AMERICAN IMAGES OF CHILDHOOD IN AN AGE OF EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL REFORM, 1870-1915

By

AMBER C. STITT

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We hereby approve the dissertation of Amber C. Stitt, candidate for the PhD degree*.

_________________Henry Adams_________________
(chair of the committee)

_________________Jenifer Neils_________________

_________________Gary Sampson_________________

_________________Renée Sentilles_________________

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*We also certify that written approval has been obtained for any proprietary material contained therein.
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Autochrome, 6 ½ x 4 ⅜ in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

4.19, Alfred Stieglitz, *Georgia Engelhard, 1918.*

Palladium print, 9 ¾ x 7 ½ in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.


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Photogravure print for *Camera Works No. 23*, 1908; 7 ¾ x 6 ¼ in. Cleveland Art Museum, Cleveland, Ohio.


Albumen silver print. Private Collection.


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Platinum print, waxed; 9 ¾ x 7 ¾ in. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.


Series of seven platinum prints, each 5 ½ x 4 ½ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.


Platinum print. Private collection.
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American Images of Childhood in an Age of Educational and Social Reform,
1870-1915

Abstract
by
AMBER C. STITT

During the period 1870-1915, painters and photographers created some of the most famous contributions to American imagery. More often than not, these images dealt with the extraordinarily complex social issue of children and childhood, and the way that the sentimental value of children evolved alongside a transitioning nation.

Post-bellum genre painters portrayed boys as defiant mascots of the nation, in communion with nature, at odds with social institutions like the school. These painters foreran the realist “Ashcan School,” whose paintings of misfit children illustrated the vices of the growing, clashing American city. Yet these were not the only images of children produced in this period. Paintings of the “Genteel Tradition” portrayed pampered children, and their photographic analogue, the “Photo-Secessionists,” attempted to establish a highly artificial rhetoric of the “child-angel.” Often, these discreet artists ironically unmasked the psychological complexity of real, living child models. Finally, documentary reform photographers invented a new, stark aesthetic mode to advocate disenfranchised child laborers. American art about children was not only profuse, but also treated the subject in new and unusual
ways that often directly paralleled contemporaneous literature and social commentary.

Yet curiously, while psychologists, literary and cultural theorists, and historians have generated a vast body of scholarship on the role of the child in America, their observations never intersect systematically with research on children in American art. This dissertation will attempt to rectify this gap in art historical research. It focuses on the brief but fecund time frame when American artists overwhelmingly depicted children. It discusses children exclusively as a subject, as opposed to the extant survey-oriented studies that sandwich children within a list of disempowered social groups. Simultaneously, I attempt to draw comparisons and contrasts between contemporaneous visual media—paintings, photographs, and drawings. This dissertation, though primarily intended to analyze visual culture at a specific historical moment, is interdisciplinary. By bringing observations from sister disciplines into the field of art history, and studying images side-by-side that are rarely spoken about together, I am hopeful that a more comprehensive understanding of the child in American art and society will emerge.
INTRODUCTION

The Artwork

Unruly children. This is the subject of Winslow Homer’s *Snap the Whip*, 1871-72. This image created a sensation when it was painted. In fact, *Harper’s Magazine* reproduced the composition as a double-page spread, the only time that the publication printed such a large copy of one of Homer’s designs. Today it is still one of the most famous paintings in the history of American art. The painting shows children playing a popular but decidedly rough game. With their hands linked like a chain, they attempt to remain upright as long as possible through a series of gyrating sprints, jerking to a halt to throw the weak off-balance. Two boys fall down, flung from the arc of tense motion. If we look closely, we can see that the larger boys are roughly dressed, wearing torn caps, and are barefoot, while the smaller boys sport hats adorned with fine feathers and wear shoes. Yet on the playground these social distinctions vanish: size and strength rule. In the background there is a red schoolhouse, where adults have control, but the doors are open, and it is obviously vacant. Autumn foliage signifies an early point in the school year, and we have the feeling that we are watching something more momentous than what happens inside the schoolhouse. A Darwinian struggle is unfolding. It is here, on the playground, that power will be established and alliances will form. Through rough physical activity, Homer’s rowdy boys master lessons that will carry into adulthood.

Let us advance thirty-five years to another icon of American art, George Bellows’s scandalous *Forty-Two Kids*. Here forty-two kids in various states of
undress—yes, you can count them, although some are indicated by nothing more than a bare-bottom emerging from the water—swim by the banks of the East River in New York, hoping that a policeman will not disperse their activities. They bathe, smoke, roughhouse and even urinate. Once again, a painters seems to suggest that rebelliously socializing boys are learning lessons that will carry over into adulthood when they must face the modern world of the big city. To put it another way, Bellows implies that adults in the modern world are not that different from misbehaving slum kids. Like Winslow Homer, Bellows focuses on unruly children, and hints that their activities have some deeper message for society as a whole.

