social responsibility. If Black foster families lived in areas without playgrounds, safe housing, or well-resourced schools, then their foster children could not access them. At a time when White children enjoyed the benefits of federal initiatives of family stability and a shift toward therapeutic institutions, the rise of race-matched foster family care called for a retraction of public responsibility.

Though the color-line stifled the potential for radical solutions to the child welfare crisis, strategies need not have relied on the private family. Public funds could have been channeled to promote the child welfare work of Black women’s groups and churches, which included the development of day nurseries, homes for working girls, and orphanages. Their work emphasized the enhancement of “mothers’ skills, families’ material circumstances, and children’s opportunities” (Roberts 2022, p. 293; see also Carlton-LaNey 1999; Roberts 2005). With increasing control by Black administration, institutions like Riverdale also offer a glimpse into the possibilities for community-oriented substitute care. They not only allocated additional funds for foster payments, above and beyond city boarding rates, their institution offered recreational and professional opportunities, from playgrounds and music rooms, to summer classes and college scholarships. Institutions “drew freely from the black mutual aid tradition” and Black reformers continued to organize “institutional programs long after white reformers had deemed group care archaic” (O’Donnell 1994, p. 765). When long-term institutions disappeared, so too did possibilities for child-care coupled with community investment.

By contrast, the disproportionate use of foster family care for Black youth highlights an assumption in child welfare that the placement of minority foster youth can be used to lessen segregation and its consequences. Child welfare workers imagined that by “scattering” Black youth across the city, outside of segregated areas, they could ensure access to safety and stability without reallocating resources in ways that improved the conditions of African American

communities. But in practice, not only did White communities resist this plan, most Black children never made it to better communities. Socially engineering integration to achieve racial justice has often “enshrined proximity to White people as the goal and prize of integration” and, in doing so, stigmatized Black spaces (Stanley 2015, p. 11). Already by the 1960s, many child welfare reformers began to suggest White foster families for Black youth under the presumption that more White families had access to the economic and social resources that Black youth desperately needed (Tynes 1962). The lack of attendance to the structural aspects of the color-line framed Black families as failing to take responsibility, setting the stage for decades of debates over interracial fostering and adoptive care.

In this way, the history of New York City foster care offers insight into the shortcomings of racial and ethnic matching as a solution to racial injustice in child welfare. Ethnic and religious groups have long struggled for control over child welfare—as a strategy of assimilation or, conversely, as cultural preservation. Minority calls for community control came to a head in the 1970s, with matching becoming a primary means of redressing harmful child welfare practices. But scholars have found that policies that support the placement of minority children in foster families of the same race or community do not stem the tide of family separation (Beardall and Edwards, 2021). This does not suggest that community control is unimportant to racial justice in child welfare, but that without state efforts to remedy economic and social inequalities in minority communities, the crisis of family separation will persist. As Dorothy Roberts (2002) argues, the harm caused by fostering, even race-matched or kinship foster care, is significant: even as “cultural transmission might be allayed if the state placed more Black children in Black foster ... homes... the political harms created by racially disparate family disruption and state supervision of children would remain” (p. 254). While community control over child placement is a critical component of dignity and racial autonomy, the case of New York City shows that foster family care remains a privatized solution to systemic racial inequalities.

This article joins scholarly calls for the redistribution of social and financial resources as a critical component of racial justice in child protection (Arons 2022; Beardall and Edwards, 2021). The character of policy formulated and implemented by city reformers during this early historical period made the accommodation of all races in child welfare possible “without significant resource redistribution” (Guinier 2004, p. 99). It was a distinct solution to the social problem of Black child poverty that envisioned the private, often middle-class, Black family as the solution to child dependency. Yet this happened during a moment when the state was re-envisioned in a radical way to assume responsibility for White family poverty. Today, we need to again “implement a paradigm shift in the state’s relationship to families” and “reimagin[e] the very meaning of child protection” (Roberts 2022, p. 284). Recent research by Anna Arons (2022) shows that child protection is possible without family regulation—expansive government entitlements and mutual aid networks are effective alternatives to child separation. This study showed that historically, foster family care failed to materialize as a solution for Black child protection because it was not rooted in the idea of family integrity as a policy of systemic, state-sponsored economic support as it was for White youth. Alternative visions of child protection must attend to the historical legacy of racial exclusion from twentieth century family security projects.

