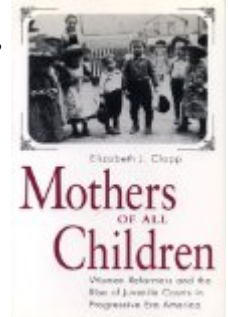


Elizabeth J. Clapp. *Mothers of All Children: Women Reformers and the Rise of Juvenile Courts in Progressive Era America.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998. ix + 214 pp. \$86.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-271-01777-8.



Reviewed by Elizabeth F. Shores

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Elizabeth J. Clapp, a lecturer in American history at the University of Leicester, U.K., provides a detailed account of early advocacy for juvenile courts in the United States, focusing on the roles of middle- and upper-class women's clubs and of Chicago's settlement house workers. She builds her work on extensive research in archives in Chicago and Washington, D.C., and she offers the thesis that female advocates for truants and juvenile delinquents were all maternalists despite different orientations and, further, that their perspective was distinctly different than that of male advocates.

Separate chapters cover the activism of the Chicago Woman's Club, settlement workers in Chicago, the emerging national network of women's clubs, and the widely-known efforts of Benjamin Barr Lindsey, a county court judge in Denver.

Clapp characterizes the members of the Chicago Woman's Club, established in 1876, as traditional maternalists. She describes their efforts as volunteer matrons in the city jail and police stations and as volunteer probation officers or so-

cial workers in court, their creation of a jail school and a charitable boarding school for neglected children, their advocacy in the 1890s for a separate juvenile court and for trials of juveniles within 24 hours of arrest, and finally their support of the 1899 Illinois legislation creating separate juvenile courts—a law which male lawyers and legislators actually carried to enactment.

She characterizes the young women in Chicago's settlement house movement during the same period as professional maternalists because they typically had college educations and were not married. The settlement house workers hoped to infiltrate slum communities, document poverty and its effects, and by advocacy improve conditions for the poor. In addition, however, Clapp describes several women who belonged to both the Chicago Woman's Club and settlement houses.

A third chapter concerns advocacy around the nation for juvenile courts, particularly by the National Congress of Mothers and the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Clapp describes activity in Missouri and Wisconsin to demonstrate how the Chicago Woman's Club was mother to ju-

venile justice drives in other states. She concludes that women operating at a national level tended to be traditional, rather than professional, maternalists.

Beginning in 1901, Judge Lindsey brought an unusual style to juvenile justice. Typically, he ordered delinquent boys to resume attending school and required them to regularly present him with written status reports from their teachers. On these report days, Lindsey delivered homilies on character and virtue and sometimes spoke privately with especially recalcitrant boys, appealing to their better nature (p. 114). Clapp demonstrates that Lindsey's focus on correcting individual boys' characters was distinct from the maternalists interest in correcting slum mothers parenting techniques. In Clapp's view, Lindsey sought to be a super-father to Denver's wayward boys, whereas maternalists hoped to reform delinquent children's mothers through charity and home visits. According to Clapp, Lindsey delegated handling of truant girls, who were sometimes accused of immorality, to female assistants and was less likely to release them on their own recognizance. Clapp seems to consider this fact a bulwark of her thesis that Lindsey's approach to juvenile justice differed from the Chicago approach, that predated it by a few years, because of his gender, when it appears just as possible that Lindsey's method was merely idiosyncratic. In fact, Clapp states later in the same chapter that Lindsey was not typical of male juvenile court reformers. Moreover, she notes that the Denver Woman's Club endorsed Lindseys method. Thus, her premise that there was a single, distinctive masculine approach to juvenile justice seems weak.

Clapp's work is valuable for demonstrating the formative, if informal, role women have played in advocacy for children. The pattern of men taking the lead as spokesmen and sponsors after women recognized social problems and devised solutions continued to the mid-twentieth century, as this writer has found in examining

parents efforts to establish special education in Arkansas.

However, Clapp's theoretical construction of three distinct perspectives within the early juvenile justice movement, those of the traditional maternalist, professional maternalist, and male philanthropic, is not sturdy enough for an otherwise valuable contribution to children's history. Her thesis is strained, as when she acknowledges that in many senses the reformers of the Chicago Woman's Club reflected the bias of their social class and yet argues that of more importance was their gender identification (p. 44). She groups the clubwomen and the nascent social workers of the settlement houses together, although doing so obscures the importance of the latter groups recognition that poverty underlay juvenile delinquency. To this reviewer, the more important point is that gender solidarity did *not* extend across class lines. Middle-and upper-class clubwomen did not understand or empathize with poor mothers. On the contrary, they believed that if slum women simply acted more like middle-class women, their children would be better off. This attitude continues to permeate conservative thinking about child welfare.

On another note, Clapp's work deserved more careful editing. Her book suffers from repetition and muddled writing. A more thorough explanation of the circumstances of children in the courts before the juvenile justice movement would have been helpful, as would have a bibliographic essay, a key to abbreviations in the footnotes, and, for that matter, more scrupulous editing of the footnotes (admittedly, a very tedious task).

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