



# **Fat Blame: How the War on Obesity Victimizes Women and Children**

*April Michelle Herndon*

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A four year old Mexican American girl is taken away from her parents because she is obese and experiencing health problems related to her weight. Such a measure, once seen as extreme, quickly comes to be seen as a logical means of addressing a problem viewed as nothing short of child abuse. And yet, for all the purported concern for these children's welfare, little if any mention is ever made of the psychological ramifications of removing children from their families. They are simply the latest victims of the war on obesity—a war declared on a "disease" but conducted, April Herndon contends in this book, along cultural lines.

*Fat Blame* is a book about how the war on obesity is, in many ways, shaping up to be a battle against women and children, especially women and children who are marginalized via class and race. While conceding that fatness can be linked to certain conditions, or that some populations might be heavier than others, Herndon is more interested in the ways women and children are blamed for obesity and the ways interventions aimed at preventing obesity are problematic in and of themselves. From bariatric surgeries being performed on children to women being positioned as responsible for carrying to term a generation of thin children, her book looks closely at the stories of real people whose lives are drastically altered by interventions that are supposedly for their own good.

As with so many practices surrounding bodies and health, like dieting, people are often simultaneously blamed and empowered through policies and interventions, especially those that seem to offer them choices. What Herndon reveals is how such choices only offer the illusion of being empowering. Rather, she shows how woman and children are pushed, pulled, and sometimes victimized by interventions such as bariatric surgeries, limits on reproductive technologies, and having their families broken up by the courts. Only by identifying members of this group as victims of discrimination, she argues, can we hope to return them to a fuller and richer kind of agency.

In declaring a war on obesity, the United States has said that fat is one of the most serious enemies it faces. *Fat Blame* asks us to confront the real enemy—the moral, political, and ideological significance of our every move in this "war."

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