



BAD MOTHERS: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America

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In the past quarter century, "bad" mothers have moved noticeably toward center stage in American culture. While Susan Smith will eventually fade from the tabloids, the monster mother that she represents has a storied and long history. Mothers have been blamed for a host of problems, from autism in children (due to chilly "refrigerator" mothers), to homosexuality (attributed to "smothering" moms), to welfare dependency and crime (caused by black "matriarchs" and single mothers). Some mothers are not good mothers. No one can deny that. There are women who neglect their children, abuse them, and fail to provide them with proper psychological nurturance. While such mothers have always stimulated the American imagination, the definition of what constitutes a bad mother has expanded significantly in recent years. Indeed, with a distinct minority of American families living the two-parent, one-worker lifestyle once considered the norm, we all face the discomfiting question, Do most mothers now qualify as "bad" mothers in one way or another? Drawing together the work of prominent scholars and journalists, "Bad" Mothers considers such diverse topics as the mother-blaming theories of psychological and medical "experts" bad mothers in the popular media, the scapegoating of mothers in politics, and the punitive approach to "bad" mothers by social service and legal authorities. The volume also includes the stories of individual "bad" mothers, from sterilization survivor Willie Mallory to rock star Courtney Love. Ably edited by two leading scholars, "Bad" Mothers marks an important contribution to the literature on motherhood.



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