These two paintings roughly bracket the time-period covered in my dissertation, 1870-1915. During this period, as in no other period of American art, children formed one of the central subjects of American images. Notably, while unruly children comprise some of the most iconic images of this period, other modes of childhood prominently emerge. During this period, we also find images of the privileged, genteel child, as in the paintings of John Singer Sargent and William Merritt Chase; or the photographs of Clarence White and Gertrude Käsebier. And we find photographs of the exploited child, for instance, in the work of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine. Many of the parts of this story have been told before, but no one has ever attempted to tell the entire narrative, collectively studying the images of this period, so that we look at each of the individual strains that converge on a single subject: the American child.

When we look for iconic images of American children, we turn to the works of this period. These images have been pictured and re-pictured in art historical
surveys, as focal points in artist monographs, and as fulcrums of debate in lush thematically oriented studies. And yet a very obvious fact about these pictures is rarely mentioned: More often than not, they featured the complex, eternally developing social issue of children and childhood. American art of children at this time grappled with this issue in a way that was more rich and varied than ever before or ever since.

But how has art historical scholarship dealt with this fact, specifically in the field of American art history? Cursorily, episodically. Certainly not comprehensively. This dissertation attempts to rectify that issue.

Significantly, in dealing with visual images, I alternate between different media: in particular, paintings and photographs. To a very limited extent, this method has been used before with the paintings of the Ashcan School, but peculiarly, other important intersections of artists and artworks have not been made. For instance, the work of the Pictorial photographers, such as Alfred Stieglitz, Clarence White, and Gertrude Käsebier, has not been extensively examined in relation to the work of the painters of the Genteel Tradition, even though its themes and imagery are strikingly similar. Naturally, I do not seek to suggest that these different modes of expression are exactly equivalent to each other. Photography, for example, has always been associated with “truthfulness” whereas painting is often associated with the individual “genius” of the artist. Nonetheless, when we place images from these different media side by side, the result is fascinating—and both
the similarities and differences of approach are intriguing. By the same token, it is intriguing to compare works which cross artistic categories, such as genteel imagery and documentary reform imagery.

Contemporary Fiction and Contemporary Campaigns of Education and Social Reform.

Significantly, there is a rich literature that closely parallels some of these paintings. For many decades, scholars have recognized that there are striking parallels between the “Bad Boys” who are featured in the paintings of Winslow Homer and Eastman Johnson and the “Bad Boys” who are featured in the novels written around the same time by Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Mark Twain, such as *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1870), *Tom Sawyer* (1876), and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Indeed, in some cases there are scenes in these novels that are nearly mirror famous paintings by Johnson and Homer. For example, *The Story of a Bad Boy* contains an

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1 For instance, Lewis Hine’s *Young Driver in Mine* (1908, gelatin silver print, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.) is tired, stoic, and prematurely aged. George Luks’s *Breaker Boy of Shenandoah* (1921, oil on canvas, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota), a portrait of the same form of child labor, depicts composed masculinity. Another comparison may be made between genre painter J.G. Brown and documentary reform photographer Jacob Riis. Brown’s card-playing bootblacks in *A Card Trick* (1891, oil on canvas, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska) uphold ideals of racial harmony and economic self-sufficiency. In contrast Jacob Riis’s *Bootblacks and Newsies Shooting Craps* (1894, gelatin dry plate negative, Museum of the City of New York) portrays this same activity at a suspensefully tilted angle, and in raking light watched by a faceless man in shadow.

2 Mary Cassatt’s mother and child, in *The Child’s Bath* (1893, oil on canvas, Art Institute of Chicago), display all the tenderness that is starkly absent from Lewis Hine’s photograph of a little slum girl who is clearly used to bathing alone in a filthy sink (*Child in Tenement Bath*, 1910, gelatin silver print, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). What is absent becomes the photograph’s most powerfully expressive quality. And William Merritt Chase’s *Lake for Miniature Yachts, Central Park* (1890, oil on canvas, Private Collection) shows a deliberate disregard for urban squalor, his disdain for placing “those people” in his cityscapes. This refusal to consider the poor as models yielded, instead, paintings of his own children in safe, sequestered corners of Central Park. Contrastingly, George Bellows, who studied Chase through Henri, immersed himself in exaggerated scenes of inner-city crowding, filth, and so-called “childplay.” “Why don’t they go to the country for a vacation?” the title of his lithograph (1913, Los Angeles County Museum of Art) asks, satirizing the disdain of a genteel artist.
episode in which children demolish an old stagecoach which is very reminiscent of Eastman Johnson’s painting, *The Old Stagecoach* (1871), in which the titular object provides a setting for childish mayhem.

