

“When the Welfare People Come”: Race and Class in the US Child Protection System

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Study Questions

- 1 Why does capital need to regulate working class families while leaving middle class and affluent families largely to their own devices? How is this reflected in the child protection system?
- 2 In the 19th century, child protection was justified in part on the basis of fear of a “disruptive class.” In recent decades, this rhetoric has been replaced by talk about dependency. What factors (material conditions, ideological rationale) explain this change?
- 3 How does the growth in over-representation of Black children in state custody relate to the treatment of Black families throughout US history?
- 4 How should Marxists respond to the controversy over trans-racial adoption? Do some arguments against reify race as an invidious scheme of categorization? Do some arguments in favor devalue Black parents?
- 5 How did capitalism “create” the disabled as a class? What, if any, continuity exists between eugenics, institutionalization and modern systemic bias against parents with disabilities?
- 6 Withelma “T” Ortiz Walker Pettigrew (pp. 77-78) testified to Congress that being in foster care was nearly ideal preparation for being trafficked? What was her argument?
- 7 Why does the system treat children’s responses to their experience as mental illness? Why might well-intentioned professionals feel they have no alternative? What are some of the effects on children?
- 8 Why does the system insist on demonstrating that foster parents are “volunteers” who don’t need subsidy?
- 9 What are some of the links between the child protection and juvenile justice systems? Why did Luzerne County, PA generate more attention than similar abuse of youth in Meridian, MS?
- 10 Why did a radical tradition within child welfare not thrive? What can be done to revive and rebuild it?
- 11 What are the threats of privatization in child welfare? ... of the “auction model of adoption”?
- 12 What is the ideological function of the child welfare system? How does it serve capital?
- 13 Reform of child welfare should aim at transforming the relationship of the system to those it regulates. Ultimate transformation will not occur without the social transformations that will occur with the defeat of capitalism. If both of these statements are true, how should we approach reform? What reforms can we work for with individuals and groups not yet committed

to anti-capitalist struggle?

- 14 How does the Marxist concept of social reproduction deepen our understanding of the regulation of working class families generally? ... of the child welfare system specifically?
- 15 What challenges exist for Marxists in discussing how the role of the nuclear family will change under socialism? How can we meet these challenges?