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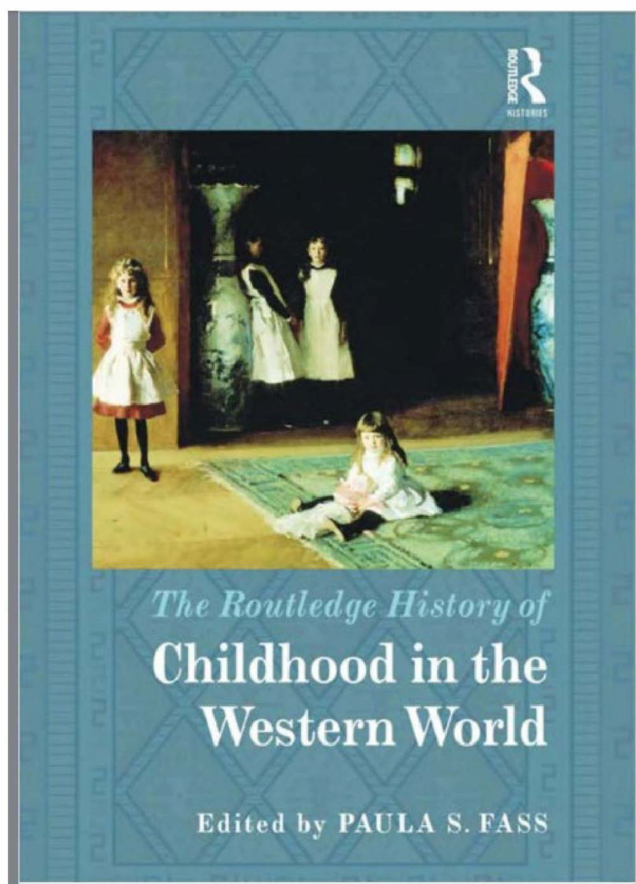
Fass, P.S., Is there a story in the history of childhood?, in Fass, P.S. (ed), The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World (Routledge, USA and Canada, 2013), pp 1-14.



THE ROUTLEDGE HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD IN THE WESTERN WORLD

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First published 2013
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
The Routledge history of childhood in the western world/
edited by Paula S. Fass.
p. cm. – (The Routledge histories)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Children–Western countries–History.
I. Fass, Paula S.
HQ767.87.R68 2012
305.2309182'1–dc23 2012025119

ISBN: 978-0-415-78232-6 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-203-07578-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon by
Sunrise Setting Ltd

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IS THERE A STORY IN THE HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD?

Paula S. Fass

When Philippe Ariès published *Centuries of Childhood*, a history of childhood over the course of four hundred years, in 1960 (in French, translated into English 1962),[1] he almost certainly did not know that he would begin a long history of his own, one in which his book would generate applause and outrage, and in the long term a wealth of research in a new field of history. There had been others who believed that children could be studied historically, but no one before Ariès had made the study of childhood an essential component for understanding modern western development. And no one else had provided such a good story. *Centuries of Childhood* was fertile in controversy at the time. More significantly it showed scholars that raising pointed questions about childhood in order to imagine the earliest (and least historically accessible) stage of life, and about childhood as a important element of change, could be a fascinating and fruitful, even an urgent, historical endeavor.

I begin this book with Ariès because, as the reader will shortly discover, at least one half of the authors notice him in their essays, but mostly because I hope that this volume, coming as it does fifty years after the English language edition of *Centuries of Childhood*, will firmly replace his book, both among professionals and among the more general reading public. Despite millions of words since 1960 on the subject of childhood history, Ariès's remains usually the first, and often the only, book that is read in this rich and dynamic field. And the new childhood history has itself hardly been integrated into the larger picture of western development. It is time, I am certain, to change that and to bring to a large audience the fruits of a new and vibrant scholarship that takes children and childhood seriously as historically important subjects. That scholarship is deeply sourced in many places and times in the western past. *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World* is intended to be read both as a culmination of an impressive scholarship incorporated into the essays that follow on a wide range of subjects relating to children, and as an introduction to the field. We now know a lot that Ariès did not know. All of the essays are original works of scholarship in themselves as well as far ranging interpretations of their specific subjects, and each provides readers with an entry into that scholarship and a set of suggested further readings to lead the reader into the much broader scholarship that lies behind it.

One of the things that Ariès did brilliantly was to tell a compelling, even a sensational, story and he made his argument both simple and vivid. That story, in its clear outlines, urged readers fifty years ago to imagine childhood as the invention of

early modern Europe. How we feel about children and how we think about them – matters we often imagine to be natural – Ariès argued, began at a particular point in time as a result of changing material and intellectual circumstances. Children had once played the same games as adults, witnessed sexual activity, and as schoolchildren wandered at an early age from teacher to teacher and place to place. They were depicted as small adults. All this changed when adults began to think of children as different and to treat childhood as a special stage of life. Childhood began with a new sensibility about the young that resulted in a view of children as requiring particular and elaborate treatment. Ariès used the present as a touchstone for the past and his story is about the creation of a childhood that modern people can identify with and understand. In proclaiming childhood an invention of modern Europe, Ariès caught people by surprise and he captured their attention.

