

Reid, Jason: *Get Out of My Room! A History of Teen Bedrooms in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2017. ISBN: 9780226409214; 320 p.

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Mapping nostalgia for teen privacy among generations of Americans growing up with / in their own bedroom onto historical inquisition into teenage life and changes in some of the most private of spaces such as teen bedrooms, *Get out of My Room!* starts off with its author's rather personal story of his teen bedroom, highlighting the sensitive nature of the book's theme as it deals with as private and titillating a space as a teenager's bedroom. The book entails a pre-history of what the social psychologist and media scholar Sonia Livingstone has famously termed the 'teen room culture'¹, weaving efforts in social and cultural history of the U.S. into the more specific threads of research pursued in childhood / teen studies. The result is a volume rich in archival evidence and intersectional arguments about such matters as gender, class, religion, and age.

After inviting the reader on a foray into the gender and class specific nature of Victorian bedrooms in the United States, Reid's introduction to the book raises awareness to the changing climate during the early decades of the 20th century when the religious notions of child-rearing gave way to scientific advocacy for teen independence and privacy (p. 4). In eight thematic / chronological chapters (with equally intriguing titles as that of the book's), Jason Reid then engages with (a) the evolution of „the autonomous teen bedroom“ in U.S. history from the ante-bellum era to the present; (b) the various factors (individual or institutional, economic and / or cultural) that led to the rise of this space as a given fixture in the modern American home; (c) (on par with shifts in the function and aesthetics of teen bedrooms,) the consequent demise of traditional parenting practices including the unprecedented levels of open warfare between „progressive and conservative ideas on child-rearing“ (p. 8); (d) the blurring of the

boundaries between the public and the private within teen bedrooms as „a space that was expected to both keep children safe from the outside world and simultaneously prepare youth to assume their place in it“ (p. 9).

The book's chapters pick up on this history as the reader comes in close contact with long-lasting changes in the very interior of American homes and its material contents (facilities, lighting, and other decoration items). The book engages with discussions on the inter-generational exchanges between parents and their children in the light of broader shifts in US society, such as the gradual but certain rise in the standard of living during and after the Cold War, the triumph of suburbanization, and the soaring traction of child development experts' advice that popped up in the second half of the 20th century in the form of advice columns and parenting manuals. The chapters further investigate the changing demographics of the US society and the ensuing commercialization of teen bedrooms as a trend at odds with the DIY mentality during the latter quarter of the century. Furthermore, Reid examines waves of social panic over the risks of teen privacy, ranging from teen pregnancy, gun violence (such as in the case of the Columbine massacre), and suicidal tendencies among American youth to the mediatization of teen bedrooms (radios, telephones, television sets, CD players, and game consoles) as markers of a new era in parent-child relationship at the turn of the 21st century. Last but not least, Reid does not fail to touch upon various public discourses spun around the idea of teen bedrooms as he examines the popular-cultural scene that references them (the hit song „If My Pillow Could Talk“ (1963) and „Institutionalized“ (1983)).

While attending to such a diverse set of sources, public discourses, and diagnostic trends, Reid's arguments enjoy a great sense of coherence around one focal point: that an investigation of the American teen culture through its bedrooms' keyholes is first and foremost a study of „matters of self“ (p. 229). Despite efforts that the book records in pathologizing teen bedrooms as spaces where

¹Cf. Sonia Livingstone, *Young People and New Media. Childhood and the Changing Media Environment*, London 2002.

maturity and masturbation come in a disturbingly close contact to one another; and given the popularity of the wealth of child-rearing advice that offered to curb the negative aspects of teen autonomy (the most common of which was to propose formulas such as „quiet room, good light, straight-back chair, clean desk“ (p. 96)); Reid’s book stands apart from existing literature on the topic by the emphasis he places on the co-evolution of adult and teen identities in and around teen bedrooms. Reminding of the fragile privacy of teen bedrooms in the light of the presence and proximity of the other members of the family, Reid asserts in his conclusion that „the idea of the teen bedroom as a fortress, a castle, or some other space defined by seclusion or impregnability is not altogether accurate“ (p. 236).

Overall, Reid’s analysis of the teen room culture in the past two hundred plus years of American history is a welcome addition to seminal social history works like Karin Calvert’s *Children in the House*, the edited volume *American Home Life, 1880–1930*, and Steven Mintz’s *Huck’s Raft* as well as such visually rich volumes as Adrienne Salinger’s *In My Room: Teenagers in Their Bedrooms*.² Looking at the sites where American teen bedrooms have been sketched, from popular songs to periodical press to TV shows and beyond, and bringing together archival depth and analytical precision, *Get out of My Room!* rekindles interdisciplinary scholarly attention to spaces of childhood beyond the disciplinary confines of history.

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² Cf. Karin Calvert, *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood 1600–1900*, Boston 1992; Jessica H. Foy / Thomas J. Schlereth (eds.), *American Home Life, 1880–1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*, Knoxville 1992; Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft. A History of American Childhood*, Cambridge, MA 2004; Adrienne Salinger, *In My Room. Teenagers in Their Bedrooms*, San Francisco 1995.