Notes

¹ For this paper, I use substitute care, out-of-home care, and foster care interchangeably to refer to the *system* of placing abused, neglected, or dependent children outside the natal home for the purpose of protection. By contrast, foster family care and foster home care refer to the *method* of placing children in private families compensated for room and board. This method stands in contrast to institutional care, which refers to placement in congregate settings.

² Often referred to as boarding homes in the early twentieth century.

- ³ GMDR. 1948. CCC: Long Term Care of Dependent and Neglected Children in New York City. Undated, MS 1615/Box 8/Folder 29.
- ⁴ JWP. 1939. Committee on Institutions: Survey of institutional facilities available to the court for treatment of neglected and delinquent children. July, MC 413/Box 3/Folder 37.
- ⁵ JWP. 1937. Memo to Justice Polier: Supporting Data 1931-2. May 4, MC 413/Box 22/Folder 256.
- ⁶ RCA. 1942-46. Memorandum For Mrs. Rockefeller from Elizabeth Phillips. Undated. FM2/Record Group 1112P/Box 33/Folder 355.
- ⁷ JWP. 1940. Scope of the Problem. December, MC 413/Box 22/Folder 257.
- ⁸ JWP. 1937. Visit to New York State Training School for Girls. Undated, MC 413/Box 4/Folder 41. See also: JWP. 1945. Memorandum with Psychiatrist at the New York State Training School. August, MC 413/Box 4/Folder 40.
- ⁹ JWP. 1939. Memorandum by the Welfare Council of New York City: Care of New York City Children Away From Their Own Homes. March 17, MC 413/Box 19/Folder 218.
- ¹⁰ CAS. 1942. Report: Advisory Committee of the Service Bureau for Negro Children of the Children's Aid Society, May 1, 1939 to April 30, 1942. July 1, Box 973/Folder 10.
- ¹¹ JWP. 1939. Memorandum by the Welfare Council of New York City: Care of New York City Children Away From Their Own Homes. March 17, MC 413/Box 19/Folder 218.
- ¹² SACS. Annual Report 1938. MC 1385/Box 138.
- ¹³ All names from historical records are changed or fabricated except for public figures.
- ¹⁴ SACS. Case File: 1924-1927. Undated, MC 1385/Box 1/Folder 16.
- ¹⁵ JWP. 1941. Letter to Judge Polier from Walter White. April 1, MC 413/Box 19/Folder 219.
- ¹⁶ JWP. 1941. Letter to Judge Polier from Walter White. April 1, MC 413/Box 19/Folder 219.
- ¹⁷ JWP. 1938. Memorandum to the Mayor: New York Facilities for Colored Children. July 19, MC 413/Box 22/Folder 256.
- ¹⁸ JWP. 1938. Memorandum to the Mayor: New York Facilities for Colored Children. July 19, MC 413/Box 22/Folder 256.
- ¹⁹ SACS. Annual Report 1938. MC 1385/Box 138.
- ²⁰ GMDR. 1937. Memorandum Suggested for Presentation to Foundations Requesting Funds for a Placement and Study Bureau for Negro Children. March, MS 1615/Box 7/Folder 9.
- ²¹ CAS. 1938. Letter to the Deputy Commissioner of the Dept. of Welfare. April 21, MS111/Box 973/Folder 9.
- ²² JWP. 1938. Documents and Statements. Undated, MC 413/Box 22/Folder 256.
- ²³ JWP. 1938. Documents and Statements. Undated, MC 413/Box 22/Folder 256.
- ²⁴ GMDR. 1946. The Institutional Care of Negro Children in New York City. May, MS 1615/Box 8/Folder 29.
- ²⁵ JWP. 1942. Report on the Enforcement of the Race Discrimination Amendment by Division of Child Welfare, Dept. of Welfare. October 14, MC 413/Box 22/Folder 258.
- ²⁶ JWP. 1955. New York City Commission for the Foster Care of Children. February 16, MC 413/Box 22/Folder 259.
- ²⁷ GMDR. 1964. CCC: Child Care—20th Anniversary Report. Undated, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 13.
- ²⁸ 1936 source: JWP. 1939. Memorandum by the Welfare Council of New York City: Care of New York City Children Away From Their Own Homes. March 17, MC 413/Box 19/Folder 218. 1946 source: GMDR. 1946. The Institutional Care of Negro Children in New York City. May, MS 1615/Box 8/Folder 29.
- ²⁹ GMDR. 1946. The Institutional Care of Negro Children in New York City. May, MS 1615/Box 8/Folder 29.
- ³⁰ GMDR. 1957. CCC Memorandum: Hillcrest Center Population. February 26, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 13.
- ³¹ GMDR. 1946. The Institutional Care of Negro Children in New York City. May, MS 1615/Box 8/Folder 29.
- ³² GMDR. 1956. CCC: Memorandum: Hillcrest Center Population. February 26, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 13.
- ³³ GMDR. 1946. The Institutional Care of Negro Children in New York City. May, MS 1615/Box 8/Folder 29.
- ³⁴ 1937-1939: JWP. 1939. Children Under Care of Department of Welfare According to Color. March 17, MC 413/Box 22/Folder 258.
- ³⁵ GMDR. 1963. CCC: Statistics on Children in Shelter Care. October 18, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 13.
- ³⁶ JWP. 1946-49. Summary Report on Needs and Facilities for Foster Care of Children in New York City. Undated, MC 413/Box 35/Folder 434.
- ³⁷ 1936 data: JWP. 1939. Memorandum by the Welfare Council of New York City: Care of New York City Children Away From Their Own Homes. March 17, MC 413/Box 19/Folder 218. 1946 data: GMDR. 1946. The Institutional Care of Negro Children in New York City. May, MS 1615/Box 8/Folder 29.
- ³⁸ GMDR. 1964. Background Material for Perspective in Preparation of the 20th Anniversary Report: Child Care Section. Undated, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 13.
- ³⁹ GMDR. 1957. CCC: Minutes of the Foster Care Section. November 6, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 16.

