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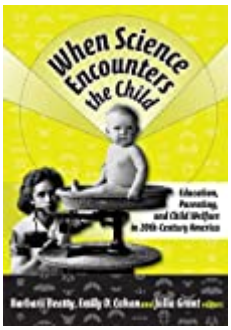

Barbara Beatty, Emily D. Cahan, Julia Grant, eds. *When Science Encounters the Child: Education, Parenting, and Child Welfare in 20th Century America.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. ix + 248 pp. $39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8077-4691-2.

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When Science Encounters the Child: A Review

Collections of essays are difficult to gather, edit, publish, and win fame for; yet, they are often worth doing, even if a majority ends up flying under the profession's radar (so to speak). *When Science Encounters the Child* is definitely a worthwhile volume. The editors, Barbara Beatty, Emily D. Cahan, and Julia Grant, are (respectively) professors of education, developmental psychology, and history, who have proven time and again that they are adept in their fields. They have brought their expertise to this thoughtful interdisciplinary volume to which other experts, including Rima D. Apple, Carlos Kevin Blanton, Barbara Finkelstein, Jona Perrillo, Roblyn Rawlins, Steven Schlossman, Christopher W. Schmidt, Diana Selig, David Wolcott, and Stephen Woolworth, have contributed essays. There is a good balance of senior, mid-career, and beginning scholars among the authors, and a nice variety of interests and points of view. The major difficulty–and this is, I suspect, due to the current constraints of academic publishing–is that a number of the essays could have been longer, more intensive and extensive.

In the useful introduction, the three editors provide a good road map of the territory that they and their colleagues cover, including the sciences of childhood, child psychology and its methods, uses and users of child psychology, children's institutes, gender, education, parenting, child welfare, scientific research in education and teaching, brain research, and impact of the sciences on childhood now. A careful perusal of this fine, brief introduction will orient those not in the field to its capaciousness. It covers a vast amount of territory.

In the first chapter, coeditor Cahan offers a brief sketch of the history of child development research, moving from the child study movement to the child welfare movement, and next, to the role of foundations in developing the field as a discipline and profession in the period between the two World Wars. She outlines attempts at professionalization on par with the more established behavioral sciences (e.g., psychology), the atheoretical and normative character of research in the field, and, finally, changes in the field produced by the liberal social programs of the New Frontier and Great Society, and what has happened since. Some of this material is familiar, but some, especially for the more recent period, is not,

and readers might well have wished for more in-depth coverage.

In the second chapter, coeditor Beatty takes up a seemingly narrow but in reality tough question: how Progressive Era psychologists conceptualized learning and teaching arithmetic. She focuses on G. Stanley Hall, John Dewey, and Edward Lee Thorndike. Each had his own approach, which reflected the peculiar psychology that each embraced. Thus, Hall was a maturationist, tinctured by nineteenth-century German philosophy and biology, even Naturphilosophie; he believed that children learned arithmetic naturally, as the result of their maturation as psychological persons. Dewey, in contrast, was a social constructionist; he thought that children learned numbers in response to real world problems, not organic maturation. And, Thorndike, that relentless experimenter, espoused an associationist psychology of learning, according to which children learned by association of one fact with another, and so on. Beatty's point in this chewy essay is not to take sides but "to show that historically the psychologizing of arithmetic was a more complex process with more intermediaries and influences that academic discourse reveals" (p. 49). In other words, mere "top-down" stories will not wash. Life was more complex than that.

In the third essay, Blanton writes about the rise of English-only pedagogy for immigrant children in the first third of the twentieth century. This was closely related to changing tides of immigration. In the nineteenth century, public and private schools that catered to immigrant children offered bilingual education. In the southwest, this was usually Spanish in addition to English. In the Midwest and the northeast, the German language was commonly the second language, in addition to English, but in a few places sometimes a different central European language, such as Czech or Polish, was deployed along with English. English-only instruction swept the nation in the first several decades of the twentieth century, starting with Puerto Rico after the Spanish-American War. English-only instruction was the product of progressive education, not surprising when one stops and thinks about the matter. The idea was, of course, to create a common American culture and citizenry through language. And, indeed, although Blanton does not say so, language unification was common throughout the Old World and the New in this period–something for historians of nationalism to ponder more synoptically than before. Blanton points out that on its own terms, English-only instruction was a failure, if it was supposed to promote a common culture and citizenship, for it tended to promote segregation, as with Hispanic peoples in the southwest. Finally, after World War II, American educators and public officials realized that Americans needed to learn more foreign languages, a reflection of the nation's sudden emergence on the world stage.

In chapter 4, Rawlins writes about changing notions of "precocious" or abnormal children. In what is a too brief essay, Rawlins shows how scientific understanding and social interpretation of early, or precocious, intellectual development in children changed from the early nineteenth century, when it was viewed as a problem, to the post-1930s years, when it became an exciting challenge. Thus, in the early nineteenth century, intellectual precocity was commonly understood as an abnormal or even pathological state, thanks to the democratic ethos, which assumed that all normal children would conform to a type. In the later nineteenth century, precocity was often viewed as even more problematic, once the democratic era's sentimental view of children had yielded to a naturalistic or realistic climate of opinion. With the emergence of the idea that the child should be dependent, a view that gained currency in the early twentieth century, compulsory school attendance laws came into vogue. With compulsory mass schooling came, in fits and starts, the idea that there are, among the mass of schoolchildren, some who were gifted intellectually and should be marked out for special, accelerated schooling. After 1910, the term "gifted child" appeared in educational literature, and, of course, Lewis M. Terman of Stanford University began the so-called longitudinal study of geniuses in the early 1920s. By the end of World War II, the American Association for Gifted Children was founded, and a new era of belief in the intelligent individual was to dawn.

