



A Mother's Job: The History of Day Care, 1890-1960

Elizabeth Rose

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Americans today live with conflicting ideas about day care. We criticize mothers who choose not to stay at home, but we pressure women on welfare to leave their children behind. We recognize the benefits of early childhood education, but do not provide it as a public right until children enter kindergarten. Our children are priceless, but we pay minimum wages to the overwhelmingly female workforce which cares for them. We are not really sure if day care is detrimental or beneficial for children, or if mothers should really be in the workforce. To better understand how we have arrived at these present-day dilemmas, Elizabeth Rose argues, we need to explore day care's past.

A Mother's Job is the first book to offer such an exploration. In this case study of Philadelphia, Rose examines the different meanings of day care for families and providers from the late nineteenth century through the postwar prosperity of the 1950s. Drawing on richly detailed records created by social workers, she explores changing attitudes about motherhood, charity, and children's needs.

How did day care change from a charity for poor single mothers at the turn of the century into a recognized need of ordinary families by 1960? This book traces that transformation, telling the story of day care from the changing perspectives of the families who used it and the philanthropists and social workers who administered it. We see day care through the eyes of the immigrants, whites, and blacks who relied upon day care service as well as through those of the professionals who provided it.

This volume will appeal to anyone interested in understanding the roots of our current day care crisis, as well as the broader issues of education, welfare, and women's work--all issues in which the key questions of day care are enmeshed. Students of social history, women's history, welfare policy, childcare, and education will also encounter much valuable information in this well-written book.

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