There is also abundant literature that parallels the imagery produced by the painters and photographers of the Genteel Tradition: novels such as Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1885-86), Rudyard Kipling’s *Captains Courageous* (1897), and Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)—novels which deal with the travails of genteel, well-bred children, and in a remarkably varied fashion—sometimes with sentimentality, sometimes in the guise of horror and disturbing psychological undercurrents.

Finally, this was a period of changing social ideas about the role of children, which was explored in a rich and extensive literature on education and social reform. In America, generally speaking, this literature forms two distinct bodies. The earlier of the two is devoted to the issue of the education of children and is associated with a more permissive approach to pedagogy that emphasized the individual needs of the child. Among the notable products of this movement was the creation of “Kindergarten,” a form of schooling for young children that stressed the importance of free-spirited play as a mode of learning and developing an understanding of the world, as opposed to top-down forms of memorization and discipline. Interestingly, by the twentieth century, this notion of play for very small children had been extended to older children, and even adults, through John Dewey’s notion of “learning by doing.” In its formative period, in the early and mid-nineteenth-century, the Kindergarten movement was largely centered in Boston and
its suburbs, as well as the American Midwest (in small towns in Wisconsin as well as in Columbus and Chicago), although by the twentieth century, it had also taken hold, through Dewey and others, in heterogeneous New York.

The second movement was that of social reform, which sought to improve the lives of poor children. This movement was associated with laws mandating education for children and prohibiting exploitative child labor. Social reformers asserted that if individuals were mistreated as children, they would not develop into good citizens. In many ways this reformist impulse was associated with democratic ideals: It was based on the assumption that, to vote intelligently, all classes of society needed access to at least a basic education, including the ability to read and write, as well as sufficient leisure to engage in some form of political discussion with their peers. It is important to recognize that this movement was largely aimed at a particular demographic group—not middle-class or wealthy children, but those who were desperately poor—very often children of the urban slums. Social reformers sought to alleviate the plight of recent immigrants, and thus their efforts became linked with conflicts about ethnic background and race, as well as poverty.

While one may not claim that the parallel is completely exact, it should be evident that these two movements of social reform—the first aimed at changing education itself, the second at giving all children access to good education—exhibit striking parallels with the paintings of their respective periods. In the first few decades of his career as a painter, for instance, Winslow Homer focused almost obsessively on schoolhouse scenes, or on images of children that evoke how their forms of play relate to the course of life that they will assume as adults. Notably, the
protagonists of his paintings invariably appear in a rural setting. In the early twentieth century, by contrast, artists such as Robert Henri, George Luks and George Bellows focused intently on the world of the poor urban child—sometimes treating such children as beautiful and endearing, and sometimes (particularly in the art of Bellows) treating them as depraved or genetically abnormal—almost as throwbacks to some more primitive form of animal life.

The images of children that I have singled out, in short, assume richer meaning when we view them in the context of the literature of their respective period, and the educational and social issues that were being debated at the time. But curiously, though psychologists, literary and cultural theorists, and historians have generated a vast body of scholarship on the evolving role of the child in Western society, such an exercise has not yet been conducted in the field of art history.

This dissertation will attempt to rectify this gap. It will focus on the brief but fecund time frame when American artists overwhelmingly depicted children. It will discuss children exclusively as a subject, as opposed to the extant survey-oriented studies that sandwich children within a list of disempowered social groups. At the same time, I will attempt to draw meaningful comparisons and contrasts between contemporaneous visual media—paintings, photographs, and comic serials; between discursive forms—unprecedented advances in child pedagogy, children’s literature, and legislation concerning children’s social rights; and among artists who worked together during the same milieu, with children as their central subject. This dissertation, though primarily intended to analyze visual culture at a specific
historical moment, is highly interdisciplinary. By bringing observations from sister disciplines into the field of art history, and placing different kinds of images that are rarely spoken about together side-by-side, I am hopeful that a more comprehensive understanding of the child in American art and society will emerge.

I will begin with the first major American painters of childhood, the genre painters Winslow Homer, Eastman Johnson, and J. G. Brown, whose images of “bad children,” particularly “bad” boys, exhibit striking parallels to the depictions of children in the literature of Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Mark Twain. These writings, in turn, seem to reflect new approaches to childhood education based on a new conception of the essential nature of the child. I will then investigate the work of the genteel painters and art photographers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—painters such as John Singer Sargent, William Merritt Chase, Abbott Thayer, and Mary Cassatt, and photographers such as Alfred Stieglitz, Clarence White, and Gertrude Käsebier. These artists’ alternative vision of the privileged, sensitive child also had interesting parallels in popular novels of the period by authors such as Frances Hodgson Burnett, Rudyard Kipling, and Henry James. I will conclude with the work of the social reform photographers, such as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, and the “Ashcan School” painters, such as Robert Henri, George Luks, and George Bellows, whose renderings of children of the slums parallels the social activism of the period, both in legislative movements, such as child labor laws, and educational movements, such as John Dewey’s belief in the need to integrate play and “doing” into child pedagogy. Some painters, such as Robert Henri, idealized children, while others, such as George Bellows, emphasized their brutal qualities.
Of course, some words of caution are in order. For one thing, visual images and texts communicate meaning in a different fashion: We should never assume that they are interchangeable with each other and present identical messages. In addition, when we bring in elements of social history, it should be stressed that the images produced by painters do not represent a demographically balanced outlook. Indeed, the painters and photographers whom I have judged to be outstanding artists of American childhood are condensed in two particular places—New England, particularly Boston, which still possessed a rural outlook during the nineteenth century, and more mercantile, ethnically heterogeneous New York City. The work of these artists definitely reflects the local cultures in which they were steeped. A partial exception is Lewis Hine, who did travel across the entire country photographing child laborers, although his ideological bias was still that of a sociologist from Columbia University. Notably, Boston and New York were also the two major American centers of the publishing industry, so the regional bias of writers was often similar to that of the painters.