- ⁴⁰ RCA. 1940. Statement of Background Aims and Purposes. Summer, FM2/Record Group 1112P/Box 33/Folder 354.
- ⁴¹ RCA. 1945. Memorandum from Arthur W. Packard. December 12, FM2/Record Group 1112P/Box 33/Folder 355.
- ⁴² RCA. 1947. Memorandum from Arthur Jones. October 30, FM2/Record Group 1112P/Box 33/Folder 356.
- ⁴³ GMDR. 1958. Resources Required to Meet Current Foster Care Needs. March 20, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 13.
- ⁴⁴ JWP. 1948. Letter to Mayor O'Dwyer from Raymond Hilliard, Commissioner of Welfare. August 6, MC 413/Box 35/Folder 434.
- ⁴⁵ JWP. 1949. Letter from Assistant Chief Probation Officer to all Case Supervisors in the Children's Court. June 10, MC 413/Box 35/Folder 434.
- ⁴⁶ GMDR. 1955. CCC: New York City's Foster Care Program and the 1954 Forecast on Population Trends. Undated, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 12.
- ⁴⁷ GMDR. 1956. CCC: Infants Needing Foster Care. April 20, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 12.
- ⁴⁸ GMDR. 1957. CCC Minutes: Foster Care Section Memorandum. June, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 13.
- ⁴⁹ JWP. 1960. Report of Joint Home Finding Campaign in Public Housing Projects, May 1959-April 1960. Undated, MC 413/Box 22/Folder 259.
- ⁵⁰ GMDR. 1948. Facts Concerning Temporary Care of Dependent, Neglected, and Delinquent Children. May, MS 1615/Box 8/Folder 29.
- ⁵¹ JWP. 1943. State Found Kids Mistreated in 4 of 5 SPCC Shelters in City: Only on Staten Island are they Being Handled Humanely. *PM Daily*. September 30, MC 413/Box 5/Folder 53.
- ⁵² JWP. 1945. Hope for Shelter 'Prisoners'. *PM Daily*. October 1, MC 413/Box 5/Folder 53.
- ⁵³ GMDR. 1956. Expert from Draft of Executive Committee Minutes. October 3, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 12.
- ⁵⁴ GMDR. 1956. Expert from Draft of Executive Committee Minutes. October 3, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 12.
- ⁵⁵ GMDR. 1956-1957 CCC: Untitled Report. Undated, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 13.
- ⁵⁶ GMDR. 1956. CCC: Proposal for a Survey of Placement Programs for Babies. November 8, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 12.
- ⁵⁷ GMDR. 1958. CCC: Statement by Mrs. David M. Levy, President of the CCC, Before the Board of Estimate. March 27, MS 1615/Box 11/Folder 13.

