



## **The War on Moms: On Life in a Family-Unfriendly Nation**

*Sharon Lerner*

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**"A stinging account of how public policy and private businesses have failed to adapt to working mothers."**

--**Jennifer Ludden, NPR** Why life is harder on American families than it's been in decades—the book that takes the blame away from moms and puts it where it really belongs

Pressed for time and money, unable to find decent affordable daycare, wracked with guilt at falling short of the mythic supermom ideal—working and non-working American mothers alike have it harder today than they have in decades, and they are worse off than many of their peers around the world. Why? Because they're raising their kids in a family-unfriendly nation that virtually sets them up to fail. *The War on Moms* exposes the stress put on families by an outdated system still built around the idea that women can afford not to work. It tells the truth that overworked, stressed-out American moms need to hear—that they're not alone, and they're not to blame.

Expose a lack of reasonable and flexible work opportunities as the real cause of the supposed rift between employed and stay-at-home mothers

Explodes the myths about supermoms, slacker dads, opt-out moms, bootstrap moms, daycare options, and make-money-from-home scams

Uncovers the widespread, brutal reality of having no paid maternity leave

Offers portraits of real women—across social classes and across the country—who are struggling with issues that will strike a familiar chord with most Americans

Explains why American women have it hard and why it's not going to get any easier until the country dramatically changes course

*The War on Moms* turns the "mommy wars" debate on its head by arguing that a mother's real "enemy" is not other women, but a nationwide indifference to the cultural and economic realities facing parents and families in the United States today.

## The War on Moms: On Life in a Family-Unfriendly Nation Details

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Author : Sharon Lerner

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## **From Reader Review The War on Moms: On Life in a Family-Unfriendly Nation for online ebook**

### **Vickie says**

This book does a great job of demonstrating the problems facing working as well as stay at home mothers in the middle and lower classes. I liked how this book showed that stay at home moms do not always have it easy and are often struggling to survive, while also showing that working mothers don't always get to choose to work or not but are often forced to return to work before they are ready. It draws attention to the fact that if things are this hard for so many people than something is wrong with our society that we need to change.

I agree that mothers and children are very important to society and should be supported, but I do not think this book gave satisfying answers to how that should be done. The author seems to think that we should imitate European countries and adopt more of their policies on universal childcare and maternity benefits. However, those countries are taxed more heavily than we are, so if families are already struggling I don't think taxing them more is going to help them too much. In addition, I recently saw an article on how those same European countries are now having to cut down on a lot of their social benefits due to their mounting debt crisis. Obviously those systems are not working as well as they may seem to.

The focus of the book is really on the problems and not on proposing many solutions and that's ok. I think getting people to realize that this is a big issue that needs to be addressed is a huge step in the right directions. Solutions can come later. This book addresses these problems well so I would recommend this book to other readers interested in what obstacles mothers and families face today.

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### **Chris says**

I abandoned this book.

I picked it up because it looked interesting, and because it addresses key issues that I find to be increasingly important in my everyday life. The truth is: we live in a culture and society that refuses to support parents. It starts with a total lack of support for maternity/paternity leave, includes unreal "options" for childcare and safety while continuing to work, continues with an unrealistic expectation for hours when one has a family, and so on. These are all true.

We live in a society which sets parents up to fail. Why? Because our system of childcare is based on the assumption that one-income household is realistic or possible. It is neither, not anymore, but our childcare system has not adjusted for that.

Yet I still abandoned the book. This is largely because I didn't feel that the book actually added anything to the discourse. I read as much of this book as I did because I was interested to adding to my own knowledge and ability to discuss this topic intelligently with others. Yet the book did not add anything I didn't already know. It wasn't particularly well written. It was more a rant, or a list of figures without citing sources (not useful at all). I don't need examples of stories of people who are struggling--I live it and I know other parents. (I especially don't need stories about parents who are struggling due to the medical problems of their children--that's all tied into the health care debate, which is obviously changing rapidly right now with the

change in laws, so it's not helpful to a conversation centered around supporting parents, and not about health care)

What I wanted was an insightful analysis of how we got here, ways in which parents are not but could be supported, ways in which mothers are disproportionately affected, and practical suggestions for change. A sophisticated analysis, like a Fresh Air interview with a really smart guest. That is not this book. It tried to be those things, but it failed in the analysis.

And I am a mom. I'm busy. I have a lot of work to do, a lot of parenting to do, a lot of other books I want to read, but will probably not get to. So I abandoned this book, so I could have time reading something that would actually add to my education or at least my entertainment.

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### **Lesley says**

Educational read. Good info...something all women with careers who have children can relate to.