In fact, in some instances artists intentionally skewed the historical picture of American childhood to suit a personal agenda, which demonstrates another important point: visual culture does not only reflect, but also influences, social ideology. For instance, J.G. Brown depicted mostly German and Irish American children in New York City well into the 1890s and early 1900s. However, the American Census reports that the urban German population had dropped from 951,119 in 1860 to 505,152 in 1891, and the urban Irish population dropped from
914,119 in 1860 to 399,179, during the same time period. By the end of his career, the Italian, Russian, and Polish populations had surged, but Brown never represented Italian, Russian or Polish models. In fact, Brown was hostile to the new surge of immigrants and intentionally portrayed young male bootblacks and young female flower vendors from more established, assimilable cultural backgrounds. His favorite model was an Irish immigrant boy named Paddy Ryan.

The Development of Academic Studies on Childhood

From what has been said, it is clear that this study, while it places art history in the foreground, is interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary in approach. An over-arching assumption this study—which has rarely been applied to art history in the American field—is that childhood forms a distinct stage of life. Interestingly, this assumption, while seemingly self-evident today, is relatively recent—and the study of childhood, as a phenomenon which has changed over time, is more recent still. In 1962, with his text, Centuries of Childhood, Phillipe Ariès introduced the idea that childhood is an area of scholarly study in its own right. An entire new field of academic research arose, without which even the idea of writing this dissertation would be impossible. Ariès established a debate, still ongoing, over whether adults have recognized childhood as a discrete stage of human development only in the modern period, or whether, instead, adults acknowledge childhood at every point in the human narrative, only in culturally differing ways.

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have looked at Ariès’s work as well as the work of later masters of child studies, such as Hugh Cunningham, who, in 1995, with *Children and Childhood in Western Society*, provided a broad overview of the literature on Childhood Studies, which demonstrates how it has flowered as a discipline, and in fact has created many sub-fields. Today there are studies of childhood in the West (the work of Lloyd DeMause, John Sommerville, and Linda Pollock are classic examples), and art historical studies of childhood in the Nonwest (the work of Anne Barrott Wicks is an excellent example), and the Classical world (the work of Jenifer Neils is an outstanding example).

A separate field that arose during the early 1960s—the same time that Child Studies became a viable form of scholarship—is the field of developmental psychology, which looks at childhood as a distinct and unique phase of human development. In 1963 Erik Erikson published his iconic *Childhood and Society*.\(^5\) Following the lead of educational theorists, such as John Dewey, Erikson argued adamantly that childhood play is a way to help children master each stage of development: “Play assumes special importance during [early childhood] and provides the child with a safe island where he can develop his autonomy within his own set of boundaries or laws.”\(^6\) He contended that watching children play is revelatory because play is the way in which children uniquely communicate and organize meaning in their world. While this dissertation does not delve deeply into developmental psychology, Erikson’s basic idea that children go through stages of

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development, that they learn through play, and that disruption at any stage can damage adult identity, are ideas that underlie much of my analysis of texts and works of art.

Of particular value to this study have been those works which specifically address the role of children in American society. The works in this specific discipline, which I have found most illuminating, include texts by Viviana Zelizer (Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children, 1985), Paula Fass (Childhood in America, 2000), and Steven Mintz (Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood, 2004). Some of these texts deal with a specific aspect of children's living conditions: for instance, Karen Halttunen (Confidence Men and Painted Women, 1982), Anthony Rotundo (American Manhood, 1993), Anne Scott MacLeod (American Childhood, 1994), David I. MacLeod (1998), Beverly Lyon Clark (Regendering the School Story, 2001), and Michael S. Kimmel (Manhood in America: A Cultural History, 2006) wrote now-axiomatic studies of differences in gender between boys' and girls' experience of American life during the nineteenth century.

