

some physical danger, authors argue this possibility of risk does not warrant the creation of structures free from potential harm. Such attempts produce structures so predictable in their design that they fail to arouse a child's imagination and curiosity. Thus, some assumed risk should not impede school administrators and public-park designers from refurbishing old playgrounds or building new natural play settings with raw materials and loose parts. The section closes with vibrant photographs that show how flowers, sod, natural groundings, shrubbery, and mounds of dirt and grass heighten the sensory experiences of children and help them create their own places for play.

A thought-provoking part 5 centers around the term "child-centered city," tracking how children interact, how they negotiate group play and its leadership roles, how they draw upon cultural experiences, how they develop a quest for adventure, and how they create restriction-free play scenarios. Several discussions validate the benefits children derive from play, even in densely populated areas with congested neighborhoods. The simple answers to apparently complex problems that characterize this section of the work inspire the hope that even one person can initiate a major change regarding play in urban settings. City planners and park departments will

find the information related to "shared outdoor space" especially useful.

A Place for Play can successfully stand alone. However, when used in conjunction with the previous works, the trilogy becomes a comprehensive curriculum package appropriate for college students. *A Place for Play* is also ideal for park departments seeking strong rationales for existing play and leisure programs threatened by other city projects and commercial ventures. The trilogy addresses misguided attitudes and offers good arguments for increasing prudently priced and practical efforts to protect children's play. It is a goal certainly possible to achieve and one, as this book asserts, that children deserve.

—Rhonda Clements, *Manhattanville College, Purchase, NY*

Children's Nature: The Rise of the American Summer Camp

Leslie Paris

New York: New York University Press, 2008. Notes, index, photographs. 363 pp. \$39.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780814767078.

Historians of childhood and youth are forever in search of the agency of their young subjects, the ability of children and youth to have some control over their lives in a world where they are relatively powerless. Our own experiences as children tell us that the adult

regime is not omnipotent. As children, we found some spaces to resist adult power and to create autonomous folk cultures. Leslie Paris's fine book on American summer camps nicely demonstrates how social and cultural historians can connect this autonomous world of children with the history of childhood. As Paris notes, at summer (sleep-away) camp, adult control and adult surveillance of kids proved far less complete than in schools. Adults might have constructed the formal organization of the camp, but what happened at camp—the actual experience of camp, its informal organization—was a collective project where adult aims and the folk cultures of children and adolescents interacted to create a third thing.

Paris understands from the outset how the categories “children” and “nature” are social constructions reflecting adult ideologies. She wisely narrows her topic to camps in the northeastern United States, and her history stops in the 1940s—though the concluding chapter briefly recounts the postwar boom in summer camps. She uses an array of evidence besides the usual government and local-history resources. She also finds in local archives and in personal collections and archives written histories of individual camps. She has in her sample of camps the full range of types—the expensive camps for the well-to-do, religious camps,

YMCA camps, and camps serving poor children. Some of these archives have photographs of the camps and campers, and she illustrates her book with several. Trying to give the children a voice in this history, Paris looks at kids' letters home, journals, diaries, scrapbooks, camp newspapers done by campers, oral histories, autobiographies, written reminiscences, and more.

Paris's history of the American ideas that gave rise to the summer camps in the nineteenth century is solid. Much of this is familiar to the historians who have charted the country's move toward modernity after the Civil War and the impulses to resist modernity. In fact, argues Paris, the summer camp of the 1880s to the 1920s and its “nostalgic counter-modern” (p. 9) character condensed the larger tensions in American culture. This was an era when the arts and crafts movement offered an antidote to machine-made goods, when several forces converged in the 1890s to create a white “masculinity crisis,” and when scientific psychology was creating new concepts of childhood and adolescence. At the same time, the discontents of civilization drove many white, middle-class reformers to “revitalize” American culture by trying to capture the primitivism of the American wilderness, of the American pioneer, and of the Native American.