Ariès also made the specialness of childhood coincide with important historical changes and with a variety of alterations that we today define as modern in perspective and in institutions: a new attention to age ever more carefully measured; an emphasis on privacy within a closely defined and enclosed family that becomes much more oriented to matters of child rearing; the elaboration of capitalist markets and new class distinctions; and a new emphasis on literacy and the spread of schooling. In pointing out how childhood was a product of these changes and essential to them, Ariès made the new childhood both historically contingent and worthy of attention. In line with these changes, parents became much more involved with and attached to their children and began to provide them with the affection that moderns assume to be "natural" to parenting. In the process, Ariès made some harsh judgments about parents in the preceding period of time; harsh at least from our modern perspective though hardly from his own more romantic view of the pre-modern world. His was a compelling story vividly told and illustrated about a time when everything changed, so much so that something so fundamental as childhood, which we all take for granted, was just beginning to peek through the fresh historical soil. Do we now have a story good enough to replace his, and one that can garner the kind of attention that was and still is directed at Ariès?

I believe that we do. It is a story that is perhaps less surprising than the one Ariès offered, but just as compelling. The story that unfolds from the following twenty-seven essays, written by talented historians from different backgrounds, two continents, and several historical generations, is about childhood in the West as a privileged state, a status to which some children have historically had much more access than others. One of the clear conclusions that historians have come to is that modern childhoods and children's experiences are deeply affected by circumstances such as status, class, wealth, and poverty. As a result, while all children have a childhood, the kind of childhood we have come to imagine as desirable and to expect in the modern West has been available unevenly in the past, while the emphasis on this childhood has grown.

As modern Westerners have conceived and defined it, childhood as a space for development and an agent of future promise is not so much a product of a particular time as it has been a possibility that was accelerated within the conditions of the early modern period when Ariès first noticed it. The sixteenth century was fruitful in launching some of the initial conditions that turned childhood into a privilege increasingly defined as widely desirable and socially useful. But it was hardly the period that enabled

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the wholesale access to childhood that *Centuries of Childhood* seems to claim, not least because schooling was still only available to very few (and only rarely for girls). Indeed, it was not until the nineteenth century, at the earliest, that childhood – at least one that modern westerners can recognize – seems to have become a universal aspiration as nation states inserted it among the ideals of citizenship.

The privileges of childhood are often related to other privileges, such as race, class, wealth, and sometimes gender. But the story of childhood as a privilege is also about how western societies in the period since the nineteenth century laid out a pattern, even a paradigm, that has increasingly defined, constrained, and regulated the lives of all children as it penetrated our belief systems as not only ideal but as a requirement of proper development. By adopting various institutions that enshrined the privileges of childhood, the West has enforced these as necessary and uniquely appropriate for children. That paradigm has also spread beyond the developed West to exercise increasing influence on the nature of childhood images and children's experiences throughout the globe. It has done so through organized endeavors that Dominique Marshall examines in her essay on international child saving, but also through the products of childhood and the pictures of childhood created in the West. Some of these, as Gary Cross shows, are consumer items that appeal to children as a group apart. It is for this reason that this volume ends not in Europe or North America, which are within the traditional confines of what we usually designate as the "West," but in Latin America which is globally west but also decidedly south. Nara Milanich clearly shows how Latin American childhood has been connected to the western experience of privilege, while access to these privileges are much more exclusive and elusive in countries in the southern hemisphere.

The volume also begins well before the modern period, starting in the ancient classical world and the ancient Middle East where the dominant western religions of Judaism and Christianity were born. Ancient Greece and Rome, as well as these two religions (and later Islam), held out very particular views of childhood that have never been entirely forgotten, in part because they left a wealth of significant texts. Examining these sources, as Keith Bradley and Margaret King do in their essays, makes it clear that childhood was hardly an invention of the last four hundred years as Ariès argued. Rather, even two thousand years ago children were regarded as critical to both the future and the present; then, as now, they were objects of care and observation. In the Ancient World, as in the modern, certain aspects of childhood – especially those related to careful preparation – were a privilege only available to some. Indeed, Bradley argues that the children of the free and well-born lived in a vast sea of those deprived. In Greece and Rome, the privileges of childhood were reserved for a very few, almost all of whom were male and free. That acute delimitation of privilege has receded in the modern West, not least because Judaism and Christianity, birthed in almost the same region, introduced childhood as a positive and respected part of human experience with universal potentials.

