

Child Protection

An American History

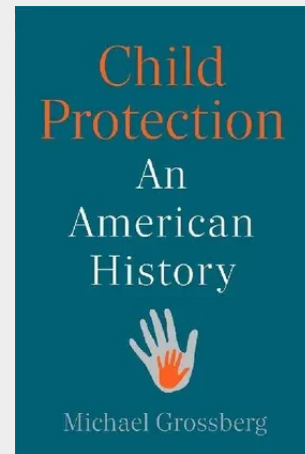
A comprehensive history of child protection in America—reflecting its origins in public uproar, its successes and failures, and what it shows us about changing ideals of childhood. In 1874, the tragic story of ten-year-old Mary Ellen Wilson galvanized the nation. Spurred to action by reformers and social workers, authorities in New York found that Mary Ellen's caretakers had beaten her, deprived her of proper clothing and food, and effectively imprisoned her indoors, where she would be forgotten by the world. A concerned public responded with new laws establishing the first organization devoted to the prevention of cruelty to children. It paved the way for protection policies to grow over the course of the twentieth century. The only comprehensive history of its subject, *Child Protection* charts the birth and expansion of the child welfare movement, recounting the political and cultural trends that have shaped it. Michael Grossberg details the stories that placed a public spotlight on the endangerment of children as well as the panics that have driven efforts to protect children from a variety of actual and perceived threats to their physical and moral well-being, the most significant being abuse, obscenity, labor, sexuality, and disability. A nimble guide, Grossberg traverses 150 years of historical change, from the founding of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in response to the Wilson case, to the emergence of "battered child" syndrome in the 1960s, up to the present. The history of child protection provides a valuable window on the American story more broadly, as Grossberg connects ideas about protection to the shifting meaning of childhood itself. A moving account of failures and successes alike, with important consequences for contemporary social policy, *Child Protection* invites us to see the relationship between the American past and present anew.

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27,50 €

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vorbestellbar, Erscheinungstermin ca. März 2027

Artikelnummer: 9780674045644

Medium: Buch

ISBN: 978-0-674-04564-4

Verlag: Harvard University Press

Erscheinungstermin: 09.03.2027

Sprache(n): Englisch

Auflage: Erscheinungsjahr 2027

Produktform: Gebunden

Seiten: 288

Format (B x H): 156 x 235 mm

