
The Children's Culture Reader

EDITED BY

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The myth of childhood innocence, as James Kincaid notes, "empties" the child of its own political agency, so that it may more perfectly fulfill the symbolic demands we make upon it. The innocent child wants nothing, desires nothing,

childhood innocence in the late twentieth century. similar. Both Molinari and Clinton tapped into an established mythology of children they evoked and the rhetorical purposes they served were remarkably children. While their political visions were dramatically different, the images of their status as "moms" and both supported their agendas by referencing their about childhood and the family. Both Susan and Hillary gained authority from itics of these occasions, giving us concrete images to anchor more abstract claims These close-ups of Susan Ruby and Chelsea rendered explicit the implicit pol-

ter, Chelsea, as visible proof of Hillary and Bill's success as parents. about the nation as a "family," the camera consistently showed the first daughter policy onto her more traditional concern for America's children. When she spoke hoped to shift public attention from her controversial role in shaping health care dressed the Democratic convention several weeks later. Hillary and her handlers The cameras were equally obliging when the first lady, Hillary Clinton, ad-

for her mother to hold before the cheering crowds. newborn. After the speech, they brought the baby, Susan Ruby, to the podium crews dutifully provided close-ups of her husband and her father hugging the daughter's recent birth had refocused her political priorities. Network camera note address, speaking as a misty-eyed and perky young "mom" about how her Susan Molinari, congressswoman from Queens, presented the Republican key-

cent child. Both conventions offered classic stagings of parental concern. for devastating welfare cutbacks. Neither could resist the attractions of the inno- and the Democrats wanted to show they still felt our pain after Clinton's support or other traditional issues. The Republicans wanted to overcome the gender gap, ego. Both gatherings focused as much on childhood and the family as on tax cuts. In the summer of 1996, the Democratic party held its presidential nominating convention in Chicago and the Republican Party held its convention in San Di-

Henry Jenkins

Childhood Innocence and Other Modern Myths

Introduction

and demands nothing—except, perhaps, its own innocence. Kincaid critiques the idea that childhood innocence is something preexisting—an “eternal” condition—that must be “protected.” Rather, childhood innocence is a cultural myth that must be “inculcated and enforced” upon children.¹

This dominant conception of childhood innocence presumes that children exist in a space beyond, above, outside the political; we imagine them to be noncombatants whom we protect from the harsh realities of the adult world, including the mud splattering of partisan politics. Yet, in reality, almost every major political battle of the twentieth century has been fought on the backs of our children, from the economic reforms of the Progressive Era (which sought to protect immigrant children from the sweatshop owners) and the social readjustments of the civil rights era (which often circulated around the images of black and white children playing together) to contemporary anxieties about the digital revolution (which often depict the wide-eyed child as subject to the corruptions of cyberspace and porn websites). The innocent child carries the rhetorical force of such arguments; we are constantly urged to take action to protect our children. Children also have suffered the material consequences of our decisions; children are the ones on the front lines of school integration, the ones who pay the price of welfare reform. We opportunistically evoke the figure of the innocent child as a “human shield” against criticism.

Until recently, cultural studies has said little about the politics of the child. Like everyone else, we have a lot invested in seeing childhood as banal and transparent, as without any concealed meanings of the sort that ideological critics might excavate, as without any political agency of the kinds that ethnographers of subcultures document, as without any sexuality that queer and feminist critics might investigate. Carey Bazalgette and David Buckingham identify a “division of labor” within academic research that subjects youth culture to intense sociological scrutiny while seeing childhood as a fit subject only for developmental psychology.² Children are understood as “asocial or perhaps, pre-social,” resulting in an emphasis on their “inadequacies,” “immaturity,” and “irrationality,” on their need for protection and nurturing. Because developmental psychology focuses on defining and encouraging “normative” development, it does not provide us tools for critiquing the cultural power invested in childhood innocence. Sociological critics focus on the “deviance” and “destructiveness” of youth cultures, their “irresponsibility,” or the “rituals” of their subcultural “resistance.” While we often celebrate the “resistant” behaviors of youth cultures as subversive, the “misbehavior” of children is almost never understood in similar terms.³ This historic split has started to break down over the past five or six years, as more and more cultural scholars examine childhood.

This marginalization affects not only how we understand the child, its social agency, its cultural contexts, and its relations to powerful institutions but also how we understand adult politics, adult culture, and adult society, which often circle around the specter of the innocent child. *The Children’s Culture Reader* is intended both to explore what the figure of the child means to adults and to offer a more complex account of children’s own cultural lives.

Given the wealth of material about childhood that has emerged in sociology, anthropology, pedagogical theory, social and cultural history, women's studies, literary criticism, and media studies in recent years, it seems important to identify what this collection won't do. It will not be a collection of essays centered primarily on issues of motherhood, fatherhood, adult identities, pedagogy, schooling, advertising, media reform, mass marketing, computers, public policy, and the like, though all of these topics will be explored in so far as they impact contemporary and historical understandings of childhood. A surprising number of the essays written about children's media, children's literature, or education manage not to talk about children or childhood at all. The essays in *The Children's Culture Reader*, on the other hand, will be centrally about childhood, about how our culture defines what it means to be a child, how adult institutions impact on children's lives, and how children construct their cultural and social identities.

This book is intended not as a guidebook for media and social reformers, not as a series of attacks on the corrupting force of mass culture on children's lives. Rather, it will challenge some key assumptions behind those reform movements, rejecting the myth of childhood innocence in order to map the power relations between children and adults. This book avoids texts that see children primarily as victims in favor of works that recognize and respect their social and political agency.

Some may question the "political stakes" in studying the child, especially in moving beyond powerful old binarisms about adult corruption and victimized children. Such myths have survived because they are useful, useful for the Left as well as for conservative and patriarchal agendas. At a time when Republican crime bills would try children as adults and toss them into federal prisons or when we want to motivate state action against child abuse, images of innocent and victimized children are our most powerful weapon. Yet, the Right increasingly draws on a vocabulary of child protection as the bulwark of its campaign against multiculturalism, feminism, Internet expression, and queer politics. Any meaningful political response to this conservative agenda must reassess childhood innocence.

In this introductory essay, I outline work on children's culture across a range of disciplines and suggest some of this research's implications for thinking about contemporary cultural politics. In doing so, I identify what I see as three major strands in recent writings about childhood: (1) the examination of the meanings that children carry for adults; (2) historical research into our shifting understandings of the relations between children and adults; and (3) studies of children as cultural and social agents. Each of the next three sections of this introduction takes one of those strands as its central focus. In the closing section, I return to the question of the politics of childhood and outline some of the implications of this research.

Too often, our culture imagines childhood as a utopian space, separate from adult cares and worries, free from sexuality, outside social divisions, closer to nature and the primitive world, more fluid in its identity and its access to the realms of imagination, beyond historical change, more just, pure, and innocent.

and in the end, waiting to be corrupted or protected by adults. Such a conception of the child dips freely in the politics of nostalgia. As Susan Stewart suggests, nostalgia is the desire to re-create something that has never existed before, to return to some place we've never been, and to reclaim a lost object we never possessed.⁴ In short, nostalgia takes us to never-never land.

This book assumes that childhood is not timeless but, rather, subject to the same historical shifts and institutional factors that shape all human experience. Children's culture is not the result of purely top-down forces of ideological and institutional control, nor is it a free space of individual expression. Children's culture is a site of conflicting values, goals, and expectations. As Henry Giroux has argued:

Children's culture is a sphere where **entertainment, advocacy and pleasure meet** to construct conceptions of what it means to be a child occupying a combination of gender, racial and **class positions** in society.⁵

Children, no less than adults, are active participants in that process of defining **their identities**, though they join those interactions from positions of unequal power. When children struggle to reclaim dignity in the face of a schoolyard taunt or confront inequalities in their parents' incomes, they are engaged with **politics** just as surely as adults are when they fight back against homophobia or join a labor union. Our grown-up fantasies of childhood as a simple space crumbles when we recognize the complexity of the forces shaping our children's lives and defining who they will be, how they will behave, and how they will understand their place in the world.

1. *The "Fort" and the "Village": The Politics of Family Values*

The child was there waiting . . . defenseless and alluring, with no substance, no **threatening history**, no independent insistences. As a category created but not occupied, the child could be a repository of cultural needs or fears not adequately disposed of elsewhere. . . . The child carries for us things we somehow cannot carry for ourselves, sometimes anxieties we want to be divorced from and sometimes pleasures so great we would not, without the child, know how to contain them.

—James Kincaid⁶

In this section, I examine the convention speeches of Hillary Clinton and Susan Molinari as embodying different ideological strategies for mobilizing the figure of the innocent child. For Hillary Clinton, the child represents our "bridge to the twenty-first-century," the catalyst transforming uncontrollable change into meaningful progress. For Susan Molinari, the child represents our link to the past, carrying forth family tradition and "the American Dream" in a troubled world. For Clinton, the child is a figure of the utopian imagination, enabling her to conceive of a better world—a new "village"—that must be built in the present. For Molinari, the child is a figure of nostalgic remorse, whose violated innocence

demands that parents "hold down the fort" against contemporary culture. But, both women, in Kincaid's sense, use their children to "carry things." As Kincaid acknowledges, the very impermanence of childhood, its status as a transitional (and fragile) moment in our life cycle, enables many different symbolic uses: "Any meaning would stick but no meaning would stick for long." Often, in our rhetoric, the child embodies change, its threat and its potential. The child, both literally and metaphorically, is always in the process of becoming something else. As Kincaid writes:

If the child had a wicked heart from birth, that heart could be ripped out and a new one planted there in no time. If the child was ignorant, that wouldn't last long; if disobedient, there was always the whipping cure; if angelic, death would take him or, more likely, her; if loved or loving, that too would pass."

Childhood—a temporary state—becomes an emblem for our anxieties about the passing of time, the destruction of historical formations, or conversely, a vehicle for our hopes for the future. The innocent child is caught somewhere over the rainbow—between nostalgia and utopian optimism, between the past and the future.