References

- Arons, Anna (2022). An Unintended Abolition: Family Regulation During the COVID-19 Crisis. *Columbia Journal of Race and Law*, 11(1): 1–28.
- Baylor, Edith M. H. (1928). Problems of Institutions and Foster Homes: When Should the Foster Home be Prescribed for the Problem Child? In *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work 1928*, pp. 377–383. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Beardall, Theresa Rocha, and Frank Edwards (2021). Abolition, Settler Colonialism, and the Persistent Threat of Indian Child Welfare. *Columbia Journal of Race and Law*, 11(3): 533–574.
- Billingsley, Andrew, and Jeanne M. Giovannoni (1972). *Children of the Storm: Black Children and American Child Welfare*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Bonapart, Joseph (1934). Sociology and the Care of Dependent Children. *Social Forces*, 12(4): 515–522.
- Breese, Gertrude E. (1936). *Finding Foster Homes*. Buffalo, NY: The Children's Aid Society. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89097126155&view=1up&seq=5> (accessed November 11, 2022).
- Brown, Michael K. (1999). *Race, Money, and the American Welfare State*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Carlton-LaNey, Iris (1999). African American Social Work Pioneer's Response to Need. *Social Work*, 44(4): 311–321.
- Carstens, C. C. (1936). Social Security Through Aid for Dependent Children in Their Own Homes. *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 3(2): 246–252.
- Child Welfare League of America (1945). *Child Care Facilities for Dependent and Neglected Negro Children in Three Cities: New York City, Philadelphia, Cleveland*. New York.
- Children's Aid Society (CAS) (1853-1947). *Records*. New York: New York Historical Society.
- Children's Bureau (1967). *The Story of the White House Conferences on Children and Youth*. Washington, DC: Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
- Committee on Economic Security (1934). Child Welfare in the Economic Security Program. *Unpublished CES Studies*, Volume IX Committee Publication, Washington DC.
- Cooper, Melinda (2017). *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*. New York: Zone Books.

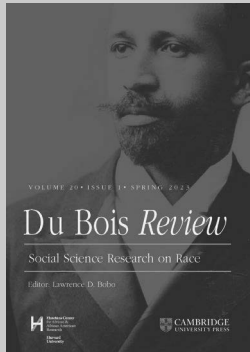
- Creagh, Diane (2012). The Baby Trains: Catholic Foster Care and Western Migration, 1873-1929. *Journal of Social History*, 46(1): 197–218.
- Crenson, Matthew A. (1998). *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Curran, Laura (2006). Feminine Women, Hard Workers: Foster Motherhood in Midcentury America, 1946-1963. *Journal of Family History*, 31(4): 386–412.
- Curran, Laura (2013). The Mixed Economy of ‘Foster Care’: Public and Private Child Welfare in the New Deal. Research Report #9, Huamin Research Center. https://socialwork.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/research_report_9_2.pdf (accessed October 18, 2022).
- Dalton, Edward (1942). Color—and Negro Child Placing. *Survey Mid-Monthly*, October, p. 270–271.
- English, Peter C. (1984). Pediatrics and the Unwanted Child in History: Foundling Homes, Disease, and the Origins of Foster Care in New York City, 1860-1920. *Pediatrics*, 73(5): 699–711.
- Fisher, Jacob (1944). The Comparability of Public Assistance Payments and Social Insurance Benefits. *Social Security Bulletin*, 7(12): 9–14.
- Fox, Cybelle (2012). *Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Frey, Cecil P. (1981). The House of Refuge for Colored Children. *Journal of Negro History*, 66(1): 10–25.
- Furstenberg, Frank F. (2007). The Making of the Black Family: Race and Class in Qualitative Studies in the Twentieth Century. *Annual Review Sociology*, 33 (2007): 429–448.
- Gans, Herbert J. (2011). The Moynihan Report and Its Aftermaths: A Critical Analysis. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 8(2): 315–327.
- Gerald E. Markowitz and David Rosner Papers, 1923-1999 (GMDR). *Rare Book and Manuscript Library*, Columbia University Library, New York, NY.
- Gordon, Linda (1988). *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston 1880-1960*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Gordon, Linda (1994). *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare*. New York: The Free Press.
- Gordon, Linda (1999). *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Greene, Larry A. (1993). Harlem, the Depression Years: Leadership and Social Conditions. *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, 17(2): 33–50.
- Guinier, Lani (2004). From Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy: *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest-Divergence Dilemma. *The Journal of American History*, 91(1): 92–118.
- Hacsi, Timothy A. (1997). *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Haney, Lynne (2018). Incarcerated Fatherhood: The Entanglements of Child Support Debt and Mass Imprisonment. *American Journal of Sociology*, 124(1): 1–48.
- Haney, Lynne, and Miranda March (2003). Married Fathers and Caring Daddies: Welfare Reform and the Discursive Politics of Paternity. *Social Problems*, 50(4): 461–481.
- Hanna, Agnes K. (1936). Dependent Children Under Care of Children’s Agencies: A Review of the Census Findings. *Social Service Review*, 10(2): 243–263.
- Hays, Sharon (2003). *Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Hubert, James H. (1933). Urbanization and the Negro. In *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work 1933*, pp. 418–425. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Igra, Anna R. (2006). *Wives Without Husbands: Marriage, Desertion, and Welfare in New York, 1900-1935*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Jeter, Helen R. (1963). *Children Problems and Services in Child Welfare Programs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Welfare Administration, Children’s Bureau.
- Jones, Eugene K. (1921). Problems of the Colored Child. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 98(1): 142–147.
- Jones, Marshall B. (1993). Decline of the American Orphanage, 1941-1980. *Social Service Review*, 67(3): 459–480.
- Justine Wise Polier Papers, 1892-2015 (JWP). Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
- Kaplan, Barry J. (1978). Reformers and Charity: The Abolition of Public Outdoor Relief in New York City, 1870-1898. *Social Service Review*, 52(2): 202–214.
- Katznelson, Ira (2005). *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-century America*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Kaye, P. B. (1946). Judge Bolin Hits Court’s Jim Crowism. *New York Amsterdam News*, February 16, p. 1.

