

Raising Americans - Raising Europeans in the 20th Century

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The 20th century, the century Swedish author Ellen Key had hoped would be the „Century of the Child,“ saw an unprecedented expansion of expert knowledge on and state activity in childrearing, education, and children's welfare on both sides of the Atlantic. The appropriate methods of raising children and the roles of mothers and of fathers in the process as well as the scope and degree of state intervention, however, remained contested. The conference, organized by Dirk Schumann (German Historical Institute Washington, D.C.), brought together American and European historians and focused on three questions: How did concepts and practices of childrearing change over the course of the century? What was the impact of pivotal political developments and ruptures, such as the change of political regimes and wars? And how did transnational and transatlantic academic communication shape concepts and practices in individual nations?

Sonya Michel (University of Maryland, College Park) set the stage by discussing how children's welfare and the national interest became intertwined in the 19th century. Following the Revolution, public discourse in the USA called for a „Republican Motherhood“ that was to inculcate the values of the new state in its future citizens. While fathers continued to lose authority, mothers became the target of various kinds of advice-givers. Constructions of plight and deviance in public discourse enabled the state to exert more control over the lives of its citizens but also to provide relief. As the subjects of these interventions were able to mold them to their own advantage, they contributed to the general expansion of this new state activity.

The first panel of the conference examined concepts of the roles of fathers and mothers. In Wilhelmine Germany, as Carolyn

Kay (Trent University) showed, the rise of the sciences coincided with an increase in the number of advice books on childrearing that acknowledged the pivotal role of the bourgeois family for the strength of the nation. These books, directed primarily at mothers, agreed that discipline was the precondition for attaining the other middle-class values. Caroline Hinkle McCamant (University of California, Berkeley) discussed a fundamental redefinition of fatherhood in the US. At the beginning of the century, a father's principal task was to connect his family to the outside world. Under the impact of skyrocketing divorce rates, the upheaval of the First World War, and the rise of peer culture, advice-givers encouraged fathers to become emotionally close and playful companions of their sons. Rebecca Jo Plant (University of California, San Diego) examined a fundamental change of the definition of the mother's role in the U.S. since the 1930s. Experts warned that overly protective mothers would weaken democratic fortitude and recommended close bonding between mother and child only in its very early years. This redefinition marked a break with the tradition of „Republican Motherhood“, as it devalued and pathologized mother love. Till van Rahden (Universität Köln) posited a link between the legal dismantling of patriarchy and the evolution of West German democracy. While the chancellorship of Konrad Adenauer had initially been characterized by the restoration of the patriarchal family it then became a period of „experiments and new beginnings“ after the Constitutional Court ruled in 1959 that fathers and mothers had fully equal rights in the family.

The second panel addressed the relationship between parental rights and those of the state. Charles A. Israel (University of the South, Sewanee, TN) described conflicts about religious and moral education in the American South. At the turn of the century, this education was seen primarily as the task of parents. As Progressive reformers were focusing their efforts at public schools, however, conservatives in the South sought to give the Bible a substantial presence in the classroom. Lynne Curry (Eastern Illinois University) gave a detailed description of a case of child abuse in

Wisconsin in the 1980s and the failing responses of state agencies to it. The social worker who was in charge of the case followed a „therapeutic“ model in her actions, which gave priority to keeping a family together and to counseling its members over placing a child in state custody. Dirk Schumann (German Historical Institute Washington, D.C.) argued that parental involvement in school affairs made a contribution to the democratization of West Germany already in the late 1940s and 1950s. As parents' rights were acknowledged as „natural rights“, many parents became actively involved in school matters by participating in newly formed parents' councils and in face-to-face encounters with teachers and officials. John Cornell (Butler University) compared the development of the Kindergarten in both German states after 1949. West German Kindergärten were for the most part half-day institutions but they provided a realm of social learning in groups of mixed age and allowed for some experimentation in teaching methods. In marked contrast, their East German counterparts relied on very traditional teacher-centered methods and rigid separation of age cohorts.

The third panel focused on various groups of experts. Brian Ganaway (Presbyterian College) discussed how in Wilhelmine Germany male businessmen who dominated the market for toys were successfully challenged by female entrepreneurs. While the men offered dolls that were standardized versions of adults, the female producers used individualized faces for their dolls, thus encouraging girls to take an active role in playing with them. Till Kössler (Universität München) explored the ways in which the Catholic Church sought to change its educational institutions in the 1910s and 1920s. As the Catholic colleges modernized their facilities, curricula, and disciplinary methods, Catholic pedagogy began to redefine education as a task that required the expertise of modern psychology. Sibylle Brändli Blumenbach (Universität Basel) described the emergence of new relationships between experts and their clients in Basel, Switzerland, in the 1970s. The old concept of removing a severely troublesome child from its class and/or family gave way to an approach centered on counseling and thera-

py. This granted children a substantial degree of agency but also met with resistance from clients.