The continuing privileges and the aspiring universalism of childhood are together the two most resonant aspects of the story that the authors of this volume tell about the period since 1500, and this story unfolds in many places and in various accents to the present. It is clear that despite Ariès's best attempts to claim that it did not exist in the medieval period, historians have recognized not only children but also the outlines of a childhood in that long period between ancient and

modern times. Children then might enjoy the love and attention of parents as Joanne Ferraro demonstrates, although large portions of the population had to contend with the vicissitudes of brutal circumstances and the general unpredictability of life in Europe where marauding gangs, famine, and disease were a constant presence. Childhood for all was shorter and many children left the parental home earlier, and those who were otherwise privileged could also provide some special protections to their own children, although parenting was far more at the mercy of a decimating mortality. And while the sixteenth century introduced some changes, they hardly marked the radical revolution that Ariès suggested.

How all this affected parents' love is not easy to resolve because, like many other privileges, it is one that not all children experience equally,[2] but the historical record has rectified Ariès's error; one expressed by others during the earliest phase of investigations into the history of children when the nature of modern childhood was confused with the elaboration of expressions of family affection. The love for children cannot be said to have begun at any one point in history, while the callous treatment of children cannot be said to have ended once modern times began. Of course, certain circumstances could make the life of children brutal and their parents could do little to relieve the coarseness of their lives. This was true of slave children in the Ancient World, as Keith Bradley makes clear, and in the Americas during the modern age, as Steven Mintz shows. Unwanted children everywhere throughout the West were often disposable, killed as infants or abandoned to institutions or to the streets. The history of infanticide, as Bengt Sandin shows in the case of Sweden, is long and winding, intersecting with matters of church control, state development, as well as cultural mores and broader issues of social welfare.

A child's life in the past, like that of an adult, could be brutal but it was not brutal because it was the life of a child and therefore did not matter. Judaism and Christianity both made child life vital and important and created certain protections for childhood – so did Islam. But circumstances could make even loving parents unable to protect their children and it could make people both caring and brutal. The same nineteenth-century planter who loved and indulged his sons and daughters could create conditions that made his slaves teach their own children qualities that would make for endurance. So too, during the same period, while children's books and illustrations dwelled on the wonderful beauty and innocence of children, the West produced the factory routine which allowed, as Colin Heywood shows, terrific exploitation, long hours and dangerous working conditions for masses of working class children as young as five or six. In Latin America, middle-class people imitated European customs of the time and provided their children with overtly solicitous affection while dismissing, as refuse, the many children who resulted from illegitimate unions. Childhoods, both as ideals and as the experiences of children, change and reflect the institutional networks of a particular time and place; so too do the forms in which parents express love and caretaking. But brutality toward children is hardly the criterion by which we can judge change over time.

Childhood impinges on so many institutional realms that it is difficult, at first, to see where the story ends, or rather to separate its boundaries from the history of the West more generally. And this is part of the point; childhood, as it has developed and changed over time in the West, has not only affected the experience of almost one half of the population, but the political, economic, cultural, and social institutions created

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for or directed at childhood move out in widening circles of strategic influence. These circles have become much more dramatically linked in the recent West as childhood became more consciously a public concern. Some of these nests for childhood are obvious such as parenting and schooling; others require only a bit of further reflection. Such is the case with regard to the welfare institutions for orphans and delinquents that Ivan Jablonka examines, or the physical environment of buildings and objects. As childhood became a more pressing public obligation in the modern world these latter institutions evolved around the perceived needs of children. Ariès recognized that the modern world has been fertile in creating institutional and physical arrangements that are aimed specifically at children or target children in special ways, and he helped to set many historians on the path of discovering these places and material environments, as Marta Gutman shows.

Twenty-first-century readers are less inclined to see how crucial work was for childhood and indeed how integral children in the past were to the world of work, but the connection will become obvious after reading Colin Heywood's essay. Children's work has been, through most of western history including the modern period, an essential contribution to social life. During the period Ariès thought brought childhood into being, children's everyday lives were still dominated not by schooling but by labor. Most children remained deeply embedded in household regimes and routines, not so different than in the medieval period, and children continued to work even as schooling gained in significance after the middle of the nineteenth century, although they often worked outside the house. This began to vary somewhat by age by the late nineteenth century as young children were increasingly shielded from work outside the house or the farm, but work continued to define child life for older children, by which we mean those over twelve.

