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Peter Stearns. *Childhood in World History.* New York and London: Routledge, 2006. x + 140 pp. $29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-415-35233-8.

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Peter Stearns's *Childhood in World History* is a worthy member of the Themes in World History series, published by Routledge, taking its place alongside volumes on such topics as disease and medicine, alcohol, sports, food, migration, revolutions, and religion. A front note indicates that the purpose of the series is "to provide serious, if brief, discussions of important topics as additions to textbook coverage and document collections" (p. ii). Thus this work and others in the series are intended primarily for undergraduate students. As Stearns is the series editor and has two other volumes in it, readers will be unsurprised to find that the volume under review meets the standards described for the series almost exactly. What may surprise some readers, however, is that *Childhood in World History* has a great deal more than a quick survey to offer.

As the book approaches the recent past and the contemporary world, chapters become richer and more detailed. Early chapters are brief, sketchy, and necessarily superficial because of the lack of adequate sources. Much of what can be said about childhood in early agricultural societies is at best broad, general, and even contradictory. Stearns observes, for example that "most agricultural societies emphasized extended families, with strong links among surviving grandparents, adult children, and their spouses (usually with wives moving to the extended families of husbands) and children, but more isolated nuclear families could also develop" (p. 16).

When societies became more civilized, historians are blessed with more evidence. Early laws defined childhood and often specified the status they inherited. The appearance of schooling gives some tantalizing evidence of the lives of children in the classical civilizations. In China, Confucianism defined expectations for children, but these fragments most often pertained only to the children of the elites. Such fragmentary sources permit Stearns to make some brief (and very general) comparisons between the civilizations of China, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome.

Chapters on the impact of religious change, "Debating Childhood in the Premodern West," and the emergence of what Stearns calls "the modern model of childhood" follow (p. 54). Stearns's artic-

ulation of this model is especially useful in thinking about developments affecting children in the recent past. Among the elements in the model are the "conversion of childhood from work to schooling" (p. 55), the limitation of family size, a reduction in the infant death rate, and a greater separation between childhood and adulthood. A change in assumptions about children's inner natures accompanied these basic patterns. In the modern model, children were no longer born in sin, but were now blank slates (as in John Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding," 1689) and thus capable of being influenced by experience and social factors. As families had fewer children and as individual children became more important, the practice of childrearing, especially mothering, became more intensive, while at the same time new aspects of childhood--a concern about sexuality, for example, or the concept of adolescence--emerged as social issues.

Even as the modern model of childhood appeared, other patterns persisted. Slavery remained legal in the United States and Brazil until the 1860s and 1870s, and slave children were mostly denied access to the schooling and other aspects of the modern model. In colonial societies, especially Latin America, the rates of illegitimacy rose dramatically and this, in turn, produced a number of children who circulated between orphanages and families who needed children for labor. Some aspects of that colonial pattern have persisted among the lower orders in Latin America.

The six concluding chapters all focus on the twentieth century and on the complex developments affecting children late in that century. These latter chapters are much richer in both detail and analysis, and by themselves repay the price of obtaining this short general work. One chapter focuses on Japan's deliberate efforts to modernize its society in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Japanese committed major resources to schooling and to the reduction of infant mortality while at the same time significantly lowering the birth rate (from 2.7 children per woman in 1950 to 1.4 in 1995) (p. 77). Another aspect of childhood in Japan was the development of consumer appeals to Japanese children. As a result Japan became both a major producer and exporter of toys.

Another chapter combines analysis of the changes in childhood in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. In the Soviet Union, as in Japan, there was a strong emphasis on schooling and on efforts to improve health care for children and to reduce infant mortality. But there was also a strong effort to mobilize youth along ideological lines, the Young Pioneers and the Komsomol organizations being examples of that effort. But unlike Japan, the Soviet Union sought to encourage large families as the birthrate there was already quite low.

In China, the focus on education took a strange turn in the "Cultural Revolution," when millions of secondary and college-level students were "sent down" to the country to take up agricultural work. The rise of the ***Red Guards*** as agents of the "Cultural Revolution" distorted relations between children and adults. The People's Republic did achieve a much lowered infant mortality rate, but then sought to address the growth of population through the "one child" policy, a pattern that resulted in an over supply of male babies. Orphanages developed in China with their charges being exclusively female.

Stearns sums up the twentieth-century in the developed world as follows: "Societies in the United States, Japan, and Western Europe continued more fully to implement what we have described as the characteristics of modern childhood. That is they added commitments to schooling and further reduced at least the more traditional forms of child labor; they completed the dramatic reductions of child death rates that had begun in the nineteenth century, and with a few zigzags, they

made a fuller conversion to lower birth rates." (p. 93)

In addition treating children as consumers became much more common, and mothers began to work outside the home in larger numbers. As a consequence of mothers working, childcare became an important issue both for families and for social policy. Divorce also became much more common, especially in the United States, and in the 1980s there was a significant increase in the number children growing up in poverty, especially when they lived in families headed by a single mother.

In one of the most compelling chapters, Stearns takes up the impact of war and violence on children. "No single process in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries," he observes, "killed as many children as the Holocaust did" (p. 111). But the death rate for children around the world only increased after World War II. Estimates of children killed in civil wars around the globe reach as high as 150 million. Also millions of children were forced to flee as violence touched their homeland and some children became soldiers in the wide-ranging wars.

In his conclusion, Stearns notes that the contemporary world is full of complexity and that certain kinds of problems persist. Abuse of children continues in spite of the rise of the modern model, and many contemporary children suffer from psychological problems, including depression, eating problems, and suicide. Change, even rapid overwhelming change, is neither new nor likely to stop. An understanding of the history of childhood, Stearns thinks, "provides a roadmap" for the continuing debate and actions involved in the concept of childhood (p. 140).

This slim volume is intended primarily for undergraduates who are ignorant not only of the sweep of the history of childhood since ancient times, but of most social trends as well. Broad in scope and mostly lacking scholarly apparatus (although the references at the end of each chapter are helpful and include many very recent works) ***Childhood in World History*** serves as an introductory overview to the chronological and geographical complexities of the scope of the history of childhood. As such it cannot be both an introduction to so vast a field and an in-depth contribution at the same time.

Stearns's essential arguments are not controversial. First, he argues, the world children inhabit it has changed a great deal since ancient times and that world keeps changing. Next, the development of the "modern model of childhood" has made an enormous difference in the lives of children since the nineteenth century and continues to make a difference in less developed parts of the world. Third, major events such as World War II and the civil wars which have followed have had enormous impacts on children and have led to the deaths of millions of children.

Thus, we are left with a paradox: even as the modern model of childhood has extended the lives of many children and improved the quality of life for millions of children, wars and struggles have taken the lives of millions of children and otherwise hampered or harmed the lives of countless other children. ***Childhood in World History*** might serve as a supplement to introductory courses in world history or to courses related to children and families, but lacking a historical focus. It is probably too broad and general to be of much use in an upper level course in the history of childhood, family, or social trends. Those seeking a primer on the field, though, might well begin here.

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