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### **Kyla says**

I flipped through this, not because it wasn't good - but because the facts are so goddamned depressing and hopeless that I couldn't bear to revisit them.

I just upped this review up a star in response to the critical reviews that seem to think America is an amazing country for Moms and families and it will all just sort itself out if women can pull themselves up by their goddamned bootstraps and stay married and plan for their giant hospital bills and find affordable private daycare (snort)...so baffling to me.

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### **Raysha Faye says**

Skimmed large parts of the second half. Not an incredibly mind-blowing read by any means, but definitely some good insights and information for anyone who hasn't looked into this topic before. I was a little bored with it though, to be frank.

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### **Lauren says**

The War on Moms claims to be different from other looks at women in the workplace - specifically mothers - because it focuses on the working class rather than the "elites." The book takes a classist view, noting that the plight of the working class is not representative of women in America as a whole. That may be true, but of course if women in the so-called elites (you know, the ones with ivy league degrees and white shoe careers) are having trouble piercing the glass ceiling and "opt out" (i.e. are forced out of the workplace) then really, is there any hope for anyone else? I'm not sure it makes sense to write off the struggles of the elite as unrepresentative as the elites are the ones who ought to be fulfilling the promise of women's lib, but only seem able to do it when eschewing motherhood altogether.

Predictably, the book says that if you think the elites have it bad, just look at those folks with regular jobs. Lerner focuses on the lack of real maternity leave benefits, lack of affordable childcare options, poor health insurance, stringent abortion regulations in the poorest states (this book is decidedly pro-choice), gender inequalities at home, and general discrimination towards women in the workplace for having children as placing working mothers at a high risk for poverty and debt just for having a child. It makes the decision to have a child look insane!

Unsurprisingly, Europe is held up as the ideal. It certainly is in some senses, offering far superior health benefits, childcare benefits, and maternity leave benefits (but with significantly higher taxes that come along with it). However the book doesn't answer one key question: with these great benefits, why is it that Europeans aren't really having babies? The birth rate in America is much higher. The book tries to answer this question unconvincingly, by focusing largely on the European tendency to marry later and "blaming" America's high birthrate on Hispanic immigrants. But most Americans - including non-Hispanic - seem to have 2 or 3 kids based on my time on Mommy message boards as well as people I know in real life. I don't think a society that can't even reach replacement levels is an ideal either. Ultimately, I think the women's lib movement made a false promise - women really can't have it all - even in Europe. Even if the European government pays for 12 months of maternity leave, those are 12 months out of the work force - and I suspect that women can't "afford" to take that leave more than once. At the end of the day, women still compete with men and are at a disadvantage because pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding shifts the burden primarily towards women. While we can quibble with how much help men can offer overall, in reality, women are the ones who pay the price for childbearing and the workplace discriminates against this... Moreover, Europe has a higher overall cost of living compared to the US.

I don't really think a government solution is a panacea. Yes, better benefits **WOULD** be great - certainly everyone should have some level of paid maternity benefits. However, that does come at a price (both political tradeoffs and increased taxes - so really people pay for these benefits anyway).

I do think the lack of paid maternity benefits in this country is a valid issue. But overall, I think that the women's lib movement and commentators forget that as much as we try, women are at a biological disadvantage compared to men. Growing babies is hard work - it takes a good two years starting from conception for women (particularly those who breastfeed) to feel like "themselves" after having a child. Rightly or wrongly, it causes a competitive disadvantage in the work place. This is an important issue, but I still feel that it hasn't adequately been addressed how to reconcile the promises of the women's lib movement with the realities of the workplace.

\*Reviewed for Amazon VINE.

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### **Jenne says**

This book describes in a way that I think even the most conservative mother would see the need for more societal and political support for public policies that encourages families to provide for their children. It just makes sense that a government would have a vested interest in investing in children as they are the future of the country. It is well illustrated that families just like many Americans get a better deal in countries like Holland, Sweden and France. Holland has the best societal support of families and it's enough to make one very jealous and lead some to consider becoming an expatriate. Unlike many books that discuss the need for individual support and grassroots efforts for lobbying support, this book does not offer it. This is discouraging for parents who all ready feel constrained by decision makers and feel powerless to do

anything. That said perhaps my favorite line of the book was, instead of yelling at your spouse when in the impossible situation of both being employees with familial responsibilities, write an angry letter to your legislator emphasizing the need for paid family leave, flexible, part-time with benefits employment.

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### **Christine Johnson-Duell says**

Lerner writes eloquently and powerfully about the lack of 1) paid maternity leave, 2) flexible work options, and 3) quality affordable childcare in the US and the cumulative effect of this trifecta on the American family. Lerner points out that the US is a serious outlier in supporting family, unlike Djibouti, for example, which offers 14 months of paid maternity leave. She also points out that some women can't actually *\*afford\** to work, given the pay/childcare cost ratio. Important book.