The American (Heterosexual) Dream

Within the Republican ideology of family values, the innocent child is most often figured in relation to the past, threatened by the prospect of unregulated change, endangered by modernity, and denied things previous generations took for granted. Molinari told how her grandfather had "bundled up a young son and left Italy in search of a dream," an "American dream," which "passed down" from generation to generation, until "a seat in a Queen's barbershop led to a seat in the U.S. Congress." Her "American dream" was, at core, the story of heterosexual courtship and reproduction: "find a job, marry your sweetheart, have children, buy a home and maybe start a business and in the process, always build a better life for your children." This "American" dream has become harder to achieve in the face of crippling taxes and other assaults upon the family. Far from an incidental detail, the child surfaces here both as a reward for living the right life and as a responsibility heterosexuals bear.

Barbara Ehrenreich's *The Hearts of Men* offers a somewhat more critical account of this 1950s-era version of the "American dream." Psychological discourse of the period made the reproductive imperative not only a social obligation but a test of maturation and sexual normality. Getting married and having children became one of those things "mature," "normal" adult men were expected to do; the failure to father was seen as evidence of maladjustment, immaturity, and often, homosexuality. Ehrenreich notes, "Fear of homosexuality kept heterosexual men in line as husbands and breadwinners; and, at the same time, the association with failure and immaturity made it almost impossible for homosexual men to assert a positive image of themselves."¹⁰ If having children became proof

of mature heterosexuality, then it is hardly surprising that the reverse—the prospect of homosexuals having access to children—was regarded as a horrifying contamination.

While Ehrenreich's book recounts the breakdown of this formulation over the past three decades of male-female relations, its persistence in Molinari's speech, and in Republican rhetoric more generally, suggests it is still a powerful tool for enforcing normative assumptions about gender roles and sexual identities. This commonsensical connection between heterosexuality and childhood innocence undergirds the exercise of homophobia in the late twentieth century. The idea that only heterosexuals can bear—or should raise—children shapes custody decisions that deny lesbian mothers access to their offspring. The shock that occurs when queerness and children's culture come together shaped the Southern Baptist Convention's choice of Disney as the target of its campaign against corporations that provide health insurance for domestic partners. The image of the crazed pedophile threatens the employment rights of gay teachers and led to a campaign to get Bert and Ernie banned from *Sesame Street* because of their "unnatural" relations. Molinari's version of the "American dream" represents a more benign version of these arguments, one that erases—rather than denounces—homosexuality as an aspect of American family life.

The Politics of Motherhood

For a moment, Molinari can't resist the tug of the myth of the innocent child as an agent of progress. The birth of her daughter, Molinari argues, makes her "think a little less about how the world is and a little more about the world you'll leave behind for your children." However, the conservative logic of her argument pulls her back toward the present as a decline from a past golden age, toward the "real pressures" that prevent modern moms and dads from achieving their parents' dreams. The modern world, she suggests, is a world that places our innocent children at risk: "Every morning they [parents] hesitate, at the kindergarten door, even if only for a moment, afraid to let go of that small hand clinging so tightly onto theirs." For a moment, Molinari hesitates, gesturing toward feminist protests against the unreasonable expectations placed on contemporary women, only to retreat toward a more traditional solution:

I don't know a mom today who isn't stretched to her limits trying to hold down a job and trying to hold down the fort too. How many times have we said to ourselves that there aren't enough hours in a day. . . . Well, the Republicans can't promise you any more hours in your day but we can help you spend more hours at home with your children.

The threat is transformed: it is no longer unequal gender relations, poverty, or unfair conditions of employment but the idea of working outside the home that renders working "moms" miserable. Her speech sees returning to the home as the natural desire of all women and depicts women's professional lives as an unwanted obligation that better tax policies would render unnecessary.

The figure of the defenseless child has been consistently mobilized in both support of and in opposition to American feminism. Because women have carried special responsibilities for bearing and caring for children, their attempts to enter political and economic life have often been framed in terms of possible impacts on children and the family. Fatherhood is one role among many for most men; historically, for many women, motherhood was the role that defined their social, economic, and political identity.¹¹ Early suffrage leaders represented their campaign for the vote in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a logical extension of their responsibilities as mothers to shield the home from the corruptions of the outside world. This maternal politics, or "domestic feminism," focused its attention on issues of alcoholism and prostitution and on the social conditions faced by the children of the urban poor. As one early suffrage leader explained, "The Age of Feminism is also the age of the child."¹² Yet, this maternal politics also restricted women's political voice to a narrow range of issues associated with children, home, and family.

Speaking as mothers gave the early feminists, who came mostly from the upper and middle classes, a vocabulary for linking their experiences, across class and racial divides, with those of other women. The revitalization of American feminism in the 1960s and 1970s often focused on issues of abortion, day care, child custody, and other family issues; middle-class women's entry into identity politics emerged from consciousness-raising strategies and the recognition that the "personal is the political." Women could gain economic autonomy only by shifting child-rearing burdens within the family and only by gaining greater control over the reproductive process. Decades later, Hillary Clinton evoked this rhetorical tradition of sisterly solidarity through motherhood when she told her convention audience, "I wish we could be sitting around a kitchen table, just us, talking about our hopes and fears for our children's futures."

This tradition of maternal feminism has given urgency to female politicians when they speak on behalf of children. Heather Hendershot has shown, for example, that Action for Children's Television gained attention from the press and from the Federal Communications Commission in the 1970s because it could speak as a group of "mothers from Newton"; ACT expressed impatience with the demands for traditional-media-effects research and spoke with "common sense" about the impact of media on their own children's lives.¹³

Yet, the heightened public discourse about maternalism has also provided a weapon for criticizing female politicians as "bad mothers" when they place too much attention on issues not directly linked to childhood or the family. Hillary Clinton was sharply criticized for the public roles she played in her husband's administration and for her flip remarks about not wanting to be reduced to "baking cookies." In her convention speech, she made fun of the need to reposition herself as a mother, joking that she might appear at the Democratic convention arm in arm with "Bent the child-saving gorilla from the Brookfield Zoo." Dan Quayle's 1992 attacks on Murphy Brown's status as an unwed mother became a major campaign issue.¹⁴

The figure of the absent mother, the neglectful mother, the mother who abandons

sons her children for political and economic ambition always shadows the use of the maternal voice in American politics. Two of President Clinton's choices to become the first female attorney general of the United States were ultimately withdrawn because of public controversy surrounding their child-rearing arrangements, questions rarely if ever raised in considering the confirmation of male cabinet appointments. So, it is perhaps not surprising that when Molinari claimed common cause with other working mothers, it was in part to urge their return to the kitchen table. Less than a year after she delivered the keynote address at the Republican National Convention, Molinari herself resigned from the U.S. Congress to accept a job as a network anchorwoman, justifying her choice on the grounds that it would allow her to spend more time with her daughter.

The Suffering Father and the Unhappy Child

Republican formulations of the innocent child depict the home as "a fort" where mothers and fathers must protect their children from the chaos of modern life. Adopting characteristically military metaphors, former general Colin Powell spoke to the Republican convention about the need for families to remain strong in order to "withstand the assaults of contemporary life . . . resist the images of violence and vulgarity which flood into our lives every day . . . [and] defeat the scourge of drugs and crime and incivility that threaten us." This formulation of family values uses the figure of the innocent child to police boundaries between the family and the outside world. It often masks class and racial divisiveness, despite the presence of the African-American Colin Powell as a living symbol of Republican efforts toward becoming a "party of inclusion." This formulation, as Eric Freedman notes, also presupposes that the primary threat to our children comes from outside, while most cases of violence against children and most cases of "missing children" can be traced back to family members.¹⁵ The Republican version of "family values," which sharpens our fears and anxieties about outside forces, lets the family itself off the hook.

One of the most memorable moments of the Republican convention involved the speech of a wheelchair-bound former policeman, crippled in the line of duty and now an advocate of tougher sentencing laws. He was attended by his young son, who stood behind him, one hand resting on his shoulder throughout the speech. With a slow and pained voice, he explained: "My son, Conner McDonald, is nine years old and he has never seen his father move his arms or legs but when he puts his soft hands to his father's face I feel the promise of America and when he looks into my eyes I know that he can see the pride of America." Few images more perfectly capture the melodramatic qualities of this "family values" politics. One of the moment's most striking aspects was its embodiment of male vulnerability and suffering. If conservative ideology has tended to hold women responsible for nurturing and raising the child, it sees the father as a breadwinner and as a bulwark protecting the family against the outside world.

As Robert L. Griswold notes:

Men's virtual monopoly of breadwinning has been part and parcel of male dominance. The seventeenth-century patriarch has long since disappeared, but twentieth-century men have profited from their status as fathers. The linkage between fatherhood and breadwinning, for example, has helped legitimate men's monopoly of the most desirable jobs . . . So, too, insurance policies, pension plans, retirement programs, tax codes, mortgage and credit policies, educational opportunities and many more practices have bolstered men's roles as providers.¹⁶

If women have found a politics based on motherhood a double-edged sword, justifying both their ability to speak in the public sphere and their continued restriction to the domestic sphere, men have found fatherhood a win-win situation, justifying their continued presence in public life, which, in turn, explains their negligible role in child rearing. While the charge of being a negligent mother can be directed against any woman entering politics, the "dead-beat dad," only now emerging as a political category, is treated as an aberration—a breakdown of the family-wage system. There is something unnatural, then, about this spectacle of a father who desperately wants to care for his son but is unable to do so. The wounded father, who cannot wrap strong arms around his needful son, and the wide-eyed son, who struggles to maintain his belief in the "pride" of his nation, intensify our horror over the breakdown of law and order. As Mary Lynn Stevens Heininger notes, the discourse of childhood innocence has historically provided powerful tools for criticizing the "vicious, materialistic, and immoral qualities of American society."¹⁷ The horrors of modernity are magnified through children's innocent eyes. Children serve as "soft and smiling foils to a more grim and grownup reality." Young Conner, his blond hair slicked down, his blue eyes shifting nervously, personifies suffering innocence and its rebuke against the adult order. At the same time, as Heininger notes, the figure of the "pristine" child has been an "indispensable element of American optimism": "It is precisely because the young are untainted that the nation can willingly vest in them its best hopes." The father feels "the promise of America" in his son's touch. The speech precariously balances the image of Conner as already damaged by a harsh world against the image of Conner (and his unblemished innocence) as potentially healing that world. As Heininger explains, "[B]ecause simplicity and innocence were considered to be children's most distinguishing characteristics, it followed that happiness should be their natural state."¹⁸

This ideologically powerful assumption allows us to direct anger against any social force that makes our children unhappy. As Kincaid argues, "[A]n unhappy child was and is unnatural, an indictment of somebody: parent, institution, nation."¹⁹ The figure of the endangered child surfaced powerfully in campaigns for the Communications Decency Act, appearing as a hypnotized young face awash in the eerie glow of the computer terminal on the cover of *Time*, rendering arguments about the First Amendment beside the point.²⁰ As one letter to *Time* explained, "If we lose our kids to cyberspace, free speech won't matter."²¹ The innocent child was to be protected at "all costs."