Another specialized study of American childhood is Hugh D. Hindman's Child Labor: An American History, 2002, which is an entire narrative of the ideological and legislative war fought on behalf of child laborers in America. And Paul D. Moreno highlights the political battles that arose between African-Americans and child laborers with similar needs (Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History, 2006).

Changing Social Schemas About American Children
Some general background knowledge about the role of children in American society will be helpful for an understanding of what follows, for during the nineteenth century, the view of the American child underwent momentous changes. The center-point of this change was the evolution of American parenting styles.

During seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a predominant way of structuring the family unit was the Puritan model, which ascribed to the idea of Original Sin. Though colonial parents loved their children, mourned their too-common deaths, and were not always pathologically abusive by twenty-first-century standards, early Protestant doctrine judged that children were born wicked. Any signs of willful individualism needed to be broken by a stern and physically punitive patriarch, at least according to church leaders. But at the turn of the nineteenth century, an extraordinary change occurred. American parents and religious authorities began to replace the idea of Original Sin with a schema of innate childhood innocence. Concurrently American families espoused a gentler means of childrearing. The matriarch became the child’s chief caretaker. She provided positive reinforcement to her children, and acknowledged that a foundation in concrete principles and free play was the best way to teach children abstract moral and intellectual values.

Nineteenth-century Protestant American parents sustained the belief that what children learned early in life prepared them for adulthood as good citizens: that is, the nuclear domestic unit developed and became the shaper of behavior, and behavior in the household was the model for behavior in the larger community. As we shall see, increasingly, children—particularly boys—beyond the age of six were granted unprecedented time to socialize with peers outside the domestic realm, to
learn through play, also in preparation and practice for adulthood. Underlying all of these changes was the sentimentalization of children, the markedly increased view of their intrinsic value.

The nineteenth-century sentimentalization of childhood accounts for much of the polemics that arose debating the “place” of the child in society. In genteel circles, this was not a difficult question to answer: children should be, and were, sheltered and indulged. But this became a more complicated question for underprivileged children. It is important to understand the reasons for this fierce contentiousness: notably, in legislative battles over whether poor children belonged in school or the place they were more often found—the wage-earning workplace. The sentimentalization of American childhood was a social construct of the middle-class, who were the most outspoken children’s welfare “reformers.” These individuals recast centuries-old working-class activities such as “pitching in for the family” or “helping out on the farm” as morally suspicious practices. This was exacerbated by the fact that the middle-class now perceived a physical and psychological difference between the homestead and the workplace—the factory or office. An interesting social manifestation of this increasing split between home and workplace was the creation of “the weekend”—a period of time when workers did not have to go to the factory or office but could remain at home, a place associated with leisure time. The right to “the weekend” was achieved only after a long period of conflict and was ultimately won by labor strikes.

Neither laborers nor reformers were able to operate in a purely idealistic fashion: both were constrained by elements of self-interest, with results that were
often seemingly paradoxical. For instance, working-class parents often withdrew their children from schools and placed them in dangerous occupations because they needed an additional source of “pooled family income,” for protection against the real threat of bankruptcy and starvation should the family head die without a working heir. On the other hand, child labor reformers sometimes belonged to labor unions who only wanted children out of work in order to eliminate competitors for a minimum wage. Debates over the appropriate role of children in American society divided religious authorities, parents, and social activists. These debates centered on the slippery question of what defined labor, and whether a “price” based on gainful employment should be placed on a child. To American reformers, who wished to keep (often ethnic immigrant) children in schools where mainstream social values were disseminated, the worth of a child exceeded fiscal justification and employing a child was an ideological affront to children’s sentimental value. To those Americans opposing child labor reform, denying a child gainful employment was also an ideological affront—to his/her courage and resourceful support of family—furthermore arguing that the greater social ill was a child’s idleness and vagrancy. Significantly, to both factions in this struggle, the problem faced was to determine in what manner society could best define the inherent worth of a child.

Sentimentality was often a powerful tool of reform. But the sentimentalization of childhood in this period also possessed dangerous, paradoxical elements. Through much of the nineteenth century, upper-class children were perceived as fully human but working-class children were not. Thus, working-class children labored in mills and factories to bolster the abundant luxury
of the pampered children of the elite. At the same time, the children of the elite, in spite of being treated as the objects of sentimental attention, were not necessarily happy. The impossibly perfect childhood that Victorian authors *constructed* often clashed terribly with the actual needs of children—and, ironically, often produced “genteel” children who were not happy but neurotic and insecure. Thus, even wealthy children suffered from a world-view that did not reconcile abstract ideals with reality. In reality, wealthy children were children—not little angels. They were emotionally complex. They often disobeyed, as children do. They often had unpleasant moments. Furthermore, they sometimes became ill and, not infrequently, died young. If their parents had possessed a more realistic concept of their actual needs, some of these unfortunate turns might have been avoided. In the main body of this dissertation, we will explore a fascinating instance of this theme: the Governess in Henry James's “The Turn of the Screw.” Metonymically as Victorian society, the governess accidentally suffocates her little pupil, Miles, in an attempt to “rescue” him from the “evils” of adult predators.