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### **Tracy says**

I won this book for Free on Goodreads First-reads!

I loaned it to a friend who said the book was very insightful; "It was like reading a book about my own life." I can't wait to read it for myself. It is an insightful book about socioeconomic hardships that low and middle class mothers face. This book is a real conversation starter. If you agree with the thought that mothers should have the government help raise their children and take the burden off of them, then this book will give you some ammo. If, however, you believe that mothers should raise their own children and not have the government do it for them, this book will be a frustrating read but should give you some insight to the other line of thinking.

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### **Jen says**

Wow! Everyone should read this. She definitely focuses on public policy being the solution but she does touch on a lot of 'touchy' subjects and does not seem judgmental of any choice a parent decides (stay at home or work). Her focus is more on how our society can be supportive of the choices that families make. The last paragraph sums up the entire book well.

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### **Pinky says**

Felt totally disgusted with the U.S. after reading this. We're the only industrialized nation in the world that does not offer paid family leave. I'm moving to France.

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### **Ms. Online says**

Why are U.S. mothers so pressed for time and money? Journalist Sharon Lerner sets aside such decoys as "opts-out moms" and "slacker dads" to examine the root of the problem: family-unfriendly U.S. policies.

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### **Ana Mardoll says**

The War on Moms / 978-0-470-17709-9

It's not easy being a mom, and it's becoming more and more so in America. You probably already knew that, but what author Lerner can provide in this fast blow to the gut are the numbers and facts to back that statement up. Interspersed with anecdotal tales of tragedy and of well-meaning, loving families sinking into heart-rending poverty at the birth of a developmentally challenged child, or the unexpected loss of a job, the reader will also find hard facts and comparisons - including numbers and data from poverty-stricken, non-industrialized nations that still treat motherhood with more care and dignity than America does (America being "one of only five nations - rich or poor - not to grant new mothers paid time off").

"The War on Moms" is a quick read, and yet essential for anyone thinking about becoming a parent. Lerner argues - correctly, in my opinion - that we need to empower women and mothers to make choices: choices about whether or not to work outside the home, choices about when to return to work after giving birth, choices about how their children will be cared for. Lerner strenuously avoids the "good mommy"/"bad mommy" rhetoric by arguing that such divisive tactics only hurt people in the long run and do nothing to help individuals make the choices that are best for them.

Most notably, Lerner brings to light the "puppy mentality" that so many people in America hold - that children are novelty 'pets' and that the onus for caring and raising should fall solely on the parent and never on their employers or society. Yet who will be the doctors and engineers and builders and teachers if no one ever has children or raises them to be strong, healthy members of society? Lerner carefully punctures the notion that children are a luxury and that mothers do not deserve the resources they need to raise their children as best they see fit.

I felt that this book was well-written, thoroughly researched, and careful to extend respect and humanity to all mothers, regardless of their individual choices or working conditions. I appreciate that Lerner is careful to never disparage either working moms or stay-at-home moms, and I value the fact that she understands that neither choice is one made easily, nor is one choice "better" than another.

NOTE: This review is based on a free Advance Review Copy of this book provided through Amazon Vine.

~ Ana Mardoll

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### **Kristina says**

Everyone should read this.

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### **Brent says**

This is a fantastic book! Lerner talks about how the U.S. lacks a coherent policy to help mothers (and parents in general) from having the money, security, and healthcare they need for themselves and their infants.

Children are the future and it is beneficial for all of society to invest in their care (as we do with public education), but before school begins women are mostly on their own finding a job with maternity leave, health coverage, and the flexibility to take care of their kids. Some respond to this by saying that mothers shouldn't be working and they should stay home with their kids, but many mothers simply don't have this choice. There's no one else around to work or even if there is, it's just not enough. If U.S. society wants children, we should reward those who make the sacrifice to have kids instead of leaving them all to their own devices.

It wasn't long ago that I hated kids and would've laughed at the idea of a book like this, but I've changed. I think even from the most selfish standpoint, an individual's success is largely dependent on the state of the society they live in and a society that neglects its children will fail. We can let families fend for themselves saying that's how it should be or we can recognize that simply isn't working and something needs to change. Raising children is a public service and it should be rewarded as such. Mothers can be teachers, doctors, psychologists, coaches, cooks, and so much more for their children. We pay all of those people for what they do, why not mothers? Perhaps there was a time when men paid women for this, but that time is behind us now. The world has changed and we need to adapt.

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