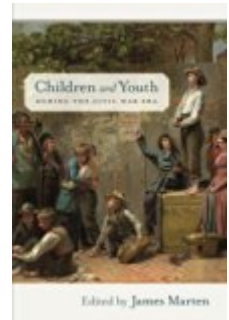


**James Alan Marten.** *Children and Youth during the Civil War Era.* New York: New York University Press, 2012. xii + 270 pp. \$25.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8147-9608-5.



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*Children and Youth during the Civil War Era*, third in the series *Children and Youth in America*, begins the process of patching a gaping historiographical hole. The collection of essays makes a considerable contribution to a better understanding of the experiences of young people just before, during, and after the Civil War, a topic that has been little explored by historians. As editor James Marten notes, the volume also makes significant contributions to other historiographies, including the history of changing ideas about childhood, scholarship on the experiences of slave families, and the history of the Lost Cause. It also succeeds on another front by eloquently evoking the lived experiences of Civil War-era children—experiences many historians alternately ignore or presume irrecoverable.

Part 1, “Children and the Sectional Conflict,” examines the intersection of the slavery debate and ideology of childhood, as well as the responses of young people to the sectional crisis. Rebecca de Schweinitz’s and Elizabeth Kuebler-Wolf’s essays illustrate the ways in which both pro- and an-

tislavery advocates made use of the ideology of childhood. By the mid-nineteenth century, many Americans viewed childhood as a period during which youth should be protected and nurtured. De Schweinitz writes that antislavery writers pointed to slave children’s lack of this nurturing experience as one of the most profound evils of the system. Slaveholders also evoked family ideology in their defense of the institution, claiming that slavery simply represented an extension of proper patriarchal family order. Kuebler-Wolf offers a complementary argument, analyzing several images that appear to support the arguments of both sides of the slavery debate. An 1863 cartoon of a young white boy beating a black doll while his approving sister looks on captures the fears of antislavery activists who “argue[d] that slavery effectively destroyed the cherished institution of family life and corrupted childhood’s innocence” (p. 29). Two photographic images of white children and their black nurses represent proslavery apologists’ belief that close association of young blacks and whites within the system of slavery

would not corrupt childhood innocence; rather, they believed, it would strengthen the bonds of affection and forestall tyranny and abuse on the part of white slaveholders later on. Read in tandem, these essays offer innovative and convincing arguments of the importance of family ideology to the coming of the Civil War.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai provides an essay on the political activity of students attending four New England colleges during the sectional crisis. Students' essays and speeches "reflected a northern, New England-centric conception of progress, in which slavery would die out and the entire nation would develop similarly to the industrializing North" (p. 47). The subsequent Union victory in the war vindicated these students' convictions. Herein perhaps may be found the most significant implications of Wongsrichanalai's argument, which he does not fully elaborate in this necessarily brief essay. How did the vindication of the principles of these college men influence them as they took on the roles of political leaders in the postwar period? Perhaps a future volume in the series *Children and Youth in America* will wrestle with this important question.

Part 2, "Children of War," examines ways in which the military conflict affected primarily white children in both the North and South. Thomas F. Curran explores the case of Tommy Cave within the broader context of boys who ran away from home to join the Union or Confederate armies. Tommy defied his father and ran away from his Missouri home at age fifteen to join the Confederate army. After Tommy was captured by Union troops, officials decided not to send him home, but rather treated him as a prisoner of war, and thus "emancipated the teen from his parents' control" (p. 73). Curran's essay demonstrates that the war sometimes allowed young people to achieve independence from their parents, but also illustrates that such declarations could be short-lived. After being exchanged and re-enter-

ing Confederate service, Tommy was killed in the Battle of New Market in 1864.

Two essays examine Civil War-era print culture for and about children. Paul B. Ringel analyzes the *Youth's Companion* under the editorship of Daniel Sharp Ford. By the end of the war, a tone that Ringel calls "moralistic sensationalism" dominated the periodical, with stories featuring children who confronted danger in both the public and private realms (p. 79). The tone developed during the war brought the *Youth's Companion* popularity and economic success, and, according to Ringel, "the conflict strengthened the connection between children and the nation's market economy" (p. 79). In his essay, Sean A. Scott examines children's obituaries, most of them from Cincinnati's *Western Christian Advocate*. Narratives in which children redeem family and friends were prominent, and obituaries of children frequently chronicled the reasons they surely made it to Heaven, although obituaries of boy soldiers often emphasized the youth's patriotism more than his spirituality. Ultimately, all "sentimental stories and obituaries of infants, children, and youths published in denominational newspapers during the Civil War sought to diminish the terrors of dying for a culture permeated with death" (p. 107).