**Changing Literary Schemas About Children**

Changes in American children’s literature also arose during the second half of the nineteenth century and were particularly geared toward the adventures of unruly “Bad Boys” (such as *The Story of a Bad Boy* by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, 1870, and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain, 1876), but also included increasingly complex stories for girls in domestic settings that were produced even earlier (such as Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, 1869). Both types of children’s
literature advocated a permissive model of child education that condemned harsh physical discipline. More frequently, these new stories granted little boys the agency—indeed, the heroism—to rebel against severe, or merely civilizing, adult authority. These new archetypes of children’s literature creatively reflected the pedagogical changes transpiring in American elementary schools.

Similarly, there are striking connections between the work of the genteel society painters of the later nineteenth-century—such as John Singer Sargent, Abbott Thayer, William Merritt Chase, and Mary Cassatt—and the type of literature that was propagated in the “genteel” magazines of the period, such as *The Atlantic Months*, *Scribner’s*, and *The Century*. Indeed, these painters were clearly consumers of such magazines, as well as in many instances, friends of the authors who wrote for them. Naturally, they assumed a similar scheme of values.

For instance, there are illuminating affinities between Frances Hodgson Burnett and William Merritt Chase. Chase saw a Broadway version of Burnett’s book, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and knew the child actress portraying Fauntleroy. His depiction of *Elsie Lyde as Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1889, oil on canvas, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid), like his other depictions of children, is almost artificially ideal, pampered, and plays an ambiguous gender role, much like Burnett’s protagonist.

Robert Louis Stevenson best correlates with Abbott Thayer. Thayer idolized the writer and, like Stevenson, fervently idealized childhood. Thayer’s paintings, such as *Angel* (1887, oil on canvas, Smithsonian Art Museum, Washington, D.C.), were also an attempt to cope with the deaths of his wife and two of his children. The
melancholic yet moralizing tone of much of Thayer's work echoes poems in Stevenson's *Child's Garden of Verses*.

Rudyard Kipling and Henry James both correlate with John Singer Sargent. Sargent portrayed little boys in sailor suits, such as *Caspar Goodrich* (1887, oil on canvas, location unknown), a painting that is part of a long line of British and American portraits of sons of the elite in miniature Naval uniforms. Caspar's stalwart yet endearingly childish demeanor is reminiscent of the protagonist in Kipling's *Captains Courageous* (1897). Kipling's young Harvey Cheyne is dealt a harsh awakening to the cult of working-class manhood as a remedy to spoiled "effeminacy."

Sargent was a close friend of both Henry James and his brother, psychologist William James, both of whom explored the abnormal and morally ambivalent aspects of childhood. Sargent also depicted little girls whose ruptured psyches question the popular idea that childhood is unequivocally happy. A quintessential instance is *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (1882, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), in which four wide-eyed, pale sisters retreat with increasing age into the unsettlingly engulfing shadows of a Parisian apartment.

Finally, Louisa May Alcott and Mary Cassatt, who knew each other through Alcott's sister in Paris, similarly operate within the confines of traditional femininity. But they do so in order to empower the women and children whom they depict. For instance, Cassatt's *Young Mother Sewing* (1900, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art), frames mother and daughter in a traditionally
domestic parlor, but portrays a candidly bored child whose direct stare complicates the idea of passive femininity.

For the sake of clarity and simplicity, I have stressed relationships between texts and paintings in a one-to-one fashion, but, of course, the actual cultural situation was more complex. The parallels that I have drawn should be taken as only particularly striking examples of a type of interaction between paintings and literature that was far richer and more complex than can be done justice by a study of this length.

**Educational Reform During the Nineteenth Century**

A major phenomenon of the nineteenth century was the profound change that took place in the education of children—changes that reflected a changing concept of “childhood” and “the child.” This educational reform movement began in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century and can be broadly referred to as “Pestalozzian” after the Swiss educator Heinrich Pestalozzi, who originated the new approach and the philosophy with which it was associated. Pestalozzian education questioned the axiom of Original Sin brought to America by the Puritans over a century earlier. Pestalozzian educators argued that children were born sinless, had personal needs unique from those of adults, and needed to play while under the care of nurturing matriarchs in order to develop healthily. I summarize the contributions of Friedrich Froebel, his German Kindergarten, his many acolytes, and the way that educational reform rapidly spread to the United States in new schools and correspondent forms of children’s literature.
In America, one of the first manifestations of this new approach was the creation of Kindergartens. The first Kindergarten appeared in America in Watertown, Wisconsin in 1856 as an experiment by Margarethe Meyer Schurze, a politically liberal Jew from Hamburg, Germany. But in its early years, the movement was particularly powerful in Boston, and today is largely associated with Elizabeth Peabody, one of Froebel’s most devoted followers, who in 1860 opened America’s first English-speaking Kindergarten in Boston, Massachusetts. Other kindergartens soon followed. Adolph Douai opened a Kindergarten in Newark, New Jersey, in 1861, and William N. Hailmann attached a Kindergarten to his German-American academy in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1865. And when the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, 1876, hosted Anna Coe’s Kindergarten display, it received national attention. The Kindergarten movement spread from New England to the Midwest, finding flourishing centers in Columbus, Ohio (beginning with Catherine Louise Frankenburg’s Kindergarten, 1858), and Chicago, Illinois (beginning with Alice Putnam, at Hull House), and gained particularly warm reception in New York City—where the majority of the artists in my dissertation produced their most outstanding paintings of children.

