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Book Note

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: THE TRAGEDY OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS FROM BEN FRANKLIN TO LIONEL TATE, by Barbara Bennett Woodhouse¹

SEHER GODERYA

IT MAY COME AS A SURPRISE to many readers that the United States is the only developed nation that has refused to sign the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*,² one of the most successful of all human rights treaties. Proponents of this choice not to ratify the *CRC* argue that existing laws already give children too many rights and/or could endanger a family's autonomy and right to privacy. In *Hidden in Plain Sight* (awarded the 2009 Human Rights Section, Best Book Award by the American Political Science Association), Barbara Woodhouse presents stories of both famous and unknown children in the hopes of sparking public debate about the meaning of rights for children and forcing a closer examination of the United States' resistance to children's rights.

The book is organized under five important human rights principles. Part one of the book addresses the privacy principle by examining narratives of children who have faced barriers to their freedom due to slavery, gender and race discrimination, and oppression by the very systems that were intended to help them. Privacy and freedom are inextricably intertwined, and Woodhouse demonstrates that children's best shot at freedom lies in having deep emotional attachments to strong and authoritative parents who are entrusted with defining their best interests and empowered to defend them. It is only by protecting the intimate nurturing relationships that parents and children share that children will be entitled to privacy.

Children have both needs-based and capacity-based rights to agency and voice. The stories of Ben Franklin's childhood and of various youth who were

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1. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 357 pages.
 2. 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 [*CRC*].

involved with the civil rights movement, in part two, serve as examples of how these children used their voice and agency to express their opinions and to challenge the injustice around them. Rather than fearing children's power and action, Woodhouse suggests that parents and mentors can help children find their own voices and exercise their agency in positive and constructive ways.

Part three focuses on the equality principle through stories in which female children in the past have exhibited agency and voice in challenging the dominant gender expectations of their times and in doing so shaped womanhood for generations to come. The meaning of equality is further examined through stories of how the principles of dignity and empowerment can be used to help children of varying abilities and disabilities to learn and grow.

In part four, Woodhouse compares the stories of children who had to hide themselves from danger, such as Anne Frank—whose diary has provided us with one of the most famous accounts of the Holocaust and its effects on Jewish families—with stories of young refugees who are forced to deny their familial, religious, racial, or ethnic identities so they can escape deportation and subsequent persecution in their homelands. Treating these children with dignity entails looking at them as individuals, not as members of a class defined by the conduct of others. This part also showcases stories of those children at work who are fighting to keep their dignity by preventing their own decline into hunger, poverty, and deprivation.

The last part of this book focuses on the protection of children viewed as both victims and criminals in the United States. These children are often removed from their families but end up suffering even more harm when they find themselves either in foster homes where they are neglected or in institutions where they grow up in isolation from the world. Woodhouse's portrayal of these stories is particularly unique because it demonstrates the importance of children's rights through a child-centered perspective, placing children, instead of the perpetrators of their abuse, at the center of policy development.

Worldwide, the *CRC* has unlocked the honesty, energy, and creativity of children, bringing us fresh insights and perspectives on old problems. Through her informative and entertaining stories, Woodhouse succeeds in illustrating why the United States should offer children both hope and dignity by extending them human rights.