- Lawrence-Webb, Claudia (1997). African American Children in the Modern Child Welfare System: A Legacy of the Flemming Rule. *Child Welfare*, 76(1): 9–30.
- Levenson, Samuel M. (1936). The South Jamaica Community League. *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, 9(6): 359–363.
- Lieberman, Robert C. (1998). *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mabee, Carleton (1974). City in Travail: Two Orphan Asylums for Blacks. *New York History*, 55(1): 55–77.
- Marquard, Elva (1943). Social Insurance and Public Assistance Payments. *Social Security Bulletin*, 6(12): 16–27.
- Mettler, Suzanne (2018). *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Mink, Gwendolyn (1996). *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917–1942*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Murphy, J. Prentice (1934). Children in the New Deal. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 176(1): 121–130.
- New York (1916). *Report of Charles H. Strong to Governor Whitman*. The University of California Library.
- New York (1918). *51st Annual Report of the State Board of Charities for the Year 1917*. Albany, NY: J. B. Lyon Company, Printers.
- New York (1933). *Annual Report of the Domestic Relations Court of the City of New York 1933*. New York: The Beacon Press, Inc.
- New York (1937). *Legislative Documents: One Hundred and Sixtieth Session, Vol V–No. 22 to 24 INCL*. Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, Printers.
- New York (1940). For Tomorrow: A Court Defends the Child and Family Today. In *Eighth Annual Report of the Domestic Relations Court City of New York*. New York: ABCO Press, Inc.
- New York (1951). *Child Welfare in New York State*. Albany, NY: Citizens' Committee of One Hundred for Children and Youth Child Care Section.
- New York (1969). *The Complete Report of Mayor LaGuardia's Commission on the Harlem Riot of March 19, 1935*. New York: Arno Press.
- New York Amsterdam News* (1939). Opens Bureau to Curb Juvenile Delinquency. May 20, p. 1.
- New York Amsterdam News* (1946). City Probes Kid Court Jim Crow. February 9, p. 1.
- New Amsterdam Star-News* (1942). Withdraw City Aid to Jim Crow Orphanage. November 7, p. 1.
- New York Times, The* (1943). Child Care Center Opened by Mayor. January 26, p. 16.
- O'Donnell, Sandra M. (1994). The Care of Dependent African-American Children in Chicago: The Struggle Between Black Self-Help and Professionalism. *Journal of Social History*, 27(4): 763–776.
- Palmer, Anne (1932). Dependent Colored Children of Detroit. *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life*, October: 317.
- Parolin, Zachary (2021). Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and the Black-White Child Poverty Gap in the United States. *Socio-Economic Review*, 19(3): 1005–1035.
- Poston, Ted (1940). Orphans Barred from New Rochelle Schools. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 27, p. 22.
- Quadagno, Jill (1994). *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ramey, Jessie B. (2012). *Child Care in Black and White: Working Parents and the History of Orphanages*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Roberts, Dorothy E. (2002). *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare*. New York: Basic Civitas Books.
- Roberts, Dorothy E. (2005). Black Club Women and Child Welfare: Lessons for Modern Reform. *Florida State University Law Review*, 32(3): 957–972.
- Roberts, Dorothy E. (2022). *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rockefeller Family Archives, 1819–1989. *FM2 Riverdale Children's Association, 1936–1961 (RCA)*. Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.
- Rymph, Catherine E. (2017). *Raising Government Children: A History of Foster Care and the American Welfare State*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Schlossman, Michael B. (2012). Less Interest, Less Treatment: Mexican-American Youth and the Los Angeles Juvenile Court in the Great Depression. *Punishment and Society*, 14(2): 193–216.
- Sheltering Arms Children's Service, 1852–1966 (SACS). Special Collections and University Archives at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.
- Simmons, Michaela C. (2020). Becoming Wards of the State: Race, Crime, and Childhood in the Struggle for Foster Care Integration, 1920s to 1960s. *American Sociological Review*, 85(2): 199–222.
- Stanley, Sharon (2015). The Enduring Challenge of Racial Integration in the United States. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 12(1): 5–24.

