

That Bad Baby

Let's TALK Kids

Claudia Quigg

This guy is bad to the bone. His parents hang their heads in shame as fingers and tongues wag in judgment of him. Is he a bank robber or a drug dealer? No, he's a colicky baby. And he's only eight weeks old.

How can a tiny infant commit acts heinous enough to warrant the disdain of adults? How indeed. And yet this baby has already been judged by the world around him.

This baby came to my mind recently as I listened while a group of admirers worshipfully adored a "Good Baby," proclaimed so by his doting grandmother. This Good Baby, it seems, did everything his parents hoped he would. He slept well and cried little. When he did fuss briefly, a quick, efficient feeding put him back into a contented sleep. His days were lovely and his nights were silent, just the way we parents like them.

And while I'm grateful for the apparently easy time his parents are having with him, I'm also thinking about some other babies I know. I'm thinking of an eight-week-old boy, a little fellow with an intelligent look and a ready smile. This boy cries. A lot. And his exhausted mother is worn out from trying to bring him comfort.

While no one would call this baby a Bad Baby (at least not to his face), the implication is clear. If babies who sleep and don't fuss are Good, then the ones who don't sleep and cry all day must, by comparison, be Bad. These hapless infants are the Yang to the contented ones' Yin.

But I have a soft spot in my heart for these "Bad" babies. Young infants who cry more than average are typically sensitive. It is harder for them to shut out stimulation in the environment. When they get overloaded, crying is their only means of blowing off steam.



"Bad" babies are also often very active babies. They have a lot of energy to invest passionately in their lives.

Some of my favorite adults are sensitive people. They tune in to the needs of people around them. They pay attention to the environment and can sense what's happening. High-energy people get more work done than most. They infuse a room with spirit, and invest

themselves into their inquiries about the world.

I can only guess because his mother is not here to tell us, but I'll bet Thomas Alva Edison was a Bad Baby. As an adult, he slept only a few hours at night in his lab, so that he could hop up and work as he awakened. Thomas Jefferson also functioned well on nights as short as two to five hours. Leonardo da Vinci was said to sleep only a couple of hours at night compared to Sir Isaac Newton's three or four hours.

Human history has described the rich contributions of these men. Nowhere in their biographies are they described as Bad Babies (although it's worth noting that Edison's school failure resulted in his education only lasting a few months.)

Somehow we judge babies' "goodness" by the demands they place on adults. Good Babies demand little of us, while Bad Babies require more effort. It's really egocentric, the way we judge these little ones based on our own needs.

So count on me to stand as character witness for these little rascals when they are indicted. Most of the Bad Babies I know grow up to be my favorite people.

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