The fourth panel explored the links between concepts of education and visions of national futures. Katharine Norris (American University) examined how child psychology became a key academic discipline in France on the eve of World War I. As demographic decline exacerbated fears of archenemy Germany, French children were regarded as a national resource of utmost importance. In the eyes of magistrates, educators, and politicians, child psychology was a helpful discipline, but psychologists were often accused of trying to manufacture mental abnormality where there was none. Examining the Bohemian Lands, Tara Zahra (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) challenged the view that the concept of collective education typically stood in fierce opposition to that of education in the family. German and Czech nationalists set up their own networks of educational and child welfare institutions prior to 1914. When, following the Nazi takeover of Bohemia in 1938/39, all of its educational institutions were placed under state control, Czech nationalists called upon families to turn their homes into bulwarks of Czech nationalism. Katherine Bullard (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) described the ambivalence of the U.S. Children's Bureau, a product of Progressive reform. Founded in 1912, the Bureau cast its programs as necessary assistance for those representing the future of the nation. This concept of „social citizenship“ was based, however, on an explicit distinction between Whites and non-Whites.

The fifth panel addressed effects of war on childrearing and education. Ellen L. Berg (University of California, Berkeley) refuted the view that wartime kindergarten in the U.S. redefined Americanization as complete and potentially coercive assimilation. As the term „war work“ became shorthand for the broader goals of kindergarten activities, it denoted for the most part the teaching of useful habits such as conservation techniques and calls to save for the Red Cross. Andrew Donson (University of Massachusetts, Amherst) described how the outbreak of the First World War led to revisions of curricula and class-

room activities in Germany that introduced references and materials previously shunned as too „political.“ As teachers were encouraged to develop close relationships with their students and to experiment with curricula, key demands of reform pedagogy were fulfilled, albeit in a nationalistic and militaristic spirit.

The sixth and final panel addressed international transfers and exchanges. Eckardt Fuchs (Universität Mannheim) introduced a systematic framework for investigating the history and mechanics of internationalism. He described three phases of international exchange, a first one from 1820 to 1870 that was marked by a „sainte alliance“ of private and religious actors, a second one of institutionalized international cooperation between 1870 and 1914, and a third after 1918 in which the League of Nations took over many responsibilities. Examining American photography of children in America and Europe, Christoph Ribbat (Universität Bonn) put forth the thesis that the image of the innocent child was not a timeless concept but a (re)creation of the years of the Second World War. In the interwar years, some photographers depicted the Great Depression by focusing on the plight of families, others showed children as strange and sexualized beings. *Europe's Children*, a photobook published in 1943, then exemplified a paradigm shift to make a poignant appeal for help. Brian Puaca (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) argued that exchange programs were a highly successful form of cultural transfers from the U.S. to West Germany in the first postwar decade. While some teachers criticized that fundamental facts and skills were not always given sufficient attention in America, both teachers and students were profoundly impressed by extracurricular activities in American schools.

In general comments on the conference, Seth Koven (Villanova University) raised a number of conceptual and methodological issues. Educational institutions had to be conceptualized in a broader sense both as sites of teaching knowledge and of providing social services and also as points where international and national influences intersected. He also called for a periodization that emphasized unevenness and the plurality of moder-

nities as well as for more international comparisons, noting for example that the „democratization of education“ had different meanings in the U.S. and in Germany. Adding a specifically American perspective, David McLeod tentatively suggested an overarching narrative that centered on „state surveillance“ in the early 20th century, „state provision“ in the 1960s and 1970s, and „state demands“ thereafter. European influences had an impact on this process up until the 1930s.

The discussion that followed focused mainly on how to conceptualize the 20th century as a distinct period in the history of child-rearing and education. One common thread could be seen in the increase of state activity. Examining the varying definitions of „citizenship“ seemed to be one particularly useful approach; another seemed to be exploring definitions of „normality,“ not the least that of gender roles. Parental authority could be constructed in various ways vis-à-vis state authority and that of experts. The rise of the latter was obvious but their actual influence needed to be explored. Children could be conceptualized in multiple ways that reflected various degrees of intrusion and distance on the part of their educators and the fact that they now became aware of their own development.

The papers and discussions of the conference have shown how current research projects in the field redefine questions about the structure and function of the welfare state by focusing on discourse, representation, and agency. They have thrown into sharp relief the problems of periodization and conceptualization of the „Century of the Child.“ The results of the conference will be published as a collection of essays.

An extended version of this report will be published in the upcoming issue of the *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* (<http://www.ghi-dc.org/bulletin.html>).

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