

## BOOKS REVIEWED

BEYOND THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD. By J. Goldstein, A. Freud, and A.J. Solnit. New York: The Free Press: 1973. 170 pp.

Reviewed by John K. Torrens, MD

What else can be said about this "instant classic" except that the 1979 revised edition responds to critics of the authors' child-centered approach and refines the criticism of the child placement practices? This edition includes an epilogue addressing the two most commonly raised criticisms and a horrifying case history that the authors and this reviewer think clearly supports their hypotheses. The original edition presents a guideline for placement and a model child placement law. The concepts presented have been generally accepted, particularly for the "wanted child," that the only relationships that should be protected by laws pertain to a child and any adult ("psychological parent") who brings an intimate loving relationship to the child that can transform him or her into a wanted child. The need for continuity of this relationship is stressed. The authors point out that the rights of this child may and sometimes should conflict with the rights of the biological parents and institutions. An important point raised in this book is that the child's sense of time is quite different from that of adults; therefore, delays, trial periods, and so on, that seem necessary to adults can be ruinous to children.

The authors' basic recommendations are that the adoption should be final at the point of placement, that the custodial parent should have complete authority over the child's future including visitation by the other parent, and that long-term foster care be recognized as "common-law adoption." They also stress that the best interests for the child should involve the "least detrimental alternative."

Criticism of these proposals in earlier editions states that the book oversimplifies the complex issues, particularly visitation controlled by only the custodial parent. In this revised edition the authors agree the book oversimplifies the complex issues but stress they believe judges may have the authority but not the capacity to handle these. Judges should answer only *who* should have custody and *how and under what conditions* the child and custodians are to relate to one and others. The authors also have clarified their point about the custodial parent having full control of the child, saying this should involve only cases in which the parents are unable to agree. They decry legally forced visitations as being potentially detrimental. Case study points this out graphically.

This book in its revised edition is still a classic and richly deserves its place as the foremost treatise concerned with implementation of the best interests of the child. The volume and its sequel, *Before the Best Interests of the Child*, belong in the library of every professional interested and involved in child placement, divorce, adoption, and the general well-being of children. The revised edition is recommended to all those well acquainted with the seminal work, particularly for answers to the controversies (and misunderstandings) that arose from the original publication. □