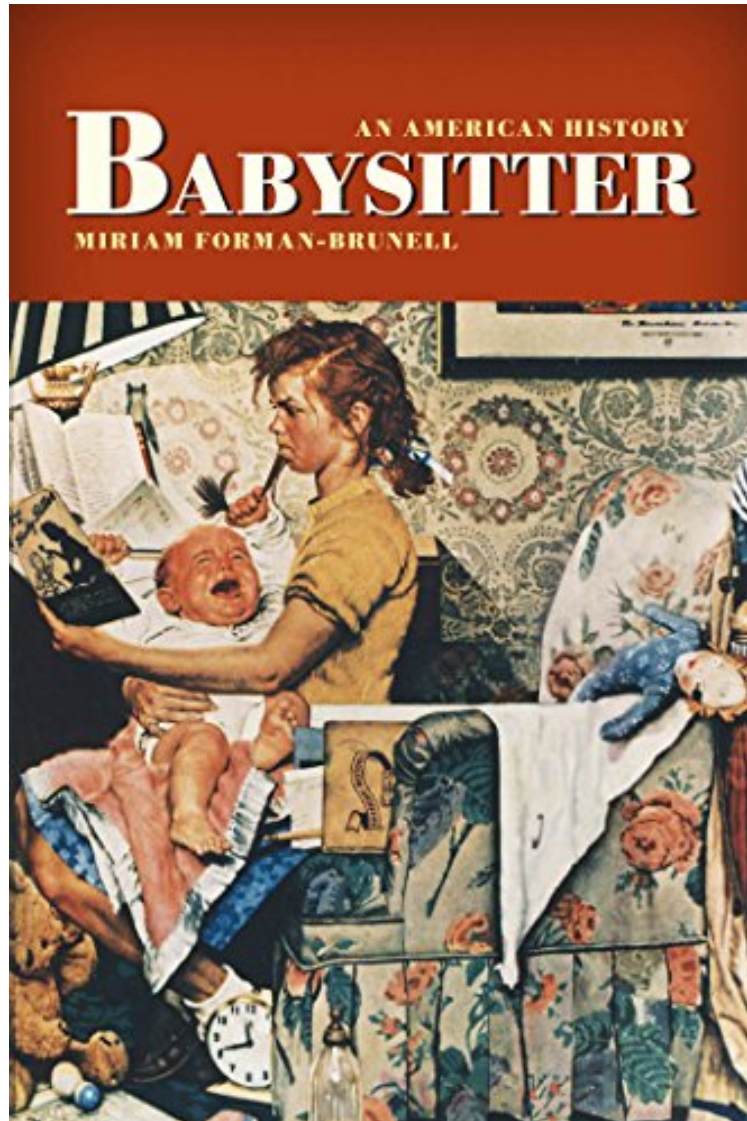


Babysitter: An American History

Miriam Forman-Brunell

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Miriam Forman-Brunell : Babysitter: An American History before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Babysitter: An American History:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Enjoyed this book very much!By Carole A. GnatukWell researched and engaging to read. I am writing a babysitting curriculum and found this book very useful. I highly recommend it as the only one of its kind as far as I know.3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Century of BabysittingBy Story Circle Book ReviewsFrom the beginnings of babysitting to the fall of babysitting, Miriam Forman-Brunell has