The same is the case for other fundamental dimensions of life and death. War and sexuality are domains from which modern Westerners have withdrawn the ideal of childhood in horror, but neither children in the past nor contemporary childhood experiences are without important connections to these arenas. Sexuality, long before Sigmund Freud made the connection, was not absent from the lives of children, as Beth Bailey shows, and the many experiences of war that James Marten examines often loomed darkly at its center. Even during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, as Larry Wolff vividly demonstrates, the very same people who emphasized the innocence of children could find them erotically compelling. Modern Westerners have circumscribed the lives of children, marking these two arenas – sex and war – as beyond the realm of childhood, largely because they have become much more exacting about prescribing norms of development, as discussed by Stephen Lassonde. In this sense, Ariès was on target when he recognized the growing importance that the consciousness of age has played in the modern West. But as James Marten shows, even in the modern period, soldiering was often child's work simply because, until fairly recently, age simply did not matter as much; at least not as a precise measure and in many cases, it was simply unknown. Today everyone knows his or her age in the western world because the state requires various kinds of registrations.[3]

One of the great virtues of Ariès's book was to make readers aware that our modern views of children and the values we attach to childhood were subject to change. Even though he was too quick to dismiss childhood before the modern period and to ignore its variability during the modern period, he understood that we tend to see childhood

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through very modern lenses and have a difficult time recognizing it (as he did) when those lenses did not exist. Our lenses have been constructed, quite literally, out of images in literature for children that Maria Nikolajeva describes and the visual arts, as examined by Anne Higonnet. These have been fashioned over the last two hundred and fifty years but came to a special fruition in the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Higonnet argues that childhood and photography evolved together, intimately connected in each other's sights. Perhaps the most potent source for our understanding of modern childhood as a particular form of vision was embedded in the philosophies and beliefs that came out of the European Enlightenment, as discussed by Larry Wolff. Certainly our child-rearing literature, pedagogical views, and our implicit values regarding children's innocence are deeply indebted to its insights and observations. These have been deeply engaged in the past century, as Stephen Lassonde demonstrates, as psychologies of childhood and the science of development became rich and fertile intellectual enterprises. The Enlightenment and the sciences it helped to promote accelerated the universalism that western religion had extolled, effectively defining childhood as a necessary basis for human experience.

How we as modern Westerners see children and understand childhood has been altered in important ways because we are committed to withdrawing them from certain adult spheres like war and sexuality, a messy process considering that over the past one hundred years schooling (now defined as a child's realm) has increased vastly as a time commitment that now includes adolescence under its aegis. Adolescents have been more and more exiled from the world of work where they once fitted quite closely either as apprentices or as important components of the agricultural or industrial work force. But modern adolescence, which is at once a separate life phase and deeply implicated in the social institutions of childhood, is probably at the forefront of both matters of sexuality and of modern consumerism. A moment's thought points up not just the contradictions that modern adolescence injects into childhood but its uncertain privileges. It is adolescents above all (though hardly exclusively) who have haunted society since at least the seventeenth century in the guise of the potential for disorder or delinquency, as Don Romesburg demonstrates. They also play parts, shown by Timothy Gilfoyle, that have given them an unusual agency and power when, as young criminals, they transgressed the dominant definitions of sentimental childhood as innocent, helpless, and guileless. Indeed, sex and war have often been at the very center of adolescent identity.

The first two sections of this volume aim to demonstrate how we have come to the tangled and potent place we are today with regard to children and childhood. Part I shows how children were treated in the long distant past and how they have been imagined in the most powerful currents of western thought before the nineteenth century. The reader is invited to think about the many differences between the experiences of childhood in the Ancient World, the Middle Ages, and in the modern period, but also how childhood as a form of preparation was carefully defined for those who were privileged to experience it fully. In looking toward the modern, the Enlightenment opened up childhood as a fundamental arena for human reflection and defined its contradictory currents. Part II is meant to provide readers with a wide perspective on how modern institutions, views and values with regard to childhood have evolved and changed over time since the early modern period, and the nature of the space that has been created for children by institutions as varied as the state, examined by

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James Schmidt; changes in parenting practices as examined by Julia Grant; and the emotional expectations embedded in modern childrearing advice, discussed by Peter Stearns. Part II looks at the multiple means by which modern childhood has been elaborated through institutions, representations, sentiments, and ideas. Each of the authors in this section has been asked to look at the period since 1500 in the long term and to examine the many changes over time that affected children and resulted in the "modern" western view of childhood and the expectations that we have about what children's lives should be like. These essays clearly show that the "modern" perspective on children as sexually innocent, economically dependent, and emotionally fragile whose lives are supposed to be dominated by play, school, and family nurture, provides a very limited view of children's lives in the modern western past. While some children did experience this kind of childhood, for the vast majority, it is quite literally only in the twentieth century that these have been enforced as both preferred and dominant.

