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## Book Reviews

### **Childhood in World History**

*Peter N. Stearns*

New York: Routledge, 2nd ed., 2011.

Contents, preface, further reading, index.

179 pp. \$29.95 paper. ISBN:

9780415598095

In the second edition of *Childhood in World History*, Peter Stearns updates his earlier study of the global history of childhood with expanded discussions of theory, methodology, childhood in Africa and South Asia, and a new chapter on children's happiness. Stearns addresses these and other themes with clear prose and little professional jargon. He delivers, instead, a lucid analysis of new research and synthesis of previous secondary works in the field.

As the author of several titles in the "Themes in World History" series and an expert in the field of world history, Stearns identifies a gap in the literature on childhood. He states clearly in his introduction that his is not "just the history of childhood, but the world history of childhood, and this adds some additional spice" (p. 7). In other words, Stearns views the variability of existing historical work, lack of

sources, traditionally West-focused studies, comparative histories, and a "fairly standard periodization" as challenges for current analysis as well as opportunities for future work (p. 8).

The book begins with an introduction covering children in world history, analytical challenges, and theoretical frameworks. It then focuses on children in specific societies within historical eras. The author writes about children in agricultural societies, classical civilizations, postclassical societies, Western societies from 1700 to 1914, colonized societies, modern Asian societies, communist regimes, and affluent twentieth and twenty-first century societies. He concludes with chapters discussing childhood dislocation in twentieth and twenty-first century war-torn societies, the effects of globalization on children, the dilemmas of children's happiness, and a general survey of childhood past, present, and future.

In light of the attention paid to children's happiness, Stearns' new chapter on "the dilemma of children's happiness" is a welcome addition. He asserts that, with a few limited exceptions, traditional societies did not associate childhood with

happiness, as “the *idea* of happiness was lacking” (p. 157). This began to change in western societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the influence of the Enlightenment before a true commitment to children’s happiness emerged in the United States during the 1920s. Stearns admits that it is difficult to identify what caused this change, but he suggests lower death rates, attacks on child labor, consumerism, and new beliefs about adulthood contributed to the notion that children should be happy. What is clear is that, over the past twenty years, countries such as China and India, and areas in the Middle East and Latin America, have placed a new emphasis on children’s happiness.

Although this survey addresses broad themes such as tradition, war and violence, modernity, globalization, communism, and play, I would have liked to see Stearns pay more attention to the roles dolls and toys played in the history of childhood. Barbie, alone, with her contemporaries in the Moslem world and her myriad costumes, would have been a perfect illustration of a western cultural icon gone global. For example, Stearns discusses the evolving nature of play and its importance from training children to be adults to pure fun and recreation. But he discusses toys in only about eleven pages scattered through his book, and there is no reference to dolls the book’s index.

Overall, the book contributes to existing scholarship by integrating childhood into world history. As such, his work is relevant to studies of postmodernism, childhood and family dynamics, and marketing aimed toward young consumers. Scholars researching the history of play and childhood will find Stearns’ work an interesting

survey of how attitudes towards children and child rearing have evolved over time and very valuable to those who study the nature of play.

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—Ellen M. Tsagaris, *Rock Island, IL*

### **Circus and the City: New York, 1793–2010**

*Matthew Wittmann*

New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2012. Appendix, bibliography, index, images. 208 pp. \$40.00 paper. ISBN: 9780300187472

### **The American Circus**

*Susan Weber, Kenneth L. Ames, and Matthew Wittmann, eds.*

New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2012. Bibliography, index, images. 460 pp. \$65.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780300185393

Though its reputation is greatly diminished today, the circus was one of the most popular forms of public amusement in the United States from the early nineteenth century until the dawn of the television era. During the circus’s so-called “golden age” (from about 1870–1910), circus performers were household names, circus posters blanketed city walls, and traveling exhibitions by the likes of P. T. Barnum, James Bailey, and Wisconsin’s Ringling Brothers attracted millions of spectators a year. The appeal of what Barnum deemed “The Greatest Show on Earth” is not difficult to understand. Cheap to attend and considered safe for the entire family, the circus incorporated a wide array of popular and exotic entertainments, from acro-