Importantly, the form that Kindergarten should take soon became the subject of debate and controversy. In 1890, Kindergarten instructor Anna Bryan gave a speech at the National Education Association requesting that American Kindergartens cease following Froebel’s inherently German model—with its use of outdated German folklore and lesson objects—and, instead, consider opening its private doors to the heterogeneous urban American demographic. Kindergarten
was no longer the privilege of an upper-class Anglo-American child, but a democratizing form of childrearing. Instructors such as Bryan and famous American pedagogue John Dewey, who became President of the Kindergarten Association, substituted Froebelian activities with everyday themes centered around the children’s often problematic homes with the goal of capturing their individual interests.⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, the Kindergarten movement was widespread, although it took diverse forms, and the progressive ideals it fostered—particularly the notion of attending to the individuality of the child, and of encouraging learning through play—had become pervasive in the American educational system.

At the turn of the twentieth century, this movement for educational reform shifted into something more wide-ranging. For the first time, the correlation between child advocacy and child imagery became explicit and political. The most influential social force in the early twentieth century was the Progressive Movement. This alliance of social moderates largely concerned itself with the influx of foreign-born Americans. Poor slum-dwelling children represented a future generation of American citizens that might supplant the status quo. To ideologically mediate immigrant children, the Progressives placed faith in the dawning social sciences and attempted to reform two social entities: schools and child labor.

Books, experimental schools and free Kindergartens, children’s welfare exhibits, political campaigns and strikes—and entire new art forms such as

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documentary photography—weighed in on this heated debate. One of the themes to emerge from this inquiry, which has not been explored before, is the degree to which many major American artists maintained a close connection with the world of educational reform, both with figures prominent in the movement and with notable schools and institutions, such as the Ethical Culture School in New York. Fascinatingly, these links encompass artists who are not traditionally viewed as particularly conscious of social issues, such as Alfred Stieglitz and his followers.

A few significant examples that I have discovered are listed. Documentary photographer Jacob Riis studied the writing of Felix Adler, the founder of the New York Ethical Culture School and the National Child Labor Committee. Documentary photographer Lewis Hine taught at the Ethical Culture School. Art photographer Paul Strand studied under Lewis Hine at the Ethical Culture School, and influenced Alfred Stieglitz’s approach to photography. Ashcan School painter Robert Henri read John Dewey’s *The School and Society* (1900). Henri and protégé George Bellows taught at Emma Goldman’s Ferrer School in New York City, where Dewey’s curriculum was utilized. And documentary photographer Dorothea Lange studied under Clarence White at Columbia University.

**Issues of Gender**

A major observation that I have made is that the narrative produced by major visual artists—such as Winslow Homer, Eastman Johnson, Robert Henri and George Bellows—is largely a history of American *boyhood*. It is primarily the equation of positive American cultural values with masculinity. When this narrative
is not a story of boyhood, it often portrays American girls who may be developmentally maladjusted. The implication is that these girls are the exceptions to the rule of healthy “childhood.” American “childhood” and “boyhood” were once used misleadingly as synonymous terms, and this very fact indicates the gendered nature of children’s role in American art history. This is a fascinating social bias to explore.

Manhood is invisible in cultural discussions because it is awarded “transcendental” properties. Manhood is a state of social privilege and, therefore, men and women do not recognize that it is a subjective, specific perspective. But during the nineteenth century, manhood became interchangeable in an unprecedented way with all the positive aspects of “being American.” For American men, femininity became “a negative pole against which men defined themselves,” and anything in American society that was not desirable, such as qualities that the newly independent nation associated with Great Britain and Europe, was labeled as “effeminate” and disregarded as the undesirable antithesis to “Americanness.”