- Sterner, Richard, Ellen Winston, and Lenore A. Epstein (1943). *The Negro's Share: A Study of Income, Consumption, Housing and Public Assistance*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Stevens, Myra (1945). Meeting the Needs of Dependent Negro Children. *The Family*, July: 176–181.
- Tanenhaus, David S. (2001). Growing Up Dependent: Family Preservation in Early 20th Century Chicago. *Law and History Review*, 19(3): 547–582.
- Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahatta (2019). *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Trafton, George H., and Leonard H. Feinroth (1944). State Differences in Insurance Status Under Old-Age and Survivors Insurance. *Social Security Bulletin*, 7(8): 6–11.
- Tynes, Harcourt, Jr. (1962). Foster Homes Sought for Negro Babies. *New Amsterdam News*, January 27, p. 23.
- Tyson, Helen Glenn (1940). Care of Dependent Children. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 212: 168–178.
- United States (1935). *Children Under Institutional Care and in Foster Homes*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Children's Bureau (1933). *Mothers' Aid, 1931. Children's Bureau Publication No. 220*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Vakharia, Parin (1948). *A Study of The Development of Institutional Care for Children in U.S.A. with Special Reference to the Jennie Clarkson Home for Children Valhalla, N.Y.* M.S. Thesis, New York School of Social Work, Columbia University.
- Vandepol, Ann (1982). Dependent Children, Child Custody, and the Mothers Pensions: The Transformation of State Family Relations in the Early 20th Century. *Social Problems*, 29(3): 221–235.
- Ward, Geoff K. (2012). *The Black Child-Savers: Racial Democracy and Juvenile Justice*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Welfare and Health Council of the City of New York (1957). *Fee Charging or Payment Policies for Adoption, Child Placement, and Maternity Shelter Care in New York City: A Survey of Current Policies and Practices*. Bureau of Special Studies Research Department, Community Council of Greater New York, Inc.
- Zelizer, Viviana A. (1985). *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*. New York: Basic Books.

Michaela Christy Simmons is currently an IDEAL Provostial Fellow at Stanford University and a recent PhD graduate from UC Berkeley. Broadly, her research examines the enduring consequences of racial inequality in the American welfare state through a focus on social citizenship, family, and childhood. Her research has been published in the *American Sociological Review* and has been supported by the National Science Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

Cite this article: Simmons, Michaela Christy (2023). The Racial Origins of Foster Home Care: Black Family Responsibility in the Early Welfare State, New York City, 1930s–1960s. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 20: 269–291. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X22000248>



Du Bois Review **will be online only from 2024**

Volume 20, issue 2 of *Du Bois Review* is the final issue to appear in print.

Please continue to find our latest published articles and issues online at: www.cambridge.org/DBR

Subscribe: www.cambridge.org/core/journals/du-bois-review-social-science-research-on-race/subscribe

Find out about Open Access options in *DBR*: www.cambridge.org/openaccess



**Hutchins Center
for African &
African American
Research**

**Harvard
University**



**CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS**