The bevy of works across academic disciplines deflating the *Donna Reed Show*-tinged memories of American life in the 1950s has long established that the dawn of the Cold War was anything but apolitical. Works from Stephanie Coontz’s 1992 book, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, which punctured the idealized notion of 1950s domestic life, to Anna McCarthy’s 2010 book, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America*, which worked to illustrate the era when corporate personhood and responsibility coalesced around the discovery of television as a vital tool in the waging of the Cold War in the American living room, illustrate this point. Numerous publications over the last decade, especially in the fields of American studies and media studies, have developed a rich and nuanced historiography of the politics of consumerism and domesticity. Grieve’s book seeks to incorporate a specific account of the recruitment of children into the economic and ideological theaters of the Cold War. I use the word “recruitment” purposefully, as the book devotes most of its five chapters not to the memories, experiences, or words of children themselves, but rather to the machinations of American corporations and government bureaucracies and their efforts to export the cultural and economic ideals of American capitalism and democracy and to also ensure domestic indoctrination of the ideals of supremacy.

Grieve argues that this restoration of the politicization of the child and childhood bridges the perceived rift between the “bland” or compliant 1950s and the social movements of the 1960s. However, the politics of this “blandness” have been explored elsewhere. For example, Margot Canday’s field-defining book, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (2009), demonstrates the active construction, through the federal bureaucracy, of the heterosexual family as the unit through which the benefits of American capitalism and democracy were delivered. In order to restore this history, Grieve offers a useful overview of the bureaucratic alignments associated with the development of American propaganda and psychological warfare. She articulates the role of the child in the abstract and literal sense as she offers examples to illustrate her picture of childhood in the 1950s. Grieve’s account would have been bolstered if the author had connected her work to this rich field of American studies literature and aligned her account of childhood with conceptions and depictions of the family during the era.

Innocence emerges as a central tenet of American childhood in Grieve’s book. The understanding of the child as a neutral, she argues,
structured the mobilization of children as agents in the American campaign to establish benevolent supremacy. These notions of innocence and neutrality are distinctly associated with the specifically white, middle-class child. This point bears greater emphasis than it is given in this book. Any scholarship about the presumed innocence of the child/childhood in the 1950s needs to also have in its sights the brutal lynching of Emmett Till in 1955 or the protests in opposition to school integration.

As Grieve lays out her case studies, she moves between accounts of media made for children to programs that recruited their creative energies. Starting with a discussion of comic books and the character of the Lone Ranger, she treads familiar ground regarding the utility of the western as a cipher for the moral rightness of America's Cold War policies of expansion and intervention. Without offering adequate visuals illustrating these comic books, the analysis is limited to narrative. In this chapter, as well as in her chapter on the cultural colonialism of Franklin Publication's juvenile book program, there is a problematic inflation of the time scale to include the late sixties and early seventies. The cultural pieties that structured such diplomacy were falling away by that period.

Grieve's case studies that stay within the confines of the fifties are ultimately much stronger and weave together a compelling administrative narrative of how the child and childhood came to signify the promise of American capitalist democracy. She creates a useful account of the multidimensional approach the federal government and corporate America took to wage the cultural Cold War. For example, children were requested to illustrate the domestic consumer goods they enjoyed in the art they created for the purpose of cultural exchange, making clear that these programs were less about exchange and more about creating a nonmilitarized means of spreading a narrative of American exceptionalism and superiority.

Grieve frames American children as diplomats and cultural ambassadors, but most significantly, she seems to underscore their power as symbols as opposed to true agents within the administrative apparatus she details. This tension between the role of children as pawns or as political activists in their own right frustrates the connection she seeks to draw between the fifties and the sixties in her conclusion. Comparing compulsory artistic exchanges in public schools with laying one's life and personal safety on the line on the streets of Birmingham in the struggle for civil rights feels disingenuous. Overall, the book neglects to interrogate the construction of whiteness as a significant pillar of the image of Cold War American childhood and this frustrates its potential contribution to the field.
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