This is the world that gave birth to the summer camp.

Paris shows how these ideas animated the enthusiastic reformers who created summer camps. She finds in these camps all the social class, gender, and racial ideologies we see elsewhere in the society, and just as schools reflected the social tensions and ambivalences the adults felt, so did the summer camps. Adults debated issues of gender, racial, and religious segregation and integration in the camps. They debated the wisdom of keeping age cohorts together or apart. They struggled with defining the aims of summer-camp experiences for girls, such as balancing physical fitness with domestic manners and skills. Paris shows how camps responded to changing ideas in developmental psychology, which made the camps less rigid and more devoted to the individuality and creativity of children during the interwar years. Paris also addresses the business history and organizational history of these camps, documenting how they became increasingly professionalized as they moved into the twentieth century.

Paris's great accomplishment here is to tease from her evidence some sense of the agency of the campers (mostly ages eight through fourteen) in forming their own experiences. This is a world the folklorists of childhood know well—how children use their

bodies, their nicknames, their pranks, their jokes, their hazing rituals, their secret clubs, and all the other elements of folklore to resist and undermine the adult agenda. But childhood historians cannot observe living children, so they must make do with the best available evidence. In some cases, we can see acts of resistance by kids in the records of adult responses to homesickness and to infractions of the rules regarding forbidden places, sexual behavior, and pranks. Wise adults created camp festivals and special events (e.g., Topsy-Turvey Day, where all power relations were inverted) that provided sanctioned, carefully controlled outlets for the resistance of campers to rules and authority. Campers and staff played with gender and racial categories when campers cross-dressed in camp theatricals and when white campers and staff staged minstrel shows in blackface. Paris's careful and complete scholarship helps contextualize these practices and points readers to further scholarship on cross-dressing and minstrelsy. Between the wars, the debates changed a bit, as summer camps matured and the influence of John Dewey and other progressive educators led the staff to give campers more freedom.

This is an important book, one sure to be read by historians and others interested in the history of childhood and youth. But it is a rewarding work

even if the reader is not a scholar but merely a grown-up veteran of the summer-camp experience. The writing is accessible to the general reader, and when Paris does introduce some key ideas (e.g., the child's body as a cultural "text"), she does so clearly and without jargon. I do wish she had used the photographs more as evidence than as mere illustration, but overall Paris performs in this book precisely the scholarship we need on the history of American children's lives.

—Jay Mechling, *University of California, Davis*

No Fear: Growing Up in a Risk Averse Society

Tim Gill

London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2007. Illustrations, notes, select bibliography. 94 pp. \$12.50 paper. ISBN: 9781903080085.

The extended essay *No Fear: Growing Up in a Risk Averse Society* presents a coherent, well-documented description of the interacting forces (especially parents, schools, judges, recreation workers, regulators, and the media) that severely limit five- to eleven-year-old children in their development of confidence, agency, knowledge, and happiness. The essay considers children of the United Kingdom in particular but, by extension, children in

the United States too. These encroachments of the adult world include excessive monitoring, placing of some experiences and spaces off limits, the loss of natural environments, and the reduction of recess and other free time. Tim Gill bases his argument on child development theory and research and on practical experience. He also notes that children in northern European countries (particularly Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and Germany) have more opportunities for play.

Gill credits the playground-improvement movement of the 1970s and 1980s with reducing the number of truly dangerous situations for children, but he argues that it has gone to an extreme. In the case of soft surfacing, he claims, not only has the movement produced a prohibitively expensive change but also one that contributes to more, rather than fewer, broken limbs. Furthermore—and he particularly blames the popular media for this—the culture has become paranoid about stranger danger in a period when in both the United States and the United Kingdom kidnapping by strangers is not only statistically low but has remained unchanged in the last fifty years. In both countries, murder and the serious injury of children is much more likely at the hands of family or friends than of strangers. Death in a car accident is much more likely than either abduction or murder.