Throughout the 1996 presidential campaign, candidate Bob Dole consistently characterized liberal politics and countercultural "social experiments" in terms

of the threats they posed to our children: "crime, drugs, illegitimacy, abortion, argued, meant a grandmother might be unable to call her grandchild or a parent might be unable to buy her child a book. Evoking the title of Hilary Clinton's best-selling book, Dole proclaimed:

After the virtual devastation of the American family, the rock upon which this country was founded, we are told it takes the village—that is, the collective and thus the state—to raise a child. . . . I am here to tell you, it doesn't take a village to raise a child—it takes a family.

Dole's slippage between the village, the collective, and the state is characteristic of a Republican rhetoric that reduces the problems of children to those confronted and solved by volunteerism and by individual families; Dole frames government action as the threat that makes children's lives miserable. Of course, many Republican solutions, such as the Communications Decency Act, depend upon the policing power of the village.

Democratic Family Values

Reworking conservative "family values" rhetoric—and thus "taking the issue off the table"—has been central to the "New Democrat" strategy of the Clinton administration. The 1992 Democratic Party convention was framed around rethinking the concept of the family to reflect the diverse ways Americans live in the 1990s. Clinton and the other "New Democrats" embraced a broader range of social units, including, at least briefly, the idea that gay and lesbian couples might constitute viable families. Clinton and Gore retooled ancient conceptions of the leader as a law-giving patriarch, adopting a postfeminist construction of the nurturing father watching over his children's bedside; images of Clinton marveling over Chelsea's birth or Gore attending his son, after a near-fatal accident, surfaced throughout speeches and campaign biographies. This kinder, gentler conception of the patriarch emerges from what Robert L. Griswold calls the discourse of "New Fatherhood" in postwar America. While historically fathers could gain power and authority from their public roles as breadwinners, they could now also get credit for their more private roles as educators and nurturers. Griswold sees this shift as a response to the expanded economic role of women in the workplace and to feminist critiques of the family but acknowledges that this new style of fatherhood often does not mean reciprocity of responsibilities. "Sensitive" male politicians can freely embrace the domestic sphere without being tapped there; Hillary Clinton's shifts between domestic and public sphere politics provoke controversy.

Hillary's law-review essays defending the concept of "children's rights" and her participation in Marian Edelman's Children's Defense Fund were ruthlessly attacked at the 1992 Republican convention by Marilyn Quayle and Barbara Bush as too "extremist" for a proper first lady.²² Although she acknowledged in her writing that "the phrase 'children's rights' is a slogan in search of definition,"

Lauren Berlant has argued that the Republican "family values" agenda involves a "downsizing" of the public sphere, a reduction of the role of politics in public life in favor of an exclusive focus on individual experience—on a politics of personal responsibilities and self-interest rather than one of the collective good.²² The Clinton version of "family values" relocates the family within a revitalized public sphere. When Hillary speaks of the "village" and its responsibility for children, she evokes a middle ground between "the state" and the private, one consistent with her husband's unstable compromise between Republican pressures toward dedederalization and traditional liberal conceptions of government activism. Hillary's village metaphor emerges from a politics of communitarianism, in which the community maintains a social contract to ensure the well-being of its members, a contract sometimes met by volunteerism and sometimes by government policy: "Home can—and should—be a bedrock for any child. Communities can—and should—provide the eyes and enforcement to watch over them, formally and informally. And our government can—and should—create and uphold the laws that set standards of safety for us all." Her book acknowledges the breakdown of traditional communities and the potential for new kinds of communities emerging in responses to changing technological and economic conditions. Rather than calling upon the community to preserve its traditional roles in protecting children, she calls a new community into being,

Forming the New Village

She stressed the need of children to have a more powerful voice in custody disputes, insisted on an expanded conception of their rights to free expression, and argued for greater procedural protections for juveniles charged with criminal violations. Republican critics felt that her arguments depended on state authorities to protect children's interests even in the face of parental opposition and thus undermined the sovereignty of the family. Her book, *It Takes a Village*, reworked some of these earlier arguments, shifting from a discourse of children's rights to a language of parental responsibility. Her new approach to "family values" was consistent with the Clinton administration's endorsement of school uniforms, cursive, and the "V-Chip." Republican critics still found within the book's more banal prose signs of the state power central to her earlier formulations.

No other group is so totally dependent for its well-being on choices made by others. Obviously this dependency can be explained to a significant degree by the physical, intellectual, and psychological incapacities of (some) children which render them weaker than (some) older persons. But the phenomenon must also be seen as part of the organization and ideology of the political system itself. Lacking even the basic power to vote, children are not able to exercise normal constituency powers, articulating self-interests to politicians and working towards specific goals.

Hillary Rodham presented a powerful case for reconsidering how the courts and other legal institutions dealt with children's issues. Sounding like many cultural critics of childhood innocence, Rodham wrote:

one constituted through its mutual concern for children as much-needed agents of future progress. The village metaphor, with its evocation of the organic communities of small-town American life, depends upon the historic linkage of childhood innocence to pastoralism (an image that can be traced back to Rousseau and the Romantics.)

If the Republican formulation of family values pits the "collective" against the family, the Democratic version sees the individual and the community as vitally and positively linked. In her speech to the convention, Hillary Clinton evoked an image of a national community where "[r]ight now in our biggest cities and our smallest towns there are boys and girls being tucked gently into their beds and there are boys and girls who have no one to call Mom and Dad and no place to call home." What unites the haves and the have-nots, according to this account, is that all of us care about our children. Therefore, the needs of children must somehow be removed from the realm of the political and into a space of shared understanding and communal action, as we work together to create a "nation that does not just talk about family values but acts in ways that values family."

Her vision of a world where "we are all part of one family" depends on state actions (such as "dedicated teachers preparing their lessons for the new school year . . . or police officers working to help kids stay out of trouble") but also on individual action ("volunteers tutoring and coaching children . . . and of course, parents, first and foremost"). These community members work together against various threats: "gang leaders and drug pushers on the corners of their neighborhoods . . . a popular culture that glamorizes sex and violence, smoking and drinking." Their united efforts on behalf of childhood innocence become the basis for a utopian revitalization of the nation. This image of transformation is explicit in the final paragraph of her book:

Nothing is more important to our shared future than the well-being of children. For children are at our core—not only as vulnerable beings in need of love and care but as a moral touchstone amidst the complexity and contentiousness of modern life. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes children to raise up a village to become all it should be. The village we build with them in mind will be a better place for us all.²⁴

For Clinton, it is not simply that children need the village but that the future of the village depends upon its shared commitments to children.

Race, Imperialism, and the Child

At a time when the Democratic Party was actively courting African Americans and Asian Americans for their votes and their campaign contributions, her choice of an African proverb, one widely used in Afrocentric pedagogy, as the book's title could not have been an accident. Hillary cites Marian Wright Edelman, the African-American woman who is the founder and head of the Children's Defense Fund as a mentor and friend. At the same time, she retreats from the explicit links Edelman draws between children's plight and racial politics. Edelman con-

nects present-day struggles on behalf of children with the legacy of Martin Luther King's civil rights movement:

We must put social and economic underpinnings beneath the millions of African-American, Asian American, Latino, White and Native American children left behind when the promise of the civil rights laws and the significant progress of the 1960s and 70s in alleviating poverty were eclipsed by the Vietnam War, economic recession, and changing national leadership priorities.²⁵

Edelman had been sharply critical of Clinton's capitulation to the Republicans on welfare reform, a decision that she estimated would place five million more children into poverty.²⁶

Edelman recognizes that suffering occurs most often to particular children, marked by racial and class differences, and Hillary engages in what Jacqueline Rose describes as the "impossible fiction" of the universalized child.²⁷ In our culture, the most persistent image of the innocent child is that of a white, blond-haired, blue-eyed boy, someone like Conner, and the markers of middle-classness, whiteness, and masculinity are read as standing for all children. *Hillary Takes a Village* adopts a multicultural variant of this universalized child, depicting Hillary on the back cover surrounded by children of all different racial and ethnic backgrounds, all well dressed, all squeaky clean, all smiling. The implications of this "Family of Man"—style image are complex: the photograph envisions a utopian community united despite racial differences, and at the same time bleaches away Edelman's racial and class specificity.

For several generations, progressive civil rights policies, especially those surrounding school desegregation, have rested on the hope that children, born without prejudice, might escape racial boundaries. As Shari Goldin notes, school desegregation advocates promote the image of black and white children interacting freely together on the playgrounds and in the schoolrooms as the advanced guard for tomorrow's "color-blind" society.²⁸ Hillary Clinton depicts childhood as an escape from racial antagonism when she recalls the old hymn "Jesus Loves Me," which finds "all the children of the world, red, yellow, black, and white. . . . precious in His sight." She wonders how "anyone who ever sang" this song "could dislike someone solely on for the color of their skin."²⁹ Her back-cover photo mimics classic pictures of Jesus "suffering the children."

At the same time, segregationists—from rural Alabama to South Boston—often posed school busing as a violation of childhood innocence, as a cynical bureaucratic "experiment" that turned children into "guinea pigs," "scape-goats," and "hostages" of a "liberal agenda." Racism, no less than the civil rights movement, has mobilized our hopes and fears for our children. Moreover, as Ashis Nandy has suggested, dominant ideologies of racism and colonialism have often mapped onto racial and cultural others the image of the child as "an inferior version of the adult—as a lovable, spontaneous, delicate being who is also simultaneously dependent, unreliable and witful and thus, as a being who needs to be guided, protected and educated as a ward."³⁰ Such paternalism framed the official politics of colonial domination and the unofficial politics of racial bigotry.

white domination was presented as a rational (and benign) response to the "immaturity" of nonwhite peoples. Asian and African adults were often ascribed with the childlikeness of good "obedient" children or the childishness of bad "rebellious" children.

