

Anglo countries. And though an imaginary and highly racialized “welfare queen” continues to be paraded in front of conservative American constituents, the affirmation that the image is neither new nor original in its construction, use, or purposeful deployment, provides little consolation. Lack of consolation aside, Irving’s book is a theoretically and historically astute investigation of the gendered and racialized fears of immigrant women, at one particularly charged moment in American history.

Mothering Teens: Understanding the Adolescent Years

Miriam Kaufman, ed.
Charlottetown, PEI: gynergy, 1997

Reviewed by Ruthe Thompson

Anyone familiar with children aged 10 to 21 will appreciate this collection created “not to tell you how to parent, but to help you understand the process of adolescence” (Kaufman 7). Editor Miriam Kaufman, a pediatrician at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto and associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Toronto, gathers a diverse group of women to provide a comprehensive look at shepherding children through the transition to adulthood. As these 21 essays demonstrate, it is no easy task. President of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, Debra Haffner comments in an excellent essay on sexuality that teens can feel “omniscient, omnipotent, and invincible” (82). Kaufman underscores this point in the overview of adolescent development that opens the volume, reminding readers like me, mother to children aged 16 and 13, that “When you’re parenting a teen, every time you think you’ve got it right, you realize you are an asshole!” (15).

Constant reassessment of household attitudes, rules, and expectations emerge as key themes in essays like, Cheryl Littleton’s piece on adolescent drug and alcohol use, Jacqueline Haessly’s discussion of teens and violence, Kathleen McDonnell’s article on rites of passage, and Merryl Bear and Kaca Henley’s cautionary tale about body image. We remember that adolescents double their body weight while surrounded by media prescriptions of unrealistic physiques. We read that teens need privacy, independence, and freedom to develop decision-making skills. We read about the strictures of gender roles and learn, perhaps contrary to parental fantasy, that “more than 80 percent of North Americans first have intercourse as teenagers,” making quality health education vital (Haffner 88). In provocative essays by Gail Winter and Pat Watson we are schooled in the challenges of raising aboriginal teens and on attitudes about

racism. We get solid suggestions from Alison van Nie about teen explorations of spirituality, and an indispensable reminder from Carol Ricker-Wilson that high-schoolers still need parental advocacy.

At times, however, the volume fails to comment on its own contradictions and focuses on the anecdotal, at the expense of larger trends. With the notable exception of Bridget Lynch's moving memoir of a daughter with developmental delays, the collection's autobiography seems limited to scant historical or statistical information. And I was surprised by the strange juxtaposition of Martha Fleming's article on economic class and Tara Cullis's chapter on activist teens two essays later. Cullis, president of the philanthropic David Suzuki Foundation, is married to its founder and discusses her daughter's journey toward activism and documentary television stardom via hard work by mother and daughter, to be sure, but also through familial connection to Suzuki, a scientist and television broadcaster whom Cullis never mentions specifically. Having been thoroughly engaged, a few pages earlier, by Fleming's account of her struggle with her husband to provide opportunities for their children on a working-class income, it is difficult to care about the exploits of a nine-year-old so fortunately connected that a wealthy donor would offer \$1000 for her environmental activism trip to Rio during a visit to the Suzuki family foundation (246).

Despite this criticism, *Mothering Teens* fulfills its editor's mission to explain why our children behave as they do, and to help us mother more intelligently. Kaufman "envision[s] this book being passed across back fences, being discussed in line at the bank or being argued about at church potlucks" (10). My volume has already traveled over one back fence into the hands of a colleague with a 13-year-old daughter, and she will pass the book on to a mutual friend. Let the conversations begin.

Weaving Work and Motherhood

Anita Iltis Garey, 1999,
Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999

Reviewed by Leigh M. O'Brien

As its title indicates, this book details the interconnectedness of "working" mothers' professional and personal lives. Garey uses the international metaphor of weaving, as it is both a process and product. She notes that many women have followed a life pattern that is not linear and often have made life changes dictated by others' circumstances (e.g., a husband's job transfer; a child's graduation from school); but she contends nonetheless that women