produced a sweeping history of the practice not chronicled elsewhere. *Babysitter: An American History* gives us a welcome look at the subculture of babysitting in the United States. When you peruse the extensive notes and bibliography, it's not surprising that the book has taken nearly two decades to complete (Forman-Brunell began her project in the early 1990's). While the book covers the 20th century, with emphasis on the 1950s through the 1980s, we are reminded of previous generations (including Puritans, enslaved African Americans, and urban working-class children) charged with babysitting as their duty without the benefit of payment. Readers will find the book full of curious bits of observations and facts about American popular culture as it relates to babysitting. For instance, poet, Sylvia Plath, at age fourteen, wrote about her first experience babysitting in a paper for an English class. The two boys demanded she read aloud story after story, jumped on top of her, playing "kill the bear," and the popcorn she was making caught fire. Plath concluded that "little children are bothersome beings...all in all, a nuisance." The narrative moves from the 1920s through the 1940s as girls begin to challenge older generations with their new conduct and confidence. As the United States marched off to war, births fell, then rose; and mothers took on jobs, then gave them up to be homemakers and move to the suburbs. The second half of the 20th century brought significant changes as society experienced more war, the sexual revolution, increasing divorce rates and mothers going back to work once again. The impact of movies, television, music, books, magazines, soft porn, and urban myths altered perceptions of babysitters. For teenagers themselves, babysitting became unattractive when social and school activities increased giving them less time for jobs. Those who wished to work could earn more money elsewhere. For a time, mothers turned to middle school-age children, many as young as ten, to fill the gap. But by the end of the century, as Forman-Brunell relates, "girls with greater self-esteem, growing individualism, higher aspirations, more extracurricular activities, and new job options abandoned the field of babysitting that had been the leading form of female adolescent employment for generations." As a babysitter myself I was struck by what I remembered and what I never knew. Many women (and men) of several generations will find *Babysitter* a worthwhile read. There is much to absorb, recall in our own lives, laugh at, and react to with horror.

by Diana Nolan for Story Circle Book Reviews reviewing books by, for, and about women

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A lively and fun read about a uniquely American phenomenon!

By Todd Bartholomew While it's hard to believe that babysitting would be the subject of scholarly examination by a professor, "*Babysitter*" is just that. Forman-Brunell's book attempts a socio-cultural examination of the phenomenon that, it turns out, is no longer the province of teenage girls. Forman-Brunell tracks the beginnings of babysitting, which surprisingly began during the depths of the great depression. The word itself first came into use in 1937 to describe the new phenomenon of teenage girls watching children while parents were otherwise engaged in a range of activities. It seems strange to think that the Lindbergh Kidnapping prompted a sudden concern about leaving children unattended, but oftentimes events such as that spark a sudden cultural change. As more women were entering the workforce, the use of servants decreased, and the extended family living under one roof became less common there arose a need for someone outside of the family to tend to children's needs. Enter the babysitter; the trusted neighbor or friend outside of the family to fill that void. The lack of ability to pay adult wages necessitated that teenagers fill that need, and considering they lacked employable skills and needed money supply met demand. Babysitting by its very nature has been a largely unregulated part of the labor market and the unevenness of the caretakers ability and the high demands of the parents could sometimes result in severe inequities and led to considerable angst with both parties. Forman-Brunell explores the cultural complaints and depictions of teenage babysitters as hormone crazed eating machines wreaking havoc to the more nuanced view of them as budding entrepreneurs. It's hard to imagine their being enough original source material for Forman-Brunell to mine for such a book, but she does so with zeal and digs up very interesting facts and her writing is quite crisp and readable. There is scarcely a family in the U.S. who hasn't been touched by babysitting phenomenon; either working as babysitters, having been watched by babysitters, or having employed them, as Forman-Brunell has. Sadly, this is a phenomenon that no longer is the realm of the teenage girls, as she points out. Nowadays teenage girls are more interested in sports and other activities including jobs that pay far better with better working conditions. In many instances parents have opted to dispense with a babysitter or are hiring more capable adults to perform the service. In that respect "*Babysitter*" may be a time capsule of an era of American History that is passing from the scene.

On Friday nights many parents want to have a little fun together without the kids. But getting a sitter especially a dependable one rarely seems trouble-free. Will the kids be safe with that girl? It's a question that discomfited parents have been asking ever since the emergence of the modern American teenage girl nearly a century ago. In *Babysitter*, Miriam Forman-Brunell brings critical attention to the ubiquitous, yet long-overlooked babysitter in the popular imagination and American history. Informed by her research on the history of teenage girls culture, Forman-Brunell analyzes the babysitter, who has embodied adults' fundamental apprehensions about girls' pursuit of autonomy and empowerment. In fact, the grievances go both ways, as girls have been distressed by unsatisfactory working conditions. In her quest to gain a fuller picture of this largely unexamined cultural phenomenon, Forman-Brunell analyzes a wealth of diverse sources, such as *The Baby-sitters Club* book series, horror movies like *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, urban legends, magazines, newspapers, television shows, pornography, and more. Forman-Brunell

shows that beyond the mundane, understandable apprehensions stirred by hiring a caretaker to mind the children in ones own home, babysitters became lightning rods for societys larger fears about gender and generational change. In the end, experts efforts to tame teenage girls with training courses, handbooks, and other texts failed to prevent generations from turning their backs on babysitting.

