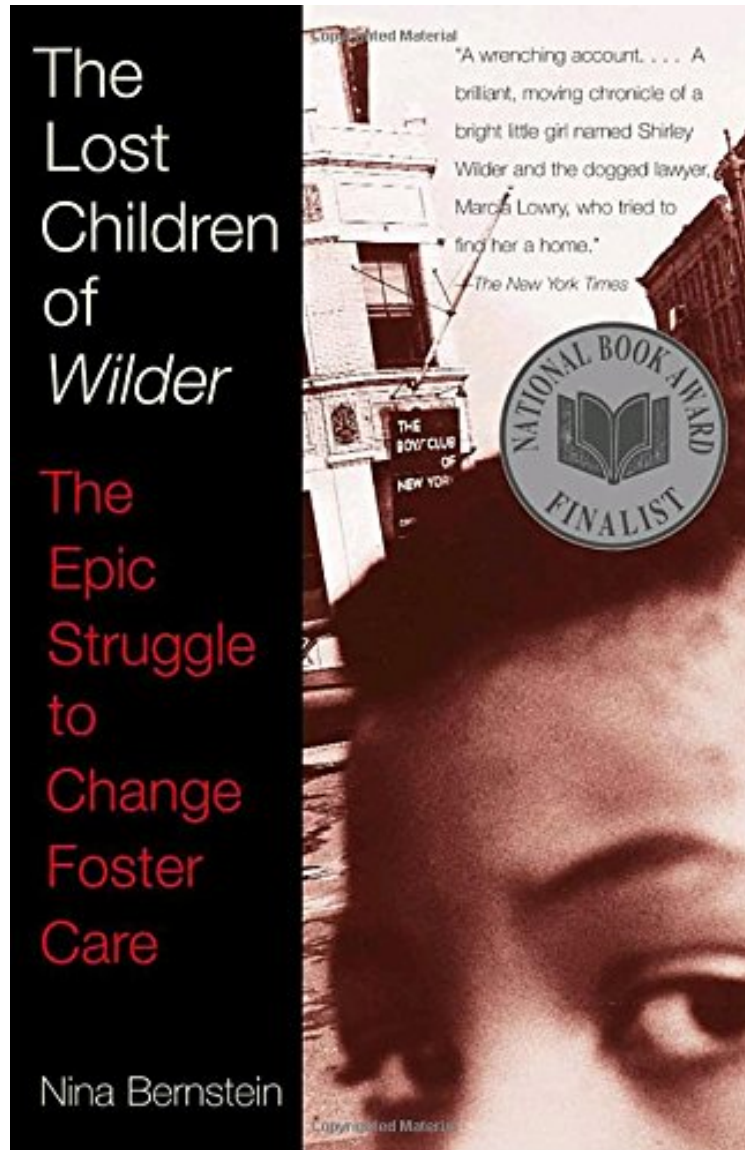


The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care

Nina Bernstein

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Nina Bernstein : The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Cassidy Shemelia Excellent/depressing account of the

wilder case and the welfare system at large. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. not your typical child abuse/ foster care read. By Chris Wuennenberg There was lots of legal information that was over my head. Informative regarding the cycle of poor in the foster care system. As a Guardian ad Litem, I read to help families I work with. 2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Sad By A Customer This is a sad book. Shirley Wilder was smart, precocious and could have given the world so much. Why are people thrown away? This book was so unbelievably sad.