Since the eighteenth century, Westerners have defined, pictured, and written about childhood as a privileged ethereal realm that we all desire personally and socially. This "Age of Innocence," as Sir Joshua Reynolds helpfully named his painting, has motivated a variety of reforms both within nations in the West and across them; served as the basis for schooling; underscored the drive for good parenting advice; and stimulated global ideals of children's rights, which the West has carried to the rest of the world in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. But as historians have discovered, these values, despite their seeming universal valence, have never been evenly experienced or applied. The West in general has been far more privileged than other parts of the globe, so over the past two centuries, it has been able to entertain these ideas and to provide more of its children with its privileges. It has also been very unevenly experienced within the West as some children could afford such a childhood while others, as Timothy Gilfoyle shows, became thieves and other criminals, roles hardly associated with innocent childhood. Some children worked early in the fields under a whiplash, while others drank sodas after school. Even in the American West, the privileges associated with childhood could be removed, as Anne Hyde demonstrates by examining the changing fate of mixed-race children. The history of childhood tells a real story, but it is not uniform and it is not fair.

These articles on sex, work, parenting, consumption, etc. are about both children and childhood and it is worth stopping briefly to talk about these two different but intertwined subjects. In its simplest form these two encompass what children do and what social norms and expectations define as appropriate to the period of life that children inhabit. But it is never quite that simple. The actual experiences of children are not only usually recorded through adult means (though we do have some evidence that is less dependent on adult observation and more direct), but expectations also define what children can do because the institutions that are created for them, such as schools, or barred to them, such as work, are fashioned through ideas and ideals regarding what childhood should be. As nineteenth-century reformers found themselves revolted by observing young children working long hours in terrible conditions and worried about them as future citizens, they began to ask for legislation that enshrined certain ages as off-limits to work and reserved for childhood. This delimiting of childhood spread by the late nineteenth century and was reinforced by school attendance requirements. As a result, more children went to school and fewer

young children went to work. As Peter Stearns demonstrates, even emotions are full of expectations, with some periods viewing some emotional expressions as legitimate and others as problematic, and thus encouraging one and discouraging the other. How then do we know what children were like in the past?

This same problem can be applied to all human behavior and it is an issue that all historians face. It is not uniquely disqualifying to children's history to say that our behaviors can only be recorded and made meaningful as they are interpreted. In the case of children, historians face this issue as stoically as possible because children are more dependent on adults because their networks of caretaking make them more vulnerable to manipulation, although this dependency decreases from infancy through adolescence. Some historians, such as Maria Nikolajeva, who deals with literature created by adults and directed at children, are especially conscious of the power disparity built into this reality. This does not mean that all children are just what they are made. Timothy Gilfoyle's examination of those young people who decidedly fell outside the terrain of approved childish dependency makes this clear, and Jay Mechling addresses it squarely when he asks how we can know what children did with the institutions created to train them, such as scouting. It does mean that our access to children in the past comes usually through understanding childhood or at least requires that we understand the lens of childhood as we examine children. Some historians have been extremely successful at locating children's own voices rather than relying solely on adults' recordings of their observations. Thus Colin Heywood, Steven Mintz, and Kriste Lindenmeyer in this volume and elsewhere allow us to hear the voices of their historical subjects to an unusual degree. Studying how children preferred to play, as Gary Cross has done,[4] gives us angles on children's lives that come close to as unobstructed a view as we are likely to get. None of this should obscure how much we have learned about children by learning about childhood.

What many of these essays also demonstrate is that the dimensions of childhood have changed in the West over time and not only because more of the young were embraced by its privileges. Defining who and what a child is has deep historical consequences. By the twentieth century, in most places in the western world, childhood included not only infancy and the period between six and ten years old (when individuals are physically not yet fully formed or fully capable) as it had at earlier times, but also increasingly older children, those between ten and fourteen years old, and then also those who would be described as teenagers in the second half of the twentieth century. All of these were included as schools expanded their scope and as the labor of the vigorous young could be dispensed with. This shifting definition of who inhabits the period of childhood makes the study both much more complex and much more important. Perhaps no other historical scholars can so effectively watch as the subjects of their inquiry change before their eyes.

With these changes in definition, the privileges of childhood could also become a social disability. The possibility of protection and dependency, which had initially made childhood into a privileged state for those who could be cared for and prepared in a leisurely way by others, and was almost always denied to the most deprived (slaves, the poor, and the exploited), became a much desired status for all children because the universal drives toward child protection that took shape in the late nineteenth century were extended to larger groups of not quite adults by the twentieth century. As I have suggested above, this new expansion of childhood privilege also

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brought its own confusions, not least because those who were now guarded and corralled were often less than happy to be so "privileged." Thus the privileges of childhood also led to new questions regarding whether children had rights to various kinds of self-determination, and what exactly the rights of children might look like. James Schmidt addresses this matter in his examination of the relationship between children and the state. In the recent past, a revised view of children's dependence and a new appreciation of self-determination has been a critical component of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which sees the agency of children as part of their birthright.[5] Today, the subject of childhood is fraught with new ideas and potential transformations as the model that became dominant in the nineteenth century shifts. As the essays in Part II demonstrate, by understanding the twists and turns of childhood, we are introduced to a complex and changing western landscape.

