

Reform, Policy Discourse, and the Politics of Research,” understand that the current situation is based on an ideological framework which poverty advocacy fails to meaningfully confront because “researchers expended great effort identifying the typical duration of participation” and “focused on work effort ... and poor people’s behaviors” “[t]o distinguish myths from realities,” they do not supply the structural questions they claim are essential to the investigation into welfare.

In the context of a bad law such as PRWORA, someone needs to announce that “the emperor has no clothes.” But no one does in *Lost Ground*. Gwendolyn Mink’s “Violating Women: Rights Abuses in the Welfare Police State,” the only article to adopt a consistently angry tone, comes closest to scrutinizing the state for its harmful doing. Mink attacks the use of welfare to implement patriarchal ideology by requiring father-headship of families and punishing childbearing outside of marriage.

In many ways, Mink has the easiest argument to prove. The Act states baldly in its purposive sections that “marriage is the foundation of a successful society” and “the purpose of welfare must be ... to ‘end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting ... marriage’, ‘prevent and reduce ... out-of-wedlock pregnancies’ and ‘encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families’” (98, quoting U.S. Public Law 104-193, Title I). Childbearing and the right to raise one’s own children are individual human rights, not to be attacked on grounds of gender or racial discrimination. They are also rights of “national, ethnical, racial or religious groups,” the groups protected under the Genocide Convention.

A useful book, *Lost Ground* contains invaluable information for women (especially mothers), minorities, and the poor, and for those who care about these citizen groups. Regrettably, however, it does not fulfill its own important mandate.

## **A Question of David: A Disabled Mother’s Journey Through Adoption, Family and Life**

Denise Sherer Jacobson  
Berkeley: Creative Arts Book Company, 1999

### **Reviewed by Shelley M. Park**

In *A Question of David*, Denise Sherer Jacobson recounts the events and emotions surrounding the adoption of her son, David. David is classified as a “special needs” baby because of his potential cerebral palsy. While it is never clear to the reader whether David has been misdiagnosed (he becomes an active

toddler apparently suffering little physical disability other than some limb stiffness as an infant), this is not of central importance to this memoir. Denise and her husband, Neil, do have cerebral palsy. Hence, the central questions raised here concern the abilities of disabled adults to raise a child and the abilities of their friends, families, colleagues, doctors, caregivers, and passing strangers to accept persons with disabilities as capable and loving parents.

Denise, who occupies the role of primary parental caregiver, suffers self-doubt about her maternal abilities. Diapering and dressing an infant is an arduous task for Denise that often takes an hour or more – by which time David often needs to be rediapered. Sterilizing and filling bottles, as well as other maternal rituals, require the daily assistance of au pairs or housekeepers. As an adult with a disability, Denise regrets losing the independence she has gained; as a writer she regrets losing the privacy needed to continue her work. Frequently, Denise also resents the fact that Neil goes to work each day, leaving her to cope with doctor’s appointments, unreliable household help, and the exhausting—if also gratifying—work of parenting. As Bree Walker Lamprey notes in her forward to the book, the emotions, fears, and uncertainties, as revealed in *A Question of David*, are experienced by many women who make “the transition from womanhood to motherhood” (ix). However, here they are intensified by the special challenges faced by a mother with cerebral palsy.

Denise is fortunate to have a network of friends and political allies who advise, encourage, and assist her throughout the first months and years of David’s life. This is a story, in part, about the importance of families of choice and other social networks when coping with first-time motherhood. Unlike other first-time mothers, however, it is a part of Denise’s daily experience to be rendered invisible or pitied by those unfamiliar with cerebral palsy. Denise and David are frequently treated as little more than “freight” by the drivers of vans summoned to transport them to and from medical appointments; when they arrive at their appointments, they are often treated as little more than “stiff bodies” to be manipulated by physiotherapists. Clearly, the greatest emotional toll occurs, however, when confronted by the skepticism of those closest to them. The relationship between Denise and her mother-in-law, for example, is rendered uneasy by questions surrounding David.

The memoir ends shortly after the adoption of young David is finalized. The “question” of David continues, however. A final chapter portends some of the challenges that lie ahead for Denise and Neil. These include an inability to keep up with and protect an active toddler and the growing David’s discomfort with his mother’s appearance. These are challenges shared by many mothers as their children develop independent skills, interests, and tastes. Again, however, the issues are intensified and made more complex for parents with disabilities.

I confess to having mixed feelings about this book. On the one hand, its significant attention to the details of everyday life of a mother with a disability renders this an important book for those who study motherhood, for those who study disability, and especially for those who study the intersections of the two.

On the other hand, at times its prose is hyperbolic and its narrative slides into a politics of victimization.

Throughout Sherer Jacobson's memoir, frequent tensions arise between Denise and her in-laws, Denise and her husband, Denise and her housekeeper. A particular strength of this work is that it does not gloss over the interpersonal struggles engendered by varying perceptions of ability and disability. I wonder, however, if the story would not be enriched further by a more multi-faceted analysis of the interpersonal struggles described. For example, Denise's ongoing contest of wills with Challukah, her housekeeper, portray Denise as victimized and Challukah as stubborn, careless, and unreliable. Indeed, every mother who has relied on another caregiver can identify with the frustration Denise experiences when Challukah is late or inattentive. Nevertheless, it is important also to recognize that an employee has needs that may be thwarted by the employer-employee relationship. Disability renders Denise dependent on Challukah; socio-economic class renders Challukah dependent on Denise. Similarly, all adult children—especially, perhaps, adult children with disabilities—will empathize with Denise's frustration at her mother-in-law's failure to treat her as capable. Yet, the tension between Denise and her mother-in-law appears also to be related to their differing relationships to Judaism and the Holocaust. *A Question of David* would be enriched by greater recognition of the complexities of these and other human relationships. Sherer Jacobson's memoir about the adoption of David raises important questions about our perceptions of disability; however, it may be that we cannot adequately answer these questions without also raising questions concerning how our perceptions are influenced by factors such as gender, class, age, and ethnicity.

## **Baby Catcher: Chronicles of a Modern Midwife**

Peggy Vincent  
New York: Scribner, 2002

### **Reviewed by Michelle Moravec**

With a background in obstetrics nursing, natural childbirth education, and her experience administering a birthing centre, Peggy Vincent's decision to become a licensed midwife with a specialization in home births might have been expected. As *Baby Catcher: Chronicles of a Modern Midwife* aptly illustrates, however, Vincent's experiences as a midwife were anything but the expected.

Vincent's career neatly encapsulates the scope of the women's health movement. As a young nursing student at Duke University, she became disillusioned with traditional obstetric practices that gave labouring women no control over the experience of childbirth. The occasional pregnant women who "thrived on the challenge and the passion" of birth and refused to submit to the