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

.com At age 12, Shirley Wilder ran away from an abusive home and landed in New York City's foster-care system. By age 13, she was named the plaintiff in a class-action lawsuit that challenged the city's 150-year-old system as unconstitutional. At 14, Shirley gave birth to a son, Lamont, who was soon swept up in the same system. This absorbing account by New York Times reporter Nina Bernstein follows the threads of the tragic lives of Shirley and Lamont Wilder and the lawsuit that bears their name. In the process it illuminates the city's--and the nation's--dysfunctional social welfare system and its impact on the children it purportedly helps. The Wilder lawsuit was filed in 1973 by a passionate young lawyer who stuck by it through 26 years of litigation, without the case ever being fully resolved. The accusation: that New York City's system violated the First and Fourteenth Amendments for giving private religious agencies control of publicly financed foster-care beds. These mostly Catholic and Jewish agencies gave preference to white Catholic and Jewish children, while the growing numbers of black and Protestant children were sent to inappropriate institutions that left them with more problems than they had when they came. Such was the fate of Shirley, who, for lack of anywhere else to go, was placed in Hudson, a state reformatory for delinquents with no treatment services for abandoned or abused children. Hudson "looked like a camp from the outside and was unmistakably a prison within." There was rampant violence and sexual abuse, and girls were regularly punished by being put in "the hole," a 5-by-8-foot cell with no windows, furniture, or heat, which Shirley would later testify was like "Winter. Winter--all year round." But a case that named state and city officials, 77 voluntary agencies and their directors, and 84 individual defendants including nuns, rabbis, and clergymen, and that threatened to pit blacks and Jews against each other, was a case destined to enter a legal wilderness of avoidance and delay. Shirley and Lamont's unforgettable stories reveal the deep fault lines in a system that often does more harm than good. While reforms come and go with little success, Bernstein makes clear that the child welfare system will never really change until there is a coming to terms with the system's place as "a political battleground for abiding national conflicts over race, religion, gender and inequality" and the "unacknowledged contradictions between policies that punish the 'undeserving poor' and pledge to help all needy children." --Lesley Reed From Publishers Weekly In this first-rate investigation, New York Times reporter Bernstein explores the genesis and aftermath of the landmark 1973 legal case filed by young ACLU attorney Marcia Lowry against the New York State foster-care system. Known as Wilder for its 14-year-old African-American plaintiff, Shirley "Pinky" Wilder, the suit claimed Jewish and Catholic child welfare services had a lock on foster care funding and placements. Like Susan Sheehan in *Life for Me Ain't Been No Crystal Stair*, Bernstein illuminates broader social issues through the story of Shirley; Lamont, the son she bore at 14; and Lamont's young son Dall graduates of New York's hellish child welfare system. The tale is gut-wrenchingly Dickensian Dall the more so because, as Bernstein shows, the well-meaning 19th-century Jewish and Catholic philanthropists, clerics and parents who founded and expanded the child welfare system in New York ultimately deprived huge numbers of children of their legal and human rights as the demographics of New York changed. It took 25 years and many more lawsuits before the reforms mandated by Wilder began to be realized. In the interim, Lamont endured the same excruciating experiences his mother had suffered, including physical and sexual abuse, homelessness, witnessing the deaths of other children in foster care and losing his own child to the foster care system. A crack addict, Shirley died of AIDS at 40. Despite these horrors, the book ends with the hopeful postscript that Lamont's son currently lives with his mother, Kisha, and visits his now self-supporting father on weekends. Ten years in the making, this viscerally powerful history of institutionalized child abuse and the criminalization of poverty, of civil rights and social change, is compelling and essential reading. Agent, Gloria Loomis. (Feb. 28) Forecast: Like Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*, this book has

the potential to jumpstart a national conversation about the failings of our social safety net for impoverished children. If it garners the review attention it deserves, it will find a solid audience among readers of Kozol's and Sheehan's books. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal This book is a fascinating history of 28 years of change in the child foster care system in New York City, where sectarian interests controlled the placement of homeless, neglected, abused, and emotionally disturbed children and adolescents. The book follows the lives of lead plaintiff Shirley Wilder and her son as Shirley goes from homeless preteen to teenage mother at 14 and is shifted from home to foster home to group home to institution. Her son grows up in foster care and institutions. The book simultaneously follows a 1986 federal lawsuit, which became known as Wilder, brought on behalf of foster care children in New York City by the ACLU Children's Rights Project. New York Times reporter Bernstein conducted extensive interviews of many of the participants for this book, which is compelling both for its elucidation of child welfare practices and for its demonstration of how litigation can affect social policy. A necessary purchase for New York State academic and larger public libraries and a very useful one for social welfare and policy collections nationwide. D Mary Jane Brustman, Univ. at Albany Libs., NY Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.