Common Ground

Both the Republican and Democratic formulations of "family values" cast popular culture as a social problem, roughly on the same level as crime and drugs. The same week that Congress passed welfare reform, President Clinton met with television executives to set up a ratings system and Bob Dole went to Hollywood to attack movie violence. Democratic senator Joseph Lieberman, who backed the welfare reform effort, has focused congressional attention on the problem of video-game violence, which he calls the "nightmare before Christmas." In each case, the attacks on popular culture shift attention away from material problems affecting children and onto the symbolic terrain.

Throughout the twentieth century, the myth of childhood innocence has helped to erect or preserve cultural hierarchies, dismissing popular culture in favor of middle-brow or high cultural works viewed more appropriate for children. As Lynn Spigel and I write, "By evoking the 'threat to children,' social reformers typically justified their own position as cultural custodians, linking (either implicitly or explicitly) anxieties about violence, sexuality and morality to mandates of good taste and artistic merit."³¹ Within this protectionist rhetoric, taste distinctions get transformed into moral issues, with the desire to shelter children's "purity" providing a rationale for censorship and regulation. Once the innocent child has been evoked, it becomes difficult to pull back and examine these cultural issues from other perspectives, thus accounting for the bipartisan attacks against Hollywood.

Both the Republican and Democratic versions of family values presuppose the innocent child as requiring adult protection; they both speak for the child who is assumed to be incapable of speaking for herself. Young Conner remains mute as his father speaks of his own sufferings and those of his son. Three-month-old Susan Ruby was too young to talk, and the Clintons turned down Chelsea's request to speak at the convention, "protecting" her from the glare of the public spotlight.

Both the Republican and Democratic visions presume a clear separation between childhood and adulthood, with different rights and responsibilities ascribed to each phase of human development. The myth of childhood innocence depends upon our ability to locate such a break, as well as upon our sense of nostalgic loss when we cross irreversibly into adulthood. As the next section suggests, this particular conception of childhood innocence is of fairly recent historical origins. In the next section, I move beyond contemporary debates between Republicans and Democrats to frame the concept of childhood innocence in a larger historiographic context.

2. *The Historical Evolution of the Child*

Members of any society carry within themselves a working definition of childhood, its nature, limitations and duration. They may not explicitly discuss this definition, write about it, or even consciously conceive of it as an issue, but they act upon their assumptions in all of their dealings with, fears for, and expectations of their children.

—Karin Calvert²

Our modern conception of the innocent child presumes its universality across historical periods and across widely divergent cultures. The presocialized child exists in a state of nature. When we want to prove that something is so basic to human nature that it cannot be changed (the differences between the genders, for example), we point to its presence in our children. This universalized conception of the innocent child effaces gender, class, and racial differences, even if it holds those differences in place. This essentialized conception of the innocent child frees it of the taint of adult sexuality, even as we use it to police adult sexuality, and even as we use the threat of adult sexuality to regulate children's bodies. This decontextualized conception of the innocent child exists outside the culture, precisely so that we can use it to regulate cultural hierarchies, to separate the impure influence of popular culture from the sanctifying touch of high culture. This ahistorical conception of the innocent child is eternal, even as our political rhetoric poses childhood as constantly under threat and always on the verge of "disappearing" altogether. In short, the innocent child is a myth, in Roland Barthes's sense of the word, a figure that transforms culture into nature. Like all myths, the innocent child has a history. In fact, one reason it can carry so many contradictory meanings is that our modern sense of the child is a palimpsest of ideas from different historical contexts—one part Romantic, one part Victorian, one part medieval, and one part modern. We do not so much discard old conceptions of the child as accrue additional meanings around what remains one of our most culturally potent signifiers. In this section, I do not trace a single lineage of the myth of the child, a task well beyond the scope of this essay. Rather, I outline how various historians have approached this question and examine the most prevalent meanings that have stuck to the semiotically adhesive child.

The Origins of Childhood

Philippe Ariès begins his book *Centuries of Childhood* with the startling statement that childhood—at least as we currently understand it—did not exist prior to the Middle Ages.³ Childhood was not a cultural preoccupation, simply a brief phase of dependency passed over quickly and bearing little special importance. The category of infant existed because few passed beyond this stage in an era of extraordinary mortality, but the category of child did not because those who could fend for themselves were treated as small adults. Children participated

fully in all of the activities of the adult world, yet there seemed little need to

separate them out as a social category. As the conception of child as separate from adult took shape, however, it still did not bear connotations of innocence. As Ariès notes, sexual contact between children and adults, touching and stroking of the genitals, dirty jokes, sharing rooms and beds, and casual nudity, was taken for granted well into the ancient régime. Children were assumed to be closer to the body, less inhibited, and thus unlikely to be corrupted by adult knowledge.

The idea of the child as innocent first took shape, Ariès argues, within pedagogical literature, helping to justify a specialized body of knowledge centered on the education and inculcation of the young; this ideal rationalized the learned class's expanded social role and efforts to police the culture of the young. Other historians suggest alternative or supplementary explanations for this modern conception of the child. One key factor was the emergence of commercial capitalism and the rise of the middle classes; the child became central to the discussion of transfer of property and the rights of inheritance. The emerging bourgeois classes placed particular importance on the education and rearing of their sons as preparation for participation in the market economy. Out of the future-orientation of capitalists came a new focus on child rearing and pedagogy. Some subsequent historians, notably Lawrence Stone and Lloyd deMause, have pushed beyond Ariès's account to suggest that premodern parents had little attachment to their children, treating them with neglect and abuse. These claims have been sharply criticized by other historians as going well beyond available evidence.³⁴ The importance of Ariès's research may not depend on whether he is correct on every particular; his book opened a space for examining the social construction of childhood as an ongoing historical process and for questioning dominant constructions of childhood innocence. As Ariès notes:

The idea of childish innocence resulted in two kinds of attitude and behavior towards childhood: firstly, safeguarding it against pollution by life and particularly by the sexuality tolerated if not approved of among adults; and secondly, strengthening it by developing character and reason. We may see a contradiction here, for on the one hand childhood is preserved and on the other hand it is made older than its years.³⁵

This contradiction runs through our modern conception of childhood innocence—we desire it and we want to help children to move beyond it. Or, to use Ariès's terms, we want to "coddle" the child and we want to "discipline" the child.

This emerging distinction between child and adult also played a central role in shaping and regulating adult behavior. In *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias describes the gradual "refinement" of manners and etiquette as the upper classes adopted modes of behavior that separated them from the lower classes; the cultural transmission and imitation of those norms responded to the emerging middle class's desire for social betterment and political access.³⁶ In his account, rules of etiquette must first be explicitly expressed and consciously imitated but, subsequently, are internalized, becoming part of what defines us as human. How-

ever, since these norms must be acquired, they must be transmitted to children, who are initially perceived as operating outside the civilized order. The child behaved in ways that adults would not, and the adults were obligated to shape the child into conformity with social norms. According to Elias, the child comes of age in a context of fear and shame; shame is the process through which social norms are internalized. Elias sees our history since the Middle Ages in terms of increased restraint of the body and tighter regulation of emotions, necessary to facilitate participation in ever-more-complex spheres of social relations. However, more recent historians, such as John Kasson, have pointed to historical fluctuations during which society loosened or tightened its control over body and affect.³⁷ These fluctuations determine whether parents "discipline" or "cod-die" children, whether they react to violations of adult norms with horror or amusement.

Drawing her evidence both from analysis of material culture and from popular discourse about childhood, Karin Calvert locates three distinct shifts in the cultural understanding and adult regulation of American childhood between 1600 and 1900. In the first phase, children led precarious lives confronting the harsh conditions of frontier settlement, subject to high infant mortality rates, "child-hood illnesses, accidents, and a lack of sufficient nourishment." In such a culture, Calvert argues, childhood was experienced as "essentially a state of illness" or physical vulnerability: "Growing up meant growing strong and gaining sufficient autonomy to be able to take care of oneself."³⁸ Such a culture had little nostalgia for childhood, stressing the early acceptance of adult responsibilities. Child-rearing practices sought to "hasten" self-sufficiency.

Around the turn of the eighteenth century, attitudes shifted dramatically, with a "growing confidence in the rationality of nature."³⁹ If before parents saw themselves as protecting their children from natural threats, this new paradigm viewed excessive parental intervention as producing invalid children. Childhood was now perceived as a period of "robust health" during which "natural forces" took their course, allowing the young to grow into vital adulthood. Childhood was seen as a period of "freedom" before the anticipated constraints of adult civilization, and so parents valued the "childishness" of their children, their non-conformity to adult expectations.

In the third phase, from 1830 to 1900, adults did not simply take pleasure in childhood; they sought to prolong and shelter it as a special period of innocence from the adult world. As Calvert notes:

Childhood was imbued with an almost sacred character. Children were pure and innocent beings, descended from heaven and unsoiled by worldly corruption. The loss of this childish innocence was akin to the loss of virginity, and the inevitable loss of childhood itself was a kind of expulsion from the Garden of Eden.⁴⁰

This new myth of childhood innocence served, in part, as the basis for criticism of modernity and the breakdown of traditional forms of family and community life.