Part III is meant to make the larger picture of modern childhood developed in Part II even more complex by looking at variations, specific children, specific places, or specific times. These could have been multiplied greatly. The choices made for inclusion in this section bring out certain aspects of the complexity of modern childhoods. Many of these articles are about fairly recent childhoods, most since the nineteenth century. But whether their subjects are Nazi youth in Germany in the 1930s examined by Dirk Schumann, or African-American slaves in the American South studied by Steven Mintz, or children during the American Great Depression that Kriste Lindenmeyer focuses on, the authors of these essays look not on how western experience, viewed broadly, developed over time so we can understand how our modern understanding evolved, but on the experiences of children and childhood in one place or in a particular circumstance. Whatever the historical nature of its longer-term development, western childhood is still experienced by specific children within particular contexts, and changing historical circumstances can make an enormous difference, as Anne Hyde shows about the fate of mixed-race children in the nineteenth-century American West.

Indeed, one of the results of developments in historical research into childhood has been to demonstrate that the history of childhood can be important to all history writing in two distinct ways. First, the general development of childhood as an internal process is linked, as I have suggested, to the changes in ideas and the institutional set of developments of the state, the economy, and the culture of the West. Second, historians have been exploring how children's experiences are linked to historical events such as World War II or the Great Depression.[6] In this latter endeavor, historians have been eager to include children among the various groups that must be understood if we are to properly assess and understand particular historical events, their causes, and their consequences. Just as no understanding of the past is now complete if we leave out women, so too no real understanding of the past is possible if children are excluded as participants in the events, such as the wars that James Marten examines, the consumer society discussed by Daniel Cook, or as the victims of changing views about race.

In historicizing childhood, Ariès had also flattened the past. Ariès's provocative argument that childhood simply did not exist before the early modern period and his even more sensational claim that parents did not love or care for their children

before then never could stand up to scrutiny. In order to distinguish the modern he had denied the historical complexity that preceded it.

A lack of historical sensitivity to the existence of childhood before the sixteenth century and a failure to notice the attachment of parents to their children were only two of the problems with *Centuries of Childhood*. Despite Ariès's attention to how children were represented and his use of diaries and records of schooling in various parts of Europe, his attention was strongly focused on France. As a result, he seemed to miss the multiple and tangled consequences of, among other matters, the Protestant Reformation.[7] Despite his use of graphs to bring age into focus as an increasingly significant cultural measure, Ariès shied away from the use of numbers. Most of all, he wrote as if the changes he described were applicable to everyone: rich, poor, peasant and city based. Just when social historians were starting to examine the subtle, historically situated distinctions that affected people in the past by addressing matters of class, gender, and religion, Ariès largely ignored these differences, thereby missing how modern childhood was differentially applicable and the degree to which it was both a privilege and a means to inscribe and affect intergroup relations. This was especially problematic in light of the many-layered demographic materials being gathered at just this time by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. As early as 1965, Peter Laslett would bring this material to a wider audience of readers through his accessible book, *The World We Have Lost*.[8] Laslett described the complex matrix of ranks and statuses that prevailed in early modern English villages and showed that even in the seventeenth century most families were small, private, and composed exclusively of parents and their children, rather than the numerous generations often envisaged in our imagined past.

Ariès had awakened some of the interest in past family relations that Laslett and others now fed, but Ariès tended to dismiss the family as a negligible factor in children's experience in the long-ago past while romanticizing the community as a boundary-less whole in which children merged seamlessly into the larger mass. Only gradually, he argued, were they treated as a group apart and did they stop engaging in the community play of adults; only gradually did their families become their main source of socialization. Laslett's carefully defined and complex description of the differences to be found in seventeenth-century English villages made that earlier world much more understandable as one in which childhood conformed to a different set of hierarchies and was an expression of other forms of subordination and family attentiveness. In this volume, Julia Grant brings the family back to its central place as an institution of childhood while demonstrating that it is both a changing and a diverse context for child life.

Laslett showed that most families were small, as even seventeenth-century cottagers exercised forms of population control, adopting late marriage as an important strategy. Childhood was always deeply embedded in decisions about the viability of birth in a social context that could sustain it. As Bengt Sandin shows in this book, the tendency to eliminate children before they are born or immediately thereafter has been a familiar aspect of western experience and long a subject fraught with legal and moral dilemmas. Thus, a child born and allowed to develop was itself a privilege (for parents as well as children) not always or equally available to all. Ariès had largely ignored ranks as a feature of pre-capitalist society, and the very texture that the Cambridge

group sought to uncover through statistical profiles of the poor and vulnerable, was absent in his book because the sources he drew on were heavily based on a literature and iconography that observed the upper ranks – the wealthy, the noble, the literate. Ariès had been examining privilege without acknowledging it.