From horror movies and pornography to the squeaky-clean cast of the Baby-sitters Club books, our cultural views of babysitters reveal more about our societal hang-ups than they do about the neighborhood teenagers who watch our children.-CalgaryHerald.comIs there a parent who hasnt fretted about getting a baby sitter for the night? Is there a baby sitter who hasnt felt put upon, underpaid, distrusted? For more than eight decades, baby-sitting has been part of our social and cultural history. Now, Forman-Brunell has analyzed its origins, evolution and inner workings.-Kansas City StarBabysitter is an exemplary work of cultural history, using widely disparate sources to correct popular but misguided myths about teens labor history, girls cultural practices, and the family as an ideological construct. Written concisely and accessibly with ample illustrations, Babysitter is ideal for undergraduates and professional scholars alike.-Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth" In this first-ever history of babysitting, Miriam Forman-Brunell has written an enjoyable account of class employees who, she argues, does an extraordinary amount of cultural work in addition to its assigned childcare chores." -Susan A. Miller,Enterprise and SocietyAs historian Forman-Brunells research reveals, the archetype of the bad baby sitter has more to do with adults fears about the changing nature of girlhood today . . . than it does with the reality of girls caring for younger kids for pay.-Salon.comA gem of a book. In its ingenious use of sources, its interpretive reach, its marvelous prose style, its wisdom and wit, Babysitter is a model of cultural history. It is also the best work I have read in years on twentieth-century gender politics, youth culture, sexuality, and family history. I cannot recommend it highly enough to scholars, students, and the general public. - David Nasaw,author of Children of the City: At Work and at PlayForman-Brunell does a service by documenting one of the few remaining common denominators of American lifethrough this one, too, is disappearing.-Wall Street JournalFor more than eight decades, baby-sitting has been part of our social and cultural history. Now, Miriam Forman-Brunell, history professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, has analyzed its origins, evolution, and inner workings.-KansasCity.comBabysitter: An American History is richly researched, investigative, provocative, and a most unique journey through the past century. -Estes Park NewsFrom horror movies and pornography to the squeaky-clean cast of the Baby-sitters Club books, our cultural views of babysitters reveal more about our societal hang-ups than they do about the neighborhood teenagers who watch our children.-National PostIn this well-documented, illustrated discussion of our cultures perceptions of babysitters through the years, the author skillfully demonstrates how changing social mores and attitudes toward girls and women were responsible for the astonishing range of notions about babysitters, running the gamut from child-care provider to home wrecker. . . . Forman-Brunell makes excellent use of the various babysitting handbooks published over the years, and, particularly, of the commercial novels (e.g., The Baby-Sitters Club series) and movies that came out, from domestic comedies to horror films reflecting parents (and babysitters) worst nightmares.-Library JournalThe first tome to analyze the ubiquitous, yet misunderstood teenaged caretaker.-TheGlobeAndMail.comThis cultural and social history captures dominant gender and generational struggles of the twentieth century around girlhood independence, domestic norms, and fragile masculinity. Forman-Brunell takes us on an engaging romp through urban legends, codes of conduct, slasher and pornographic movies, and the teen culture and resistance strategies of girls themselves.-Eileen Boris,author of Home to Work: Motherhood and The Politics of Industrial Homework in the United StatesThis chronicle of baby-sitting within the changing landscape of girlhood culture provides a voice for generations of baby-sitters and new insights into the history of rapidly shifting norms for growing up in America.-The Journal of American HistoryIt is remarkable that babysitting has lacked a history. Meticulously researched, written with humor and acute insight, this book not only chronicles the actual experience of babysitting over nearly a century, but shows how the babysitter served as a cultural lightning rod for anxieties over shifting womens liberation, the waning of masculine authority, teen sexuality, and the decline of the nuclear family. Powerful, provocative, persuasive.-Steven Mintz,author of Hucks RaftMiriam Forman-Brunell has written an enjoyable account of a class of employees who, she argues, does an extraordinary amount of cultural working addition to its assigned childcare chores.-Oxford JournalsIn this intriguing social and cultural history, Forman-Brunell (Univ. of Missouri-Kansas City) uses a wide array of sources to argue that the 20th-century creation of the babysitter can tell much about the changing views of girlhood over time, both from the perspective of adults and of girls themselves.-ChoiceConsiders the history of the babysitter in American culture, and why she has so frequently been perceived as a dangerous figure.-The New YorkerPowerfully reclaiming the marginalized history of girls domestic labor, Forman-Brunell deftly examines a broad range of cultural artifacts to help us understand how different generations used the figure of the babysitter to negotiate shifting norms for gender, age, work, and sexuality.-Mary Celeste Kearney,author of Girls Make MediaWhat might have just been an amusing collection of related relics is instead a sophisticated and smooth history of girl culture and shifting family values in Forman-Brunells capable hands. . . . Its a thorough investigation of our cultural anxieties about childcare and an intriguing look at what happens when a teenage girl rules the roost.-Bust" Meticulously researched and cleverly written, Babysitter is a must-read for anyone