Two Traditions: The "Free" Child and the "Disciplined" Child

As Calvert's account suggests, our recognition of a fundamental difference between children and adults did not predetermine what significance got attached to that difference. One strong tradition, as Jackson Lears has noted, envied children's close relations to nature and their freedom from adult constraints.⁴¹ Romantic thinkers, such as William Blake or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, engaged in a "primitivist" celebration of children's "spontaneous feeling and intense experience." The child was emblematic of "freedom from social convention and utilitarian calculation." Adulthood was understood as corruption and formal education as an instrument that deforms the child's development. As Rousseau argued:

Nature intends that children shall be children before they are men. If we insist on reversing this order we shall have fruit early indeed, but unripe and tasteless and liable to early decay. . . . Childhood has its own methods of seeing, thinking, and feeling. Nothing shows less sense than to try to substitute our own methods for these.⁴²

Rousseau's *Emile* outlined an approach to education that linked learning to natural sensation and material consequences rather than adult instruction and regulation. Rousseau wanted to preserve children's pristine moral impulses, and especially to protect children's minds from the influence of books:

The mind should be left undisturbed till its faculties have developed. . . . Therefore education of the earliest years should be merely negative. It consists, not in teaching virtue or truth, but in preserving the heart from vice and from the spirit of error. . . . Exercise his body, his limbs, his senses, his strength but keep his mind idle as long as you can. . . . Leave childhood to ripen in your children.⁴³

The Romantics valued the child's easy access to the world of the imagination and sought to free themselves to engage with the world in a more childlike fashion. Another tradition, grounded in puritan assumptions, focused on adult responsibility to constrain and "manage" the child, shaping development in line with community standards. According to Kincaid, the prevailing metaphors of Victorian child-rearing discourse emphasize the malleability of children's minds, their willingness and eagerness to submit to adults. Here children are not inherently evil—simply empty-headed—and thus appropriately disciplined and instructed by their elders:

"Children's minds are like wax, readily receiving all impressions." (1880)

"Like clay in the hands of the potter, they are waiting only to be molded." (1882)

"There is a pliability in the young mind, as in the young twig; which renders it apt to take any shape into which circumstances may press it." (1818)⁴⁴

These wax, clay, and botanical metaphors rationalize increased adult control over children's minds and bodies, often resulting in harsh punishment. The persistence of these two contradictory strands—one celebrating childhood

freedom from adult control, the other insisting on the necessity of adult restraint—helps to explain the ebb and flow between the authoritarian, discipline-centered approach and the permissive, child-centered approach. Yet, these contradictions can surface within the same thinker. Progressive Era child-rearing experts, such as William Buron Forbush or G. Stanley Hall, simultaneously celebrated childhood freedom and advocated increased adult intervention into children's play. Forbush might state, "[T]he infant is like the wild creature of the wood, and it is as cruel to confine the physical activities of young children as those of squirrels and swallows."⁴⁵ Hall might state, "Childhood is the paradise of the race from which adult life is a fall."⁴⁶ Yet, both promoted organized and supervised play activities, such as the Boy Scouts or the YMCA, and urged the development of classroom rituals intended to foster patriotism and religion. Drawing on social Darwinism, the young child was, in the words of one progressive reformer, "essentially a savage, with the interests of a savage, the body of a savage, and to no small extent, the soul of one."⁴⁷ Hall and his associates were remarkably literal minded in insisting that the child be pushed through the various stages of civilization—"from Rome to Reason"—in order to gain adulthood.⁴⁸

The "Value" of Childhood

Hall's "Child Study Movement" responded to what economist Viviana A. Zelizer describes as a serious reevaluation of the child within American culture.⁴⁹ In the agrarian cultures of the nineteenth century, children were expected to contribute labor to the family farm as soon as they were physically able. More children meant more income. Even in the immigrant families of turn-of-the-century New York, children contributed to the household economy. However, the rising middle classes directed increased public pressure against child labor, placing new emphasis upon the child's sentimental value and pitting the ideal of the untarnished "child of God" (and of Nature) against the horrors of working children. The sentimental conception of the child, Zelizer argues, compensated for the lost economic worth of child labor and quickly spread.⁵⁰ Children were to be shielded from participation in the economy, either in terms of productive labor or in terms of relations of consumption. Public attitudes toward adoption shifted, for example, from a culture that encouraged the "boarding out" of children as cheap labor to one that emphasized sentimental bonds between adoptive parent and child; the result was a decreased demand for older boy children (deemed economically productive) and an increased demand for babies and young girls (viewed as cute and cuddly). The death of children, no longer taken for granted, became a scandal that could be mobilized in reform campaigns.

With improvements in children's physical well-being, the primary focus of child rearing shifted toward concerns with psychological development, with cultural materials scrutinized for their potentially damaging effects upon children's mental health. Attacks on popular culture, for example, reflected this new psychological and sociological conception of the child. Media-reform campaigns

started in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with criticisms of series books, joke magazines, and the comics but soon spread to all commercial culture targeted at the young.⁵¹ Joke magazines and comic strips, for example, were accused of destroying "all respect for law and authority," "teaching" lawlessness, "cultivating a lack of reverence," and thereby "destroy[ing] the American homes of the future."⁵²

Such attacks also reflected children's increasingly central role as consumers. Advertising aimed at children violated the "social contract" forged during this period of "sacredization." Madison Avenue, the critics charge, no longer viewed children as outside the sphere of economic life. However, as Stephen Kline suggests, the ideology of the "sacred" child also contained the roots of a consumerist ideology.⁵³ The marketing of consumer goods was coupled with parents' concerns for their children's well-being, ideals of sanitation or education, and improvements in domestic life. The child became a central salesperson for mass-marketed goods, with marketing researchers exploiting each new breakthrough in child psychology to reach this lucrative market more effectively.

The Permissive Paradigm

Writing in the 1950s, Martha Wolfenstein saw the shift from a culture of pro-duction (with its demands for discipline and regimentation) to a culture of production (with its expectations of a "fun morality") as a major force shaping child-rearing practices in the twentieth century.⁵⁴ The emergence of permissiveness in the postwar era, she argues, was partially a response to the expansion of the consumer marketplace and the prospect of suburban affluence. Permissive conceptions of the child embraced pleasure (especially erotic pleasure) as a positive motivation for exploration and learning. Bodily urges, seen as dangerous and threatening in early twentieth-century formulations, were now regarded as benign forces that could be "redirected" into more appropriate channels. Permissiveness represented an Americanization of Freudian psychoanalysis and its "discovery" of childhood sexuality. The association with childhood rendered these new (and foreign) ideas "innocent," allowing adults to rethink their own sexuality as well.⁵⁵

At the same time, permissiveness represented an ideological response to the Second World War and public distaste for anything smacking of authoritarianism.⁵⁶ The mobilization of children as "citizen soldiers" during the war had led parents to rethink the distribution of power within the family in political terms.⁵⁷ In the postwar era, child-rearing experts promoted permissive approaches as more "democratic," as helping to prepare children for participation in the postwar era. Within this discourse, children's relations to their parents paralleled citizens' relations to the state; many child-rearing guides centered on discussions of domestic jurisprudence. The core ideology behind permissiveness can be traced back to progressive currents in American thought. Benjamin Spock, the most popular child-rearing expert of the immediate postwar period, drew insight from his political involvement in the Popular Front Movement; from anthropo-

logical discoveries of Margaret Mead, who stressed the more "liberated" approaches to children's sexuality found in various "primitive" cultures; and from emerging ideas about "social engineering" within American sociology and psychology.⁵⁸ Permissiveness's popularity in postwar America seems all the more ironic when read in relation to the militarization of American science and education, the Cold War, and McCarthyism. For some, the need to protect innocent children fostered public concern about the arms race and thus increased support for anticommunism at home and abroad. For others, the romantic conception of the free child as a utopian escape from adult regulation offered a way of coping with grown-up repression and conformity.

Postwar America was ripe for a new conception of parent-child relations; American women were having children at younger and younger ages; their dislocation from urban centers toward outlying suburbs separated them from their mothers and other traditional sources of child-rearing advice.⁵⁹ Spock's book guided their day-to-day practices; its mixture of "commonsense" and expert advice offered a security blanket for young and inexperienced parents.⁶⁰ This new approach to child rearing also helped to transform gender relations within the family, leading, as Robert Griswold notes, toward a reconceptualization of the father as playmate rather than patriarch,⁶¹ and preparing for the revival of feminist politics in the 1960s.

At the same time, precisely because this shift in the power relations in the home meant a break with the way mothers and fathers had themselves been raised, young parents demanded more and more information, and thus permissiveness proved a highly productive cultural discourse. In the child-centered culture of postwar America, permissive themes and images surfaced everywhere, from advice manuals to magazine and television advertisements, from children's programming to adult novels.⁶² Not surprisingly, the child became a potent political metaphor, with liberal critics characterizing Senator Joseph McCarthy as "Dennis the Menace" and Spiro Agnew suggesting that antiwar protesters should have been "spanked" more often when they were children. Similarly, political metaphors surface consistently in child-rearing guides, with a guilty conscience compared to the Gestapo or parental control to "brainwashing."⁶³

The mobilization of the image of the innocent child at the 1966 conventions reflected the continued breakdown of the permissive-era paradigm, which has been caught within the conservative backlash against the 1960s "counterculture." Republican ideology has tended to embrace a more discipline-centered approach, and Democratic ideology tends toward "authoritative parenting" as a middle position between permissive and authoritarian approaches.

Implications and Contradictions

This history of the innocent child presupposes some relationship between large-scale ideological shifts and localized practices. Our beliefs about childhood have some impact on our treatment of children, just as shifts in material practices,

such as the responses to industrialization Zelizer documents, have some impact on our conceptual frameworks. However, historical traces of individual child-rearing practices are difficult to locate prior to the twentieth century. Historians of childhood depend upon adult records, most often upon records and advice from the learned classes, and thus they may accurately reflect only the experience of the middle class. Children left few direct traces of how they responded to adult expectations. Only in more recent eras does the historical record support a more dynamic account—one that sees competing interests between parents and children.

The actual business of living and parenting during these historical periods was no doubt much messier than our intellectual and social histories might suggest. In our own times, parents often find themselves muttering, “my parents would never have let me get away with that,” reflecting an internal conflict between their own experience of childhood and their idealized conceptions of how children should be raised. Many contemporary parents hold themselves accountable to the ideals of the permissive family culture of the 1950s and 1960. These ideals cannot be met within a changed economy that demands that both parents work outside the home or a changed social structure wherein more than half of American children have divorced parents. Faced with these uncertainties, parents, not surprisingly, are unable to maintain consistent ideology or a coherent style of parenting; instead, they respond to local conditions in confused and contradictory ways.

Recent scholarship also suggests that contemporary America may be a far less “child-centered” nation than it imagines. Joe Kincheloe locates a core “ambivalence” in American attitudes toward childhood, and Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Howard F. Stein describe a “pathological” culture in which “bad” children become scapegoats for our frustrations and guilt.³⁰ Often, Scheper-Hughes and Stein suggest, we focus on the individual child abuser as an aberration rather than acknowledge what our society exacts from its children. Their descriptions of abusive families, latchkey kids, and neglected children could not be further from the squeaky-clean and loving ideals of permissive child rearing—a nightmare culture that manifests itself most fully in black humor and horror movies.