Childhood for Ariès was a defining quality of modernity that emerged everywhere in the West at a specific time. In fact, as many of the following essays demonstrate, modern childhood with its attendant protections, its aura of innocence, its links to schooling and preparation, its sexual taboos, and its appeal to adults' sentimentality was hardly an experience common to most children even in the modern period; it was still reserved to only some in the nineteenth century, let alone the seventeenth. While the importance of the formative qualities of childhood were inscribed by Enlightenment thought in the eighteenth century, which also provided the impetus to its universalization, it was not experienced as a period set apart in its own world of play and schooling for most children until the twentieth century, after labor laws and school requirements carved it out of previous social spaces. This did not mean that childhood did not exist for those not privileged to attend school for most of the year or enjoy other aspects of childhood in its modern guise. Work could be part of childhood and living outside one's birth family could also be part of childhood. Rather, it means the childhood we validate today was not ubiquitous but coexisted with other conceptions of childhood held by people whose world was not so modern and not so privileged. These different experiences of childhood and different understandings of protection, play, preparation, and other features of children's growth from absolute infant dependency and protection to adolescent coming-of-age existed all through the modern West as part of the world of children and adults.

It also did not mean that most parents did not care for or care about their children or do what they could to protect them within the limits of their circumstances. It did mean that the unique privileges of modern childhood as a protected space sharply separated from adult forms of social life was highly dependent on state legislation that began to universalize its perspectives. Even in the United States, which by the twentieth century was the wealthiest and most universalistic of western societies and where the extension of schooling into adolescence was well under way by the 1920s, this was not taken for granted until the 1950s, as Kriste Lindenmeyer shows. Elsewhere in the West, in Germany, for example, the impulse to set children apart in institutions of preparation could become a form of absolute state control as childhood became an object of manipulation towards political goals. Dirk Schumann demonstrates that childhood could be universalized by the Nazi regime, as all Aryan children were required to become part of the *Hitler Jugend*, but distorted at the same time because it was viewed not as a privilege of development but as a province of state power. And the lack of this privilege could be literally killing to those excluded from its circles, like the Roma and the Jews. The complex role of the state was thus critical to childhood in the modern West but its particular nature was by no means predetermined. Only after World War II did these outcomes become manifest in Western Europe, United States and Canada in the context of expanded investments in schooling and child welfare. It is well for us to realize that the Europe described in this volume relies on studies highly biased toward the western and northern areas and countries. In many areas in the East and South, parts of Poland or Sicily and even in the American South, the state's penetration was uneven and thin until the end of World War II.

Modern childhood was idealized long before it was a serious reflection of child life. Childhood as an ideal of prolonged development has always been a privilege, reserved for the well-to-do and well-placed in the Ancient World as well as in nineteenth-century America. The children of Roman slaves in the Ancient World described by Keith Bradley, as well as the African-American slave children in Steven Mintz's American South, could not be protected or adequately cherished by their parents, not because they failed at love but because childhood for them was not a period of preparation for an aspirational adulthood. Defined as a period of growth – physical, emotional, and cognitive – everyone has a childhood, at least everyone who lives long enough, but as a realm of protected development, an extended time of leisured maturation, it has historically been enjoyed by few. The belief in the possibilities of childhood for all children first emerged in the eighteenth century and was then developed vigorously in the nineteenth century when it became a dominant motif in literature and visual culture.

An important dimension of this new childhood was the greater protection against disease made available to children in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Most historians realize that the birth rate since the nineteenth century has declined in the West with ever greater predictability, and they are convinced that this is related to parental behavior and the elevation of childhood as a precious and carefully nurtured estate. Less often acknowledged, but fundamental to social expectations, was the rapid decline in childhood diseases that were once endemic and ravaged the population of children, diseases such as scarlet fever, diphtheria, cholera and many varieties of gastro-intestinal disorders. Most children have historically been born in a soup of infectious diseases, whose basis was bacterial, viral, and amoebic. In the West, until the twentieth century, about one-quarter of all children born would die before they reached one year old and many others would die before adolescence. Altogether about 45 percent of all children died before puberty.[9] In southern and eastern Europe, the figure was closer to 60 percent. The drastic change for children that medicine and public health measures produced, in the context of better nutrition and living standards, radically altered childhood for adults and for children. This change began in the eighteenth century, but became much more developed by the late nineteenth century and flowered in the twentieth century. Dominique Marshall points out how many international efforts in the early twentieth century on behalf of child life were organized and staffed by health professionals who were invigorated by the gospel of good health and sought to bring it first to the children of the western world and then beyond.[10] Whatever seventeenth- or eighteenth-century parents might want to do for their children, their means were limited by infection and its democratic scythe; although the conditions of the poor and of rural populations always made some even more vulnerable to the universal scourge of disease.