The final two essays in part 2 examine the ways in which Confederate girls and young women expressed their loyalty to the Confederate cause and dealt with the upheaval brought by war. In her essay, Lisa Tendrich Frank expertly evokes the lived experiences of girls who experienced General Sherman's invasion of Georgia and the Carolinas. Although only rarely did Confederate women experience physical assault perpetrated by Sherman's men, Confederate girls experienced the fear of it, as well as the pillaging of their homes and belongings. For example, some Confederate girls feared that Yankee soldiers would steal their letters and diaries and publish them (which occasionally did happen). Frank also

establishes the significance of girls' experiences in the formation of the postwar ideology of the Lost Cause. "Girls who lived through Sherman's march did not have to look far to find confirmation of their belief that Confederates fought honorably while Union soldiers did not," and they "threw their energies into crafting a glory- and honor-filled interpretation of the Confederate war effort" (p. 122). In her essay, Victoria E. Ott also draws connections to Lost Cause ideology. She argues that elite young women in their teens when the war began faced a unique situation due to the sudden dearth of suitors; they used the realm of courtship to demonstrate their loyalty to the cause both during and after the war. Young women pursued long-distance courtships with Confederate soldiers and rejected both Union soldiers and Confederate draft dodgers. They sometimes expressed the fear of losing loved ones, but Ott argues that they ultimately did not question the Confederate cause: "Even as the economic and emotional consequences of war took their toll on southern families, young women continued to endorse the cause of Confederate nationalism. They remained committed to an independent nation, seeing separation from the Union as the only means by which to secure their futures as privileged women" (p. 134). This assertion contradicts the arguments of Drew Gilpin Faust, Joan E. Cashin, and others about Confederate women's commitment to the cause. Although some readers may look skeptically at this component of Ott's argument, her assertions about the significance of courtship during wartime remain interesting and relevant.

Part 3, "Aftermaths," examines the immediate postwar era and includes two essays on freedchildren and two essays on white war orphans. Troy L. Kickler analyzes the educational system established for free black children in the Reconstruction era in Tennessee, which included Sabbath schools, Freedmen's Bureau schools, missionary day schools, and public (or free) schools. Mary Niall Mitchell discusses the conflicts between for-

mer slaveholders and freedpeople over the labor of free black children as each group tried to define the shape freedom would take in the postwar South. Judith Giesberg traces the postwar history of Pennsylvania Soldiers' Orphan Schools, revealing how poor conditions and a failure to assimilate orphans into Protestant middle-class society led to the schools' closure in the 1880s. In an especially stimulating essay, Catherine A. Jones examines two Richmond orphan asylums. Both institutions expanded their work dramatically after the war: "both asylums invoked the recent history of Confederate sacrifice as the impetus behind their institutional missions and a compelling source of binding ethical obligation among white Virginians" (p. 175). The motivation to care for orphans applied exclusively to those who were white; as Richmond asylums became more inclusive in some ways, they more pointedly excluded black children from their efforts.

The collection of essays concludes with an epilogue, an essay by J. Vincent Lowery that upon first glance appears out of place in this collection, but upon close reading aligns perfectly with the rest of the book and reveals the importance of studying the experiences of children in order to understand their later behavior as adults. Lowery examines the Children of the Confederacy, the youth auxiliary of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Although Lowery focuses mainly on the C of C's activities during the controversies over desegregation in the late 1950s and early 1960s, his essay demonstrates that the experiences children had as members of the C of C in every era influenced their worldviews and often inspired them to become UDC leaders later in life.

Some of the essays in the volume fall short of illuminating the actual experiences of Civil War-era children, but such a deficit is addressed in the final section of the book, a selection of primary source excerpts written by Northerners and Southerners who were children during the war. Especially rare and heartbreaking is a description

of the shelling of Atlanta as recounted by ten-year-old Carrie Berry as it occurred. Also notable are two accounts of emancipation by Caroline Richardson and Booker T. Washington, both of whom were children at the end of the war. Both recalled that slaves experienced ambivalence and uncertainty as well as rejoicing upon emancipation. Marten's choice of these two excerpts challenges conventional narratives about the end of slavery.

*Children and Youth during the Civil War Era* is a valuable resource for scholars of children and youth in the nineteenth-century United States, as well as scholars of the Civil War era. Unfortunately, the essays included are somewhat skewed towards the experiences of Southern children, both black and white. Despite this slight imbalance, the book will surely raise awareness of the usefulness of studying the historical experiences of children, as well as stimulate fruitful conversations among advanced scholars and interested graduate students and undergraduates alike.

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