A history of the ideology of childhood, then, is most convincing when it acknowledges the continued circulation of old conceptions and the emotional tug of previous practices; when it sees change in gradual rather than revolutionary terms; when it can account for the complex negotiations that occur during moments of cultural transition; and when it can acknowledge the gap between our best intentions and our worst impulses. Children’s culture is shaped at the global level through powerful institutions and at the local level through individual families. Through these everyday practices, the myth of the innocent child gives way to the reality of children’s experience.

3. Children's Culture

Parents and children negotiate all kinds of deals over television and toys. . . . The battle lines between public commercial television, educational videos and literary adaptations versus toy-based animated series, this video over that one, or one more hour of viewing versus one less are redrawn continually in parents' and children's daily lives.

—Ellen Seiter⁶⁴

Many important contributions to the new scholarship about childhood have made the child disappear, cultural critics and historians have pulled the rug out from under our prevailing cultural myths to show us that the innocent child is often a figment of adult imaginations. Philippe Ariès taught us not only that childhood has a history but that there may have been a period before childhood existed. James Kincaid tells us that "what the child is matters less than what we think it is."⁶⁵ Jacqueline Rose suggests that behind the category of children's fiction, there exists only a fictional child—a projection of adult desire. Children's fiction, after all, is written by adults, illustrated by adults, edited by adults, marketed by adults, purchased by adults, and often read by adults, for children.⁶⁶ As Rose's analysis suggests, children's writers have a wide array of motives, some illicit, some benign, for their desire to "get close" to the child and to shape the child's thoughts and fantasies. The examination of children's fiction, then, starts by stripping away the fantasy child reader, or even the fantasy of "children of all ages," in order to locate and interpret the adult goals and desires that shape cultural production.

This displacement of the child from the center of our analysis was a necessary first step for critiquing the mythology of childhood innocence. Yet, such work often leaves children permanently out of the equation, offering no way to examine the social experience of actual children or to talk about the real-world consequences of these ideologies. Increasingly, the child emerges purely as a figment of pedophilic desire. Rose suggests that our desire to erase children's sexuality has less to do with adult needs to suppress or regulate children's bodies than with the desire to "hold off" our "panic" at the prospect of sexualities radically different from our own. At the same time, she sees the process of storytelling as one of "seduction"; adults tell tales to justify their prolonged closeness to the objects of their desire. Photography critic Carol Mavor has traced the complex desires that link Lewis Carroll's photographs of naked girls with his children's books; both reflect his urge to arrest young girls' development at the moment when they first "bud" while forestalling the inevitable approach of adult sexuality and death.⁶⁷

Far from a perversion of the Victorian era, this fascination with the erotic child, James Kincaid argues, is utterly pervasive in our contemporary culture, surfacing in scandal-sheet headlines about molestation and murder, in Coppertone and Calvin Klein ads, and in popular films such as *Pretty Baby*.⁶⁸ Such images, he suggests, allow us to have our cake and eat it too—to be titillated by erotically

charged images of children while clinging to their innocence of adult sexual rounding childhood innocence in Victorian and contemporary culture. For writers like Kincaid and Mavor, pedophilia becomes a scandalous category, shocking us out of complacency and forcing us to examine the power dynamic between children and adults.

In evoking the shock of pedophilia, these critics are playing a dangerous game. Contemporary media scares about child molestation at day-care centers are the latest in a long series of attempts to use the ideology of the innocent child to force working women back in the home, especially when coupled with equally sensationalistic accounts of latchkey children and the horrors of video game/television violence. No one is denying that child seduction and molestation can be real problems, but the overreporting of the most sensationalistic cases denies us any meaningful perspective for examining the actual incidence of such problems. These media campaigns leave working mothers feeling that there is no safe way to rear their children, short of providing them with the constant supervision demanded by child-rearing experts.

In such a culture, almost all representations that acknowledge children's sexuality are subject to legal sanctions. Courts and media reformers are taking legal actions against award-winning art films like *The Tin Drum*, the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, Sally Mann, and Jock Sturges, the class projects of a Harvard undergraduate, and hard-core pornography. Even Kincaid has been attacked in the British press for allegedly advocating pedophilia. Elementary schools in Wisconsin organized "secrets clubs" where children were encouraged to tell social workers about their parents' sexual and drug-use habits. There is no question that our culture proliferates eroticized images of children, yet there is also no question that our culture engages in a constant and indiscriminate witch-hunt against anyone who shows too much interest in such images. Such hysteria makes it difficult for artists to question more-traditional modes of depicting children, for social critics to ask hard questions about sexuality, or for mothers and fathers to be certain which family photographs might become weapons in custody battles. I am not denying the validity of cultural analysis that recognizes pedophilic impulses, yet there are serious dangers in reducing the question of adult power over children to erotic desire.

Strip away pedophilia and we are still left with questions about how contemporary scholarship might represent the power relations between children and adults. Many accounts of children's culture focus almost exclusively on the exercise of adult authority over children, leaving little space for thinking about children's own desires, fantasies, and agendas. For example, Stephen Kline denies children any role in the production of their own culture:

What might be taken as children's culture has always been primarily a matter of culture produced for and urged upon children. . . . Childhood is a condition defined by powerlessness and dependence upon the adult community's directives and guidance. Culture is, after all, as the repository of social learning and socialization, the means by which societies preserve and strengthen their positions in the world.⁶⁹

Children's culture is, within this formulation, something that happens to children. Children are not participants or contributors to that culture. However powerful it may seem as a criticism of the regulatory power of adult institutions, Kline's formulation rests on the familiar myth of the innocent and victimized child whom we must protect—the mute one whose voice we must assume.

Childhood Identities

Writing about our fascination with eroticized images of young girls, Valerie Walkerdine suggests that popular culture is often experienced as "the intrusion of adult sexuality into the sanitized space of childhood."⁷⁰ This model is too simple, she argues, since it denies children's own role in shaping and deploying these fantasies. As Walkerdine notes, such an account does not acknowledge, for example, the ways that working-class girls actively embrace elements from adult erotic representations as offering a fantasy of escape from limited social opportunities or restrictive adult authority. Walkerdine would find equally simplistic any account that celebrated the working-class girl's performance of erotic identities as "resistance to the position accorded her at school and in high culture," since this reading ascribes too much social autonomy to children. She describes popular culture as the site of contested and contradictory attempts to define the child. Children's culture is shaped both by adult desires and childhood fantasies, with material conditions determining whether or not we—as adults or as children—are able to enact our fantasies.

Walkerdine represents a larger scholarly tradition that examines the complex processes by which children acquire identities or internalize cultural norms. Annette Kuhn's *Family Secrets*, for example, uses close readings of family photographs to explore her own struggle with her mother to define personal memory.⁷¹ Her autobiographical discussion becomes all the more poignant because, as a feminist, Kuhn recognizes the desperation behind her mother's attempt to project her own meanings onto her daughter:

If a daughter figures for her mother as the abandoned, unloved, child that she, the mother, once was, and in some ways remains, how can mother and daughter disengage themselves from these identifications without harm, without forfeiture of love?⁷²

In adopting the voice of the daughter, while acknowledging her mother's fears and fantasies, Kuhn reintroduces children's experiences into the discussion of "family values." Carolyn Steedman's *The Tidy House* explores how creative writing by young working-class girls reveals a pained recognition of their parents' ambivalence toward child rearing.⁷³ Steedman explains:

They knew that their parents' situation was one of poverty, and that the presence of children only increased that poverty. . . . They knew that children were longed for, materially desired, but that their presence was irritation, regret and resentment. They knew that, in some clear and uncomplicated way, it would have been better had they never been born.⁷⁴

Steedman reads the stories as the girls' "urgent" attempts to "understand what set of social beliefs had brought them into being." This tradition of feminist analysis slides back and forth between psychological and sociological investigation, exploring the charged and unstable relations between mothers and daughters in order to rethink the social and psychic dynamics of the patriarchal family. Such analysis casts the child—whether understood through autobiographical introspection (*Family Secrets*) or textual analysis and ethnographic description (*The Tidy House*)—as an active participant in these family dramas; children's desires, hopes, fears, and fantasies are central to the process of constructing personal identities.

One limitation of our current research is that almost all such work has focused on issues of motherhood and femininity. This is not surprising, given women's primary responsibility for child rearing. However, we lack solid critical analysis of the relations between fathers and sons within these same critical terms; we need more work on the construction of masculinity through the rituals of boyhood. Feminism probably offers the best tools for initiating such a project, yet few male scholars have adopted its modes of analysis to confront their own formative experiences.

Children's Culture and Adult Institutions

These recent studies of childhood have generated a more complex picture of the power relations between children and adults. Parents, schoolteachers, church leaders, social reformers, the adult world in general, *are* powerfully invested in "fixing" children's identities. Eve Sedgwick has explored how parents' anxieties that their sons and daughters might grow up to be queer motivate the imposition of gender-specific behaviors on "tomboys" and "sissies."⁷⁵ Sedgwick reviews psychological literature and clinical practices that confuse gender identification and sexual preference, seeing inappropriate dress, play, and mannerism as early warning signs that a child has homosexual tendencies. Sedgwick challenges efforts by the mental health profession to "maximize the possibility of a heterosexual outcome," wondering who speaks for the rights of queer children.

Children *are* subject to powerful institutions that ascribe meanings onto their minds and bodies in order to maintain social control. Barrie Thorne suggests, for example, that teachers' needs to routinize their procedures and to break their classes into manageable scaled groups results in a constant reinforcement of the basic binaries between "boys and girls."⁷⁶ Children are more likely to play together across gender differences in their own neighborhoods, outside adult supervision, than within school cafeterias and playgrounds.