The decline in these diseases, as Peter Stearns notes in his essay, has had a profound effect on the expression of family emotional life. The privilege of expecting good health is a critical aspect of early twentieth-century childhood, strongly augmented after World War II by the invention of antibiotics, the conquest of polio and subsequently vaccines for other childhood diseases such as measles and whooping cough. It is suggestive that once parents began to believe they had some control, as their children's physical health became sturdier, they, together with child professionals, increasingly emphasized emotional and psychological well-being. The modern

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paradigm of childhood, which required that children be elaborately protected, allowed parents who were more secure in their children's physical health to become ever more alert to other forms of well-being, including child safety. Today eternal vigilance about children appears to have become the dominant western fixation.[11] None of this would have been possible without the new certainty that medicine introduced regarding the common killers of infants and children.

In the twentieth century, the privileges of the few have affected many more and become the expectations of all. While the particular form of these privileges of childhood remains far from universal even in the West, it has become a defining norm of western civilization, a norm around which we both establish our own progress and parade our superiority over other parts of the globe. Today, as the world shrinks, the pressures are not in any sense just from the West to the rest. Global competition for knowledge-based skills continues to elevate our expectations about schooling and to extend the period of dependency. These changes come at the expense of other features of child life in the West that had once been equally embraced, and force significant delays in the pay-off in a long-deferred adulthood. Play, a leisurely approach to cognitive acquisitions, and protections from commercial concerns; all these are challenged in a western world where children today are asked to respond to a newly complex context that is forcing a re-evaluation and redefinition of childhood itself. It may be well to ask whether some of the privileges of childhood, such as play, will become scarcer during the twenty-first century for many children as the dominance of commercial values force children to ever longer periods of work in school. As a product of changing history, childhood will be forced to change, and childhood as a privilege opened to many in the twentieth century may once again become less available.

Does this mean that the essays here are dated before they can be read? Yes, in some respects. As a rapidly evolving field of study, the history of childhood is constantly amplifying and revising our knowledge and understanding. But the essays in this volume cover so many of the essential issues around what we know as childhood, including its deep history millennia ago and its growing reach, that they should serve for years to come as the essential basis for everyone's knowledge of what we mean when we speak of modern childhood.

The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World will help the reader to understand how our childhood has become the particular stage of life in which we have invested so much hope and which may today worry us as increasingly unsustainable. It will show which groups have benefitted, which have been ignored, and how as a society we have come to define ourselves so passionately according to the manner in which we value our children. It is time for the subtle, far-ranging and probing history of childhood that has grown up in the last fifty years in Ariès's wake to have its voice. This volume is the place to begin.

Notes

1 Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (London, UK: Jonathan Cape, 1962; American edition, Random House, 1962).

2 The question of parental affection has generated considerable literature. Among the most significant discussions are Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage In England, 1500–1800* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1977); Linda Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship: Parents and Children Over Three Centuries* (London, UK: University Press of New England, 1990); Lloyd deMause, ed., *The History of Childhood* (New York, NY: Psychohistory Press, 1974). While these books were mostly concerned with whether parents loved their children and if this had changed historically, Viviana A. Zelizer's, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1985) switched the conversation from parental love to cultural values. In so doing, she picked up on the more consequential dimension of the matter initiated in Ariès: the changing cultural value of affectionate expression.

3 For the development of extreme age consciousness in the modern world, see Howard Chudacoff, *How Old Are You? Age Consciousness in American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

4 Kriste Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation Grows Up* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2005); Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*; Colin Heywood, *Childhood in Nineteenth Century France: Work, Health, and Education Among the 'Classes Populaires'* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988). See also Leslie Paris, *Children's Nature: The Rise of the American Summer Camp* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2008); Rebecca de Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America's Long Struggle for Racial Equality* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, *Child of the Enlightenment: Revolutionary Europe Reflected in a Boyhood Diary* (Leiden, Germany: Brill Academic Publishers, 2009).

5 This is the point that is made in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* special issue marking the twentieth anniversary of the UN Convention, *The Child as Citizen*, ed. Felton Earls, *The Annals*, 633 (January 2011).

6 A few examples of historians who have shown the children's side of important events include: Rebecca De Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Kriste Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation Grows Up* (Lanham, MD: Ivan R. Dee, 2005); Lisa Ossian, *The Forgotten Generation: American Children in World War II* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011); Emmy E. Werner, *Through the Eyes of Innocents: Children Witness World War II* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); James Marten, *The Children's Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

7 Steven E. Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Alan Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin: A Seventeenth-Century Clergyman* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Philip J. Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

8 Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: England Before the Industrial Revolution* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965).

9 Richard Meckel, "Health and Science," in *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in the Age of Empire*, ed. Colin Heywood (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2010) 168.

10 Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

11 The articles in *Reinventing Childhood After World War II*, eds. Paula S. Fass and Michael Grossberg (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) make this clear. For childhood, education, and globalization, see Paula S. Fass, *Children of a New World: Society, Culture, and Globalization* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007).