interested in the important yet oft-overlooked history of babysitting and the gendered politics of representation in U.S. popular culture. It's a delightful book that I encourage you to recommend not only to your students and colleagues in the academy, but also to your friends, family members, and former babysitting employers." -Kirsten Pike, *Jump Cut*

Miriam Forman-Brunell's *Babysitter: An American History* explores the multifaceted meaning of the sitter in popular culture. -*Bookforum*

Miriam Forman-Brunell's *Babysitter: An American History* takes on the trope of the teen sitter. -*Jezebel.com*

"Stunning...*Babysitter* represents a real cultural triumph. The new paperback edition of [the book] belongs on the shelf of anyone interested in women's history and cultural studies. Academics who teach these topics should get it into the hands of their students." -*Pop Matters*

In this informative and entertaining book, Miriam Forman-Brunell, the author of (1993) and other works on the history of girls, has creatively mined popular culture sources and personal reminiscences to provide the first history of baby-sitting. -*Journal of American History*

What might have just been an amusing collection of related relics is instead a sophisticated and smooth history of girl culture and shifting family values in Forman-Brunell's capable hands. . . . It's a thorough investigation of our cultural anxieties about childcare and an intriguing look at what happens when a teenage girl rules the roost. -*Bust Magazine*

Forman-Brunell sets out to examine the relationship between teenage sitters and their employers over the past century. -*The Washington Post*

Babysitter offers a sophisticated analysis of the world's youngest profession that reveals almost a century's worth of generational and gender-based conflict. The sources are imaginative, the thinking is complex, and the argument is provocative at times, even startling. -*Grace Palladino*, author of *Teenagers: An American History*

For more than eight decades, baby-sitting has been part of our social and cultural history. Now, Miriam Forman-Brunell, history professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, has analyzed its origins, evolution, and inner workings. -*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

Why and how the baby sitter rose to pop culture prominence is one of the topics explored by Miriam Forman-Brunell in her book *Babysitter: An American History*. -*The Los Angeles Times*

Babysitter...is a welcome addition to the histories of adolescence and girlhood which have increasingly emerged over the last dozen years. Forman-Brunell is one of those rare academics who easily bridges disciplines, using the methods of the traditional historian, the literary critic, and the popular-culture commentator to present a well-researched and highly readable narrative about babysitters who are among the most visible, yet invisible, figures in American culture. -*The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*

About the Author: Miriam Forman-Brunell is Professor of History at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. She is the author of *Made to Play House* and general editor of *ABC-CLIO's Girlhood in America*. She is also co-director of *Children and Youth in History*.