Children's culture is shaped by adult agendas and expectations, at least on the site of production and often at the moment of reception, and these materials leave lasting imprints on children's social and cultural development. Elizabeth Segel has examined how publishers, librarians, and educators shape children's access to different genres, resulting in gender divides in reading interests that carry into adult life. The separation of domestic-based stories for girls and adventure stories

for boys reaffirm the gendering of the public and private spheres. Boys' books were often "chronicles of growth to manhood"; girls' books often "depicted a curbing of autonomy in adolescence."⁷⁷ The two forms of literature prepare girls and boys for their expected roles in adult society. However, these gender designations are not totally rigid in practice. Young girls often read boys' books for pleasure, and boys' books are more consistently taught in the classroom. On the other hand, boys typically have been reluctant to engage with books with female protagonists or feminine subject matter. Such an imbalance, Segel argues, extracts "a heavy cost in feminine self-esteem" and may be even "more restrictive of boys' . . . freedom to read." Ellen Seiter has extended Segel's analysis to the gendering of children's television. Feminists, she argues, may be well-meaning when they attack hyperfeminine programs like *My Little Pony* and *Strawberry Shortcake*, but their continued disparagement of the things girls like may contribute to—rather than help to rectify—girls' declining self-esteem.⁷⁸

The Resistant Rituals of Childhood

Without denying the tremendous cultural power behind these adult efforts to control children's identity formation, scholarship on children's culture also acknowledges the ways children resist, transform, or redefine adult prerogatives, making their own uses of cultural materials and enacting their own fantasies through play. Miriam Formanek-Brunel has researched the gender politics of doll play in the nineteenth century, indicating both the ways that dolls were valued by adults as a means of inculcating domestic skills in young girls and the ways that doll play might "subvert convention, mock maternalism, and undermine restrictions."⁷⁹ On the one hand, the gift of a doll was intended to encourage girls to sew and to rehearse other "domestic arts" expected of them as future wives and mothers. On the other hand, young girls often used the dolls to rehearse funerals and mourning rituals, expressing a core ambivalence about their future maternal roles, or played with them aggressively, chopping off their hair or driving nails through their bodies. Formanek-Brunel suggests: "Girls in the process of constructing their own notion of girlhood engaged their parents in a pre-conscious political struggle to define, decide, and determine the meaning of dolls in their own lives and as representations of their own culture."⁸⁰

Erica Rand's *Queer Accessories* suggests such localized resistance continues in contemporary doll play.⁸¹ Rand solicited and interpreted adults' memories of Barbie play, finding that these recollections often circle around unsanctioned and often erotically charged play. Many lesbians remembered transforming the fashion model into a "gender outlaw," drawing on their memories of childhood doll play to frame "dyke destiny" stories. Just as the myth of childhood innocence naturalizes heterosexual assumptions about appropriate gender roles, "dyke destiny" stories suggest the inevitability of queer sexual orientation by tracing its roots back to early childhood.⁸² Rand encourages skepticism about such stories, examining the way that memory retrospectively re-

writes the past to conform to our present-day identities. Rand sees a constant struggle within children's culture (and within adult memories of childhood) between moments of hegemonic incorporation and moments of resistance. The same girl or boy may sometimes conform and sometimes disobey.

Adult institutions and practices make "bids" on how children will understand themselves and the world around them, yet they can never be certain how children will take up and respond to those "bids." A growing literature depicts children as active creators who use the resources provided them by the adult world as raw materials for their play activities, their jokes, their drawings, and their own stories.⁸³ Shelby Ann Wolf and Shirley Brice Heath's *The Braid of Literature* offers a detailed description of Heath's own young daughters as readers, documenting the many ways they integrated favorite books into their lives. Children's books became reference points for explaining their own experiences. The girls often spoofed their language, characters, and situations.⁸⁴ They felt compelled not only to reread favorite stories but to enact them with their bodies. Such play represents a testing of alternative identities. Maintaining a fluid relationship to adult roles, children try things out through their play, seeing if they fit or make sense, and discarding them when they tire of them.

The Ket Aesthetic

Adult control over the cultural materials that enter children's lives certainly constrains the array of ideas and identities they can use in their play; adult restrictions on play activities limit this process of ideological exploration; yet, nothing can fully block oppositional meanings from entering children's lives. Alison James has explored how children's relations to cheap candies (which are called "kets" in British slang) suggest an oppositional aesthetic, one that challenges or reverses adult categories and carves out a kids-only culture.⁸⁵ Children embrace candies that provoke strange sensations (bubbling or crackling on their tongues), that incorporate unfamiliar taste combinations, that mimic things (rats, worms, and the like) adults refuse to eat, that embrace lurid or jarring colors, or that encourage playful and messy modes of consumption.

James describes "children's culture" as children's space for cultural expression using materials bought cheaply from the parent culture but viewed with adult disapproval. Her account could not differ more from Kline's conception of a children's culture produced and controlled by adults. The cheaper they are in price, the more cultural goods are likely to reflect children's own aesthetic and cultural sensibilities. Materials children can purchase with their allowances (such as candy, bubblegum cards, or comic books) are less likely to bear the heavy imprint of adult gatekeepers than high-cost items (books and videos) parents purchase as gifts.

This "ket" aesthetic can also be recognized within children's television programs, such as the "scream-real-loud" realm of *Peewee's Playhouse* or the stop-and-stime world of Nickelodeon's game shows, or in video games, which have often faced reformist pressures because of their use of scatological or gory im-

agency.⁸⁵ As Marsha Kinder has suggested, Nickelodeon's self-promotion has often encouraged an ethos of "generational conflict," stressing that parents "just don't get" its appeal to children: "adults are untrustworthy; they wear deodorant and ties; they shave under their arms, they watch the news and do other disgusting things."⁸⁷ Nickelodeon's self-presentation walks a thin line, using children's oppositional aesthetic to package shows (such as *Lassie*) that contain little parents would find offensive and creating programs (such as *Kids Court* or *Linda Eller-bee's* news specials) that almost—but usually not quite—embrace a politics of kid empowerment. Some of Nick's shows encourage children to cast a critical eye toward adult institutions, teach them to be skeptical readers of media images, encourage them to take more active roles in their communities (including leading fights for free expression within their schools) and take seriously their own goals for the nation's future (as in their *Kids Pick the President* campaign coverage). Nickelodeon's claims to be "the kids-only network" erects a sharp line between the realms of children and adults.

This approach contrasts sharply with the children's programs of the 1950s (such as *Howdy Doodly* and *Winky Dink and You*), which Lynn Spigel has characterized as inviting a "dissolution of age categories."⁸⁸ Such programs, she argues, were "filled with liminal characters, characters that existed somewhere in between child and adult" and encouraged a playful transgression of age-appropriate expectations. Spigel points to their covert appeal to adult fantasies of escaping into the realm of childhood play free from the conformity and productivity expected of grown-ups in Eisenhower's America. The Nickelodeon programs such as *Double Dare* or *What Would You Do?*, on the other hand, stage contests between children and adults, invite children to judge their parents or to smack them with cream pies and douse them with green slime. They support children's recognition of a core antagonism with grown-ups, while positioning the network, its programs, and its spin-off products on the kid side of that divide. This desire to create an autonomous cultural space for children's play is not new, nor does such freedom from adult control necessarily retard the child's inculcation into anticipated social roles. Children must break with their parents before they can enter into adult roles and responsibilities. Children's play has often been a space where they experimented with autonomy and self-mastery. E. Anthony Rotundo's analysis of "Boy Culture" in nineteenth-century America suggests its complex relationship to the adult world.⁸⁹ As industrialization led to a greater division of labor, forcing men to leave the home to work in the factories and leaving women in the domestic sphere to rear the young, the formation of masculine identities entered a new phase. Young boys sought an escape from maternal restraint, fleeing into a sphere of male action and adventure. Their play with other boys was clearly framed as oppositional to adults, taking the form of daring raids on privileged adult spaces, comic assaults on parental authority, or simply a rejection of maternal rules and restrictions. Through this play, boys acquired the aggression, competitiveness, daring, self-discipline, and physical mastery expected of those who would inhabit a culture of rugged individualism. The more rambunctious and irresponsible aspects of this culture would need to

be tempered as the young males entered adult jobs and family relations, yet this rough-and-tumble "boy culture" prepared them more fully for their future roles than the maternally sanctioned activities of the domestic sphere.

Embracing a politics of appropriation and resistance runs the risk of romanticizing child's play as the seeds of cultural revolution. I use the word *romanticizing* with precision here. In many ways, the celebration of children as "gender outlaw" or cultural rebels can be traced back to Rousseau's celebration of the "natural" and "spontaneous" child as embodying a freedom not yet subordinated to the demands of the civilized world. While this myth of the child certainly has advantages over the more-repressive image of the child as a blank slate or the multivalent image of the innocent child at risk, it is nevertheless a myth. Perhaps, there is no way for adults to speak of children without putting words in their mouths and turning them into symbols for our own use. However, Rotundo's analysis suggests one escape from this impasse: looking at the ways children's play represents a temporary space of freedom while it contributes actively to socialization and indoctrination into cultural values. Rotundo preserves the idea of children's social and cultural agency without assuming that they are outside the cultural formations or material conditions that shape all human interactions.

Conclusion: The Political Stakes of Children's Culture

Children are at the epicenter of the information revolution, ground zero of the digital world. . . . After centuries of regulation, sometimes benign, sometimes not, kids are moving out from under our pious control, finding one another via the great hive that is the net. . . . Children can for the first time reach past the suffocating boundaries of social convention, past their elders' rigid notions of what is good for them.

—Jon Katz²⁰

The Children's Culture Reader seeks modes of cultural analysis that do not simply celebrate children's resistance to adult authority but provide children with the tools to realize their own political agendas or to participate in the production of their own culture. The challenge is to find models that account for the complexity of the interactions between children and adults, the mutuality and the opposition between their cultural agendas. Feminist analysis has taught us that politics works as much through the micropractices of everyday life as through large-scale institutions and that our struggle to define our identities in relations to other members of our families often determines how we understand our place in the world.

