

## Modern Motherhood: An American History

Jodi Vandenberg-Daves.

New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014.

REVIEWED BY ELIZABETH CUMMINS MUÑOZ

In *Modern Motherhood: An American History*, historian Jodi Vandenberg-Daves lays out a broad story of motherhood in America from pre-revolutionary Puritan mingling of reproductive and productive labor, to early twenty-first century work-life balance and attachment parenting. The volume draws on myriad historical studies and surveys related to motherhood, women, the family, and children in American history in order to present a chronological narrative that situates motherhood as an institution and a practice within the larger ideological forces of citizenship, gender, race, class, science, and progress. Though its ambitious scope leads to some inevitable imbalances, the volume's greatest strength lies in its successful contextualization of the idea and practice of motherhood within the complicated discursive intersects of American history.

The book is presented in three chronological sections, each of which is organized thematically by chapters. Part I covers the “roots” of modern motherhood in America from the pre-modern world of the English colonies through most of the nineteenth century. In this section, Vandenberg-Daves clearly lays out the origins and development of the ideology of moral motherhood and its conflicting coexistence with the experience of mothers in slavery and institutionalized racism, while also addressing the emerging medical profession’s engagement with the maternal body. Part II examines the rise of “modern” motherhood from 1890 to 1940, during which the ideal of scientific motherhood took center stage before the modern altar of science and progress. This section examines the paternalism of expert mothering advice and public policy that distinguished between the “fit” and “unfit” mother, and the various strategies for adaptation and survival generated within the lived experience of these mothers. In Part III, which examines these ideas from World War II to the present, Vandenberg-Daves traces mainstream narratives of motherhood from the submissive and psychologically problematic suburban housewife of the fifties, to the harried and guilt-ridden working mother of today.

Within each chapter Vandenberg-Daves seeks to balance the white middle class motherhood ideal with a presentation of historical research into the lived experiences of all American women. As she examines the shaping of the institution of motherhood through its discursive interaction with religion, the state, the patriarchal family, science, race, and class, she also strives to

represent the dialectical influence of historical women's adaptive and often resistant practices of motherhood. Unfortunately, the volume is not able to overcome the historical dearth of archival access to the lived experiences of poor women and women of color, and in many cases, the treatment of the mainstream ideal of motherhood overshadows the silence of real women's voices. In recognition of this problem, Vandenberg-Daves calls for increased awareness of cultural diversity and focused historiographic attention to the mothering practices of women of color.

Within the broad scope of this review, three principal themes emerge: the consistent tendency of American women and culture in general to privatize the experience of motherhood and its often excruciating "choices"; the struggle to control women's reproduction and assign meaning to the maternal body; and the rhythmic resurgence of maternalist activism in women's attempts to influence public policy. Each of these themes is shown to play out in different ways in the changing ideals of model motherhood, as the national imaginary moved from reverence for the moral mother, through deference to experts and the ideal of scientific mothering, to the twenty-first century private struggle of intensive mothering. Within all of these models, mainstream attitudes distinguish the "good" mothers from the "bad," and distribute public resources accordingly.

In this ambitious volume's contextualized story of these tensions and the nature of their interplay with other historical forces, *Modern Motherhood* fills a significant gap in motherhood studies and is an important addition to the bookshelves and course syllabi of historians, sociologists, and cultural critics alike.

## Fresh Hell: Motherhood in Pieces

Carellin Brooks.  
Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2013.

REVIEWED BY FAITH GALLIANO DESAI

Carellin Brooks holds a doctorate from Oxford University and is a mother of two children. Her book, *Fresh Hell: Motherhood in Pieces*, is a bluntly honest and darkly humorous exploration of the realities of being a mother. It is a compelling memoir enhanced by its conversational style, and delves into the complex and chaotic world of mothering. Through 52 short ruminations, Brooks reflects on a variety of pertinent topics from sleepless nights to baby poop. The book is organized chronologically during the baby's first