Woolworth writes in the next essay about the tensions and turf wars between psychologists and physicians over children who required "special education" in the early twentieth century, something, which other scholars, including myself, have previously addressed. Although the struggles seemed mere turf wars, they went to the heart of diagnostic discourses. Should the child requiring special education benefit more from the ministrations of a biomedical expertise or a psychological one became the fundamental question. The biomedical approach signified, in turn, a public health approach. Thus, medical inspections of school children became a tool for detecting backward children; in the early twentieth century, such authorities as Leonard Ayres, in *Laggards in Our Schools* (1909), insisted that physical and medical defects held children back in school. Psychologists entered

the arena armed with IQ tests in the next two decades and were able, in time, to take over much of the discussion of backward children. Yet, the medical discourse was not eliminated by any means. Rather, both psychologists and doctors addressed the problems of retarded children in school and the community.

Wolcott and Schlossman extend Schlossman's earlier work on the Chicago Area Project to write about juvenile delinquency in the 1930s more generally. Their focus is on the unstable working class or poor youth, especially in urban areas. The prevalence of gangs arose from widespread truancy, indifference to education, confrontation with police, constant fighting with other youth, persistent petty stealing, and widespread vandalism, among other causes. These troubled young men lived in families, immigrant or not, that were overwhelmed by poverty, unemployment, and cultural upheavals, among other difficulties.

Then comes a real treasure, and a bit of a surprise as well, a trifecta of essays on social science and race between the 1920s and 1960s. In the first of these, Selig, in "The Whole Child: Social Science and Race at the White House Conference of 1930," skillfully delineates the eventual meshing of two competing perspectives on children: the first, the child savers, who emphasized socioeconomic and welfare issues and perspectives; and the second, the champions of the new child sciences, who pushed for psychological and other social science, as distinct from social-activist perspectives, discourses, and nostrums. What emerges from Selig's fascinating essay is the creation of the notion of the damaged child, especially the damaged African American child, who was hurt by systemic segregation, which came to prominence in many social sciences thereafter. "The insight that racial discrimination harmed personality development prefigured later social science developments," Selig writes (p. 153). Indeed, that argument came to be crucial in the studies of the American Youth Commission in the late 1930s in Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (1944), in the doll studies of Kenneth and Mamie Clark, and, of course, in the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* case (1954). Pirrillo takes the argument a step further, in "White Teachers and the 'Black Psyche' ": Interculturalism and the Psychology of Race in New York City High Schools 1940-1950," by discussing the rise and fall of the intercultural movement as a social scientist's and an educator's ideology, in response to the rise of the national therapeutic culture in those years. Great interest in the impact of discrimination and segregation on the psyche, especially of African American children, fed this movement, whose champions insisted that teaching tolerance and the quality of being "color-blind" would advance the cause of integration and racial justice. Of course, this ideology was not true to the realities that African Americans, especially their children, lived every day. Hence, it was poor preparation for life, but it did undergird the *Brown* decision. And, in an unsparing essay, Schmidt dissects the *Brown decision* and the ideas around it, which included the notions that racial integration was good, that schools and children should be at the center of the movement for racial equality, and that integrated schools would undo the horrific psychic damage caused by segregation. Schmidt dissents strongly from these assumptions and conclusions, insisting that all integrated schools did was to further damage African American children. He insists that "contact theory," the final product of the thinking of the integrationists and racial justice champions, assumed that the more contact among members of different groups and races the better society would be; and that this was well intentioned but tragically in error.

The final two chapters, by Apple and coeditor Grant, focus on various aspects of child rearing. In " 'Training the Baby': Mothers' Responses to Advice Literature in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," Apple ably differentiates various kinds of advice literature to mothers and notes the likely complexities of their responses. She insists, however, that what evidence exists suggests very strongly that mothers always read such advice, from whatever source, through the lens of what they strongly believed was the best for their children. A key concept in Apple's essay is "scientific motherhood," meaning the belief by growing numbers of mothers in the critical role of modern scientific and medical knowledge in the development of healthy and appropriate childcare practices. Like Selig, Apple sees the 1930 White House Conference on Child Health and Protection as a turning point in the development of knowledge about childcare. And, Apple insists that an important theme of all this literature was the idea of scheduling for baby and mother. Grant, in "Bringing Up Boys: Science, Popular Culture, and Gender, 1890-1960," discusses with great authority and clarity the problem of how Americans wished to raise a boy, and how to pay attention to the development of masculinity, heterosexuality, and its opposites, girlishness and homosexuality. This is a dizzying ride through many decades, and my main complaint is that I wish Grant had had twice the space to discuss her material. The final essay is a very brief and perceptive coda written by Finkelstein, which is authoritative and eminently wise.

I have been at pains to comment rather extensively on this volume for the good and simple reason that between its covers are helpful, intelligent, and stimulating essays, which, I hope, will find a wide readership among social, cultural, and intellectual historians of many stripes.

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