As I have been editing this collection, I have been continually asked to explain and justify the "political stakes" in reexamining children's culture. As this discussion has already suggested, I consider such questions misguided, both because they accept at face value the premise that childhood is a space largely "innocent" of adult political struggles and because they fail to recognize how foundational the figure of the innocent child is to almost all contemporary forms

of politics. Issues involving children are often viewed as "soft" compared to "hard-core" issues like tax cuts, crime bills, and defense expenditures, a language that suggests historic divisions between a feminine domestic sphere and a masculine public sphere. Feminists have long campaigned for a reassessment of those priorities and a recognition of the political stakes in domestic life. Yet, the politics of the public sphere, no less than the politics of the domestic sphere, rests on the figure of the child, as we saw in the various evocations of childhood at the Republican and Democratic National Conventions. Often, the figure of the brutalized and victimized child gets mobilized in campaigns to build support for war; the figure of the dead child is the most powerful trope in the campaign for tougher sentencing of criminals. For example, the recent "Megan's Law," which requires public notification of the movement of convicted child molesters and other offenders into the community, will be forever associated with the memory of a specific child victim.

Moreover, without a politics of the family, without a progressive conception of children's culture, the Left lacks the ability literally and figuratively to reproduce itself. We need to be engaged in the process not only of critiquing traditional conceptions of the family but of imagining alternative ways that families might perform their responsibilities for the care and raising of the young. We need to think about our roles as parents, teachers, and citizens in ways that help us to prepare children to participate in the process of social change and political transformation. We need to embrace approaches to teaching and social policy that acknowledge children's cultural productivity and that provide them with the materials and skills they need to critique their place in the world. The Birmingham tradition of cultural studies helped us to question the labeling of youth cultures as "deviant" by adult standards, seeing in their "hooliganism" the signs of a subversive or resistant subculture. We still lack a similarly political vocabulary for examining moments when children buck adult demands. Instead, we frame such localized moments of resistance in moralistic categories of "naughtiness" or in developmental psychological terms as "testing limits." The need is to recognize that children's disobedience to teachers, for example, might originate in a context of economic or racial inequalities, might express something of the frustrations of coping with a world that devalues your interests and seeks to impose adult values onto your activities. If politics is ultimately about the distribution of power, then the power imbalance between children and adults remains, at heart, a profoundly political matter.

Herbert Kohl confronts these questions when he debates whether we should "burn *Babar*."⁹¹ He invites us to question whether our recognition of noxious ideologies in traditional children's literature (such as *Babar's* procolonialism agenda) compels us to banish them or whether we should encourage children to become critical readers locating and questioning the implicit assumptions they find in the culture around them. As Kohl writes:

The challenge parents face is how to integrate encounters with stereotypes into their children's sensibility and help their children become critical of aspects of the culture that denigrate or humiliate them or anyone else. . . . Instead of prohibiting things

that tempt children, this means allowing them the freedom to explore things while trusting them to make sensible and humane judgments.²²

Jon Katz confronts these challenges when he shifts the focus of debates about cyberspace away from the question of how we might protect our children from corrupting influences (whether through legal sanctions or filtering technology) and toward how we might empower children to contribute actively to the political culture of the net.²³ Katz argues that children, no less than adults, have "certain inalienable rights not conferred at the caprice of arbitrary authority," "rights that include access to the materials of their culture and the technologies that enable more widespread communication as well as "the right to refuse to be force-fed other generations' values." Katz's polemical and suggestive essay points toward a reassessment of the role of education, away from a focus on the transmission of established cultural norms and toward the development of skills that enable children to question the society around them and to communicate their ideas, via new technologies, with others of their generations. He writes:

Children need help in becoming civic-minded citizens of the digital age, figuring out how to use the machinery in the service of some broader social purposes. . . . But more than anything else, children need to have their culture affirmed. They need their parents, teachers, guardians and leaders to accept that there is a new political reality for children, and the constructs that governed their own lives and culture are no longer the only relevant or useful ones.²⁴

Linda Ellerbee confronts these challenges when she creates television programs that encourage children's awareness of real-world problems, such as the Los Angeles riots, and enable children to find their own critical voice to speak back against the adult world. She trusts children to confront realities from which other adults might shield them, offering them the facts needed to form their own opinions and the air time to discuss issues.

These critics, educators, and artists offer us models of a children's culture that is progressive in both its form and its content. They move beyond mythic innocence and toward a recognition and advocacy of children's cultural, social, and political agency. Such works do not ignore the fact that children suffer real material problems, including neglect, abuse, and poverty, and that there are times and places where adults must protect them from themselves and from the world. There are also times and places where we need to listen to our children and factor their needs, desires, and agendas into our own sense of the world and into the decisions that affect our children's lives. Children need adults to create the conditions through which they develop a political consciousness, to defend their access to the information they need to frame their own judgments, and to build the technologies that enable them to exchange their ideas with others of their

generation. They need us to be more than guardians of the fort or protectors of the village, and we will not rise to those challenges as long as our actions are governed by familiar myths of the innocent child. The goal is not to erase the line between child and adult, which we must observe if we are both to protect and empower the young. The goal is to offer a fuller, more complex picture of children's culture that can enable more meaningful, realistic, and effective political change.

NOTES

1. James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
2. Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham, "Introduction: The Invisible Audience," in *Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham, eds., In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences* (London: BFI, 1995), p. 4.
3. For a good collection of key essays about youth cultures, see Sue Thornton, *The Subcultural Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
4. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).
5. Henry A. Giroux, *Fugitive Cultures: Race, Violence and Youth* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 89.
6. James Kincaid, *Child-Loving* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 78-79.
7. Convention rhetoric exaggerates dominant tendencies in American ideology, offering more differentiated versions of the party's positions than arise in everyday governmental actions. We listen to such speeches as an optimistic summation of ideals, which we share but do not fully believe can be realized. However, these ideals do translate into material practices, becoming the focus of specific policies or the crux of core political debates. These political statements are particularly vivid articulations of discourses about childhood that have a longer history.
8. Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 78.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
10. Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Fight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor, 1983), p. 26.
11. Lynn Spigel, "Seducing the Innocent: Childhood and Television in Postwar America," in this volume. See also, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1978).
12. Quoted in Spigel, "Seducing the Innocent."
13. Heather Hendershot, *Endangering the Dangerous: The Regulation and Censorship of Children's Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming).
14. John Fiske, *Media Matters: Everyday Culture and Political Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
15. Eric Freedman, "Have You Seen This Child?: From Milk Carton to *Mise-en-Abyme*," in Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc, eds., *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).
16. Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), pp. 3-4.
17. Mary Lynn Stevens Heininger, "Children, Childhood and Change in America,

- 1820–1920," in *Mary L. S. Heininger, Karin Calvert, Barbara Finkelstein, Kathy Vandell, Anne Scott MacLeod, and Harvey Green, eds., A Century of Childhood, 1820–1920* (Rochester, N.Y.: Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1984), p. 31.
18. Heininger, "Children, Childhood and Change," p. 16.
19. Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 80.
20. Philip Elmer-Dewitt, "On a Screen Near You: Cyberporn," *Time*, July 2, 1993, pp. 39–43. For a fuller discussion of the role of "childhood innocence" in the Communications Decency Act debates, see Henry Jenkins, "Empowering Children in the Digital Age: Towards a Radical Media Pedagogy," *Radical Teacher* 50 (1997): 30–35.
21. Letter to the Editor, *Time*, July 24, 1995.
22. Hillary Rodham, "Children Under the Law," *Harvard Educational Review*, summer 1973, pp. 487–514.
23. Lauren Belant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).
24. Hillary Rodham Clinton, *It Takes a Village and Other Lessons* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 318.
25. Marian Wright Edelman, "An Unfinished Symphony" at <http://www.sojourners.com/sojourners/950314.html>.
26. For useful background on Edelman's Childrens Defense Fund, see its homepage at <http://www.childrensdefense.org>.
27. Jacqueline Rose, "The Case of Peter Pan," in this volume.
28. Shari Goldin, "Unlearning Black and White," in this volume.
29. Clinton, *It Takes a Village*, p. 176.
30. Ashis Nandy, "Reconstructing Childhood: A Critique of the Ideology of Adulthood," in *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).
31. Lynn Spigel and Henry Jenkins, "Same Bat Channel, Different Bat Times: Mass Culture and Popular Memory," in Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio, eds., *The Many Lives of The Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 127.
32. Karin Calvert, *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600–1900* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), p. 1.
33. Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962).
34. For a thorough review of this whole research tradition, its strengths and its weaknesses, see Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
35. Philippe Aries, "From Immodesty to Innocence," in this volume.
36. Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners* (New York: Urizen Books, 1978); Norbert Elias, *Power and Civility*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).
37. John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990).
38. Calvert, *Children in the House*, p. 150.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), pp. 144–149.
42. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "On Reasoning with Children," in Crane Brinton, ed., *The Portable Age of Reason Reader* (New York: Viking, 1956), p. 122.

43. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (New York: Dutton, 1963), pp. 57-58.
44. Kincaid, *Child-Learning*, pp. 90-91.
45. William Byron Forbush, *The Boy Problem* (1909), as quoted in Steven L. Schlossman, "G. Stanley Hall and the Boys' Club: Conservative Applications of Recapitulation Theory," *Journal of the History of the Behavior Sciences* 9, no. 2 (1973): 140-147.
46. Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 148.
47. J. Adams Puffer, *The Boy and His Gang* (1912), as quoted in Schlossman, "G. Stanley Hall," p. 144.
48. For a discussion of the cultural impact of Hall's ideas, see Richard DeCordova, "The Mickey in Macy's Window: Childhood, Consumerism, and Disney Animation," in Eric Smoodin, ed., *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom* (New York: AFI/Routledge, 1994), pp. 203-213.
49. Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
50. Of course, this "sacredization" of the child is never absolute. Conservative attacks on "welfare mothers," for example, posit their reproduction as a "drain" on the American economy, denying their offspring the "sentimental value" that this ideology suggests is the birthright of all children. The discomfort provoked by such a blunt economic assessment of children's value may have contributed to the reframing of this issue in terms of teen pregnancy and the emotional readiness of "children to bear children." This new formulation is more closely aligned with an ideology of childhood innocence.
51. Mark I. West, *Children, Culture and Controversy* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1988).
52. For a discussion of these issues, see Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 42-43.
53. Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys and Children's Culture in the Age of TV Marketing* (London: Verso, 1993).
54. Martha Wolfenstein, "Fun Morality," in this volume.
55. Henry Jenkins, "The Sensus Child," in this volume.
56. See, for example, Henry Jenkins, "No Matter How Small: The Democratic Imagination of Dr. Seuss," in Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc, *Hop on Pop*.
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