AND SIN
NO MORE
RIMA D. APPLE AND JANET GOLDEN, EDITORS

The Selling of Contraception
The Dalkon Shield Case, Sexuality, and Women’s Autonomy
Nicole J. Grant
AND SIN NO MORE

Social Policy and Unwed Mothers in Cleveland, 1855–1990

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With love and gratitude to my own children, Margaret, Elizabeth, John, and Sarah, who taught me much about motherhood
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Marian Morton’s study illuminates the historical roots of an emotionally charged contemporary social issue: single motherhood. By tracing the care of unwed mothers in Cleveland and exploring how the changing dynamics of social welfare, religion, and race affected private and public choices, this research enables us to better understand today’s responses to single parenthood.

As demographers chart the rise of single parenthood in the late twentieth century, politicians vigorously debate appropriate methods for discouraging out-of-wedlock births. Appropriately dubbed “bridefare,” these are modifications of the Aid to Dependent Children (AFDC) programs and are designed to encourage marriage and to punish single mothers. Pilot programs in Wisconsin and New Jersey aim to reward AFDC recipients who marry and include financial disincentives for additional out-of-wedlock births. The success of “bridefare” will be judged, at least in part, on whether the programs reduce or delay subsequent pregnancies and on whether they increase the number of two-parent families. These and other programs proposed throughout the country demonstrate a political agenda informed by discussions of particular definitions of “family values.”

Clearly, the single mother today, as in the nineteenth century, evokes a cultural response deeply rooted in our notions of morality, economics, sexuality, health care, and family. In analyzing the experiences of reformers providing maternity services, and in probing the ways race and religion shaped institutions serving what were once termed “unwed mothers,” Morton has given us a vital history of an enduring social condition.

Rima D. Apple
Janet Golden
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What’s a nice girl like me doing in a place like this?

As have thousands of unwed mothers, I asked myself that question innumerable times in the last several years as I found myself living with—but thankfully not in—maternity homes and hospitals. Like most of those mothers’ stories, mine began innocently enough. I had a simple desire to spend a summer looking out of the windows of the Western Reserve Historical Society library at its lovely formal gardens. This desire, and the fortuitous discovery in that library that respectable Victorian women had sought the reclamation of their fallen sisters, led me down my own primrose path. A book that started out to be about private homes for unwed mothers came to include public institutions, which I now believe may have been more important. So it was that half a dozen years later I found myself in a dark, cluttered basement hallway of Cleveland Metropolitan General Hospital en route to an interview with a very knowledgeable woman on whose office wall hung her degree in sex education. I had come a long way from those formal gardens.

Along that way I acquired many debts. I would like to here thank some of those who helped me.

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