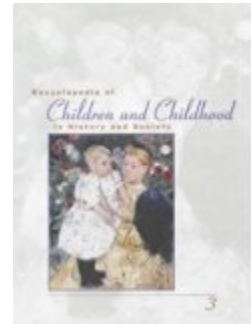


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Paula S. Fass, ed. *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood: In History and Society*. New York and London: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004. lii + 1055 pp. \$360.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-02-865714-1.

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## The Social History of Children and Youth

The publication of *The Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood: In History and Society* is another signal indication of a new interdisciplinary vitality surrounding the research into the lives of children and youth. This excellent three-volume reference work draws its coherence from the intellectual trajectory originating from the important and productive intersections between the discipline of history and various subfields among the social sciences in the United States during the 1970s. The *Encyclopedia* institutionalizes this more-neglected social history trajectory in child and youth studies, one of the two major interdisciplinary constellations that inform the current renewal of interests in the comparative studies of young people.

The *Encyclopedia* is the second major collaborative work on the history of children and childhood that Paula Fass has edited and published in the last three years. In tune with the previously published *Childhood in America* anthology (co-edited with Mary Ann Mason, 2000), the *Encyclopedia's* 336 authors and 10 editorial members are among the most well-known scholars in this area of historical research, ranging from Natalie Zemon Davis and Viviana Zelizer to Miriam Forman-Brunell and Kriste Lindenmeyer to Kelly Schrum and Lisa Jacobson. In the spirit of full disclosure, the author of this review also wrote one of the 445 entries.

The majority of the entries are generated from topics in U.S. and western European social, cultural, and institutional history subfields, with a substantial number

of entries containing a global and/or comparative perspective in varying degrees. Alternatively, some broad topics are broken into multiple entries that also reflect global, transnational, or comparative frameworks. For instance, the topic of social welfare is divided into two entries, one dealing with history and a second on comparative twentieth-century developments, and the topic of juvenile justice is divided between an international and a U.S. entry. Also reflecting both the interdisciplinary and global intentions of the project, a significant number of entries address contemporary topics or topics usually taken up in fields other than history (e.g., photographer Anne Geddes; in vitro fertilization) or topics from nations, social groups, or practices outside of the U.S. and western Europe. For instance, the *Encyclopedia* contains several entries that focus exclusively on nations or regions outside "the West" (e.g., Brazil, Japan, India and South Asia, Africa, Latin America) and a similar number on related topics (e.g., soldier children; globalization; communist youth; abduction in Africa). Despite the desire for a more global focus on the history of children and childhood, the framework for a satisfying realization of this desire has not yet been established to the degree that would allow an encyclopedic reference work with a historical approach. At this stage, for these purposes, the divisions between "the West" and "the rest" remain relatively intact.

The overall quality of the *Encyclopedia* is excellent. I found the entries to be uniformly well written and edited, providing clear, accessible, and appropriately detailed

overviews of the topics, usually including some historiographical information to help locate recent scholarship. Each entry is followed by cross-listed topics and a useful bibliography. Volume 3 concludes the *Encyclopedia* with fifty primary printed documents (the majority being brief excerpts from canonical literature, autobiographies, legal briefs, or government reports) and a finely honed index.

Although there are no other scholarly historical encyclopedias of similar scope on this subject at present, a number of features and themes will likely set the *Encyclopedia* apart for some time. As an American Studies scholar interested in visual culture, I was very pleased to find the inclusion of almost one hundred primary visual sources reproduced in black and white. Visual representations of young people have been an important source of evidence in past and current debates about the social meaning of children and youth. While most contemporary encyclopedias contain illustrations of several sorts for “visual interest,” the *Encyclopedia* is unique in its careful selection of paintings and documentary photographs, an innovation that Fass attributes to editorial board member and art historian Anne Higonnet. The *Encyclopedia* also includes an unexpected number of entries (about ten) drawn from the history of the emotions (e.g., anger and aggression; self-esteem; jealousy and envy), a theme anticipated by Peter Stearns’s place on the editorial board, and one that suggests new overlaps and areas of research. Fass’s preface concisely traces the intellectual trajectory that gives the overall project its admirable coherence, beginning with Phillipe Aries’ key work (published in English as *Centuries of Childhood* in 1962) through the social history of the 1970s to the subject’s present incarnation among historians. Following the alphabetical listings of entries and authors comes what is perhaps the *Encyclopedia*’s most unique feature: twenty broad topical outlines that select and organize relevant entries under overlapping curricular groupings (e.g., economics and work; history and theories of childhood; play, music, and entertainment). These topical outlines will be particularly useful for students, teachers of all levels, and researchers entering this field for the first time. The topic outlines also provide the reader with the conceptual scheme for the *Encyclopedia*’s selection of entries and overall design, offering further elaboration for Fass’s preface.

It is easy to make arm-chair criticisms of the topics left out of any encyclopedia; the social ideal attached to the encyclopedia form gestures toward a kind of comprehensiveness that an actual publication can never attain. The *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood* is a

very coherent summation of one of the two major intellectual trajectories that informs contemporary scholarship on children and youth in the humanities. A second trajectory, one not followed by the *Encyclopedia*, can be located in the precursors to the British “Birmingham School,” where youth cultures were among the first objects of study in the emergence of what is now generically called “cultural studies.” This tradition is perhaps best represented by the anthology edited by Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, *The Subcultures Reader*.<sup>[1]</sup> Although exceptions are plentiful, it can be said that the Birmingham School tradition has stronger ties to ethnography and qualitative sociology, and has primarily focused on teenagers and young adults and their semi-autonomous cultural relationships to social change (youth as cultural agent), while the tradition represented by the *Encyclopedia* has been most strongly grounded in history and archival methods, and is more interested in children and their dependent relations on families, institutions, and public policies (child as historical subject). In keeping with the latter tradition, expect to find more on the history of children’s health in the *Encyclopedia* (forty-eight entries are listed under the Health, Medicine, and Disease outline) and much less on youth subcultures; expect to find more on children in the family (sixty-two entries are listed under the Parenting and Family Relations outline) and much less on music and fashion, central concerns of the Birmingham tradition; expect to find entries on John Locke, G. Stanley Hall, and Phillipe Aries in the *Encyclopedia*, but not Antonio Gramsci or Michel Foucault. The *Encyclopedia* gives some due recognition to many of the major accomplishments of the Birmingham tradition while maintaining its focus on the historical side of the equation, a research trajectory that has generated not only several important anthologies recently, but also the founding of a new scholarly organization in the Society for the History of Children and Youth, to say nothing of the H-Child discussion list itself.

Although this reviewer is a long-time partisan of the Birmingham tradition (a tradition that could use a more solid historical grounding), the *Encyclopedia* is a much-needed and very welcome addition to the literature, and is one of those rare reference works that evenly and concisely summarizes a subfield without sacrificing breadth. It is wholeheartedly recommended for all university, academic, and public libraries, and scholars with the funds to purchase extensive reference works.

#### Note

- [1]. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, eds., *The Sub-*

*cultures Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997). Other recent anthologies on children's culture also share a cultural studies lineage. See Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe, eds., *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997); Marsha Kinder, ed., *Kid's Media Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999); and Henry Jenkins, ed., *The Children's Culture Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

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