Sociologist Michael S. Kimmel has written, “We search for the timeless and eternal during moments of crisis these points of transition when the old definitions no longer work and new definitions are yet to be established.” The nineteenth century, in which America shifted from being a colonial nation to a mercantile capitalist nation with increasingly industrialized qualities, punctuated by a civil war and an influx of immigrants that both further upset established social structure, was

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9 Kimmel, 3.
certainly undergoing transition. It is not a coincidence that the “masculinizing” of American cultural identity occurred during the nineteenth century. It is concordantly no coincidence that American artists were inordinately preoccupied with painting little boys: this was literally the American cultural psyche’s search for a redefinition both of childhood and of manhood. As a result, little boys became archetypes of ideal American manhood, and in turn, ideal America.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, manhood was defined as a state either of the genteel patriarch, an aristocratic landowner, or his counterpart, the independent, self-possessed artisan (defined by Kimmel as an artisan, shopkeeper, or farmer). By roughly 1830, a new archetype arose: the Self-Made Man, whose masculinity was synonymous with the volatile industrialized marketplace. This man was defined neither by landownership—which was increasingly feminized as a “foppish” product of Europe against which to rebel—nor was this man defined by an identifiable trade. The artisan remained the role model of republican virtue, but the Self-Made Man was a fundamentally different being, a product uniquely of the nineteenth century.

In order to separate themselves from British and European men, American men pathologized femininity itself as a negative state—something that is interesting to note considering that American paintings and photographs depicting childhood abnormalcy and unhealthiness almost always depict girls (particularly when we consider the Genteel Tradition). American men aspired to their masculine ideal by calling all Europeans dandies and by referring to scientific and religious doctrines to “prove” a “natural” difference between the sexes (ascribing all of the “negative”
feminine traits to the “biology” of women). In doing so, they also separated the living spaces of men and women between the masculine industrialized, mercantile workplace and the feminine homestead. Men also defined manhood from boyhood in this way: Men had not come into their own, had not reached full and respectable adulthood, until they were entirely separated from the domestic realm that was ruled by their mothers. The degree to which boys were able to escape the domestic realm defined their masculinity, and, thus, their maturity. Even activities such as breeching, in which a boy, at age six, began to wear pants and no longer lived a unisexual life dressed in the same gowns as his female siblings, demarcated initiation into manhood.11

This is where little boys in American paintings become crucial—little boys who populate, tellingly, the most famous and well-loved instances of American art throughout the nineteenth century. The development of a boy culture, and the American man’s struggle to triumph despite the anxieties of a changing nation, correlate with the rise of the inherently defiant “Bad Boy” in American art and literature. The unruliness of the Bad Boy—school truancy, roughhousing, and prank-playing—was a form of social power inversion, in which boys represented America striking out on its own against the Old World. It is indubitable that Bad Boys were icons of American heroism, worshiped by American men struggling to become self-made entrepreneurs as antebellum culture increasingly faded, their presence rendering any feminine exceptions invisible or undesirable (such as the

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10 Kimmel, 37.
famously bizarre, neurotic four sisters in John Singer Sargent’s *Daughters of Edward Darley Boit, 1882*). Male children in art and society, rather than their female counterparts, became the barometer of “Americanness.”

Socializing among male peers without adult intervention was a unique quality of the transitional nineteenth century. Without the disciplinary surveillance of their parents—especially their mothers—little boys gained time to establish a subculture that social historians have coined “boy culture.”

Boy culture provided boys with the opportunity to practice the traits that amounted to ideal American citizenship (in other words, ideal American masculinity). It is worth noting that, while the women’s suffrage movement began in the United States at a convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, women did not have the right to vote until 1920, with the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Boys, on the other hand, built skills in establishing social hierarchies, skills that would carry into adulthood. In order to hone qualities such as courage, stoicism, group loyalty, and control/mastery, boys collectively created highly specific forms of homosocial play.

Indeed, as this dissertation illustrates, children’s games were gendered. Boys vented frustration with the docile restrictions of the homestead by playing particularly violent games, sometimes cruelly targeting animals or peers who were not members of their “clubs.” For instance, in Winslow Homer’s *How Many Eggs?* (1873, watercolor and gouache on cardboard, Private Collection), a group of little boys living in Gloucester, Massachusetts discover a bird’s nest and carelessly destroy it, disrupting an animal life cycle in order to assert domination over nature.

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Yet none of this implicit violence appears in analogous paintings of little girls by painters of the Genteel Tradition. For instance, William Merritt Chase’s insular, docile images of playing daughters portray girls who never truly physically exert themselves and rarely leave the confines of the domestic space: such as in *Children Playing Parlor Croquet* (1888, oil on canvas, Private Collection). Physically violent outdoor games were, indeed, the realm of boys, and helped them establish social hierarchies.

**Art Historical Literature on American Images of Children**

While there is no overall survey of images of American children in the period covered by this dissertation, a few outstanding texts do exist which deal in part or in passing with the issues I will address.

Margaretta Lovell’s *Art in a Season of Revolution* examines the way that famous colonial American portraits provide clues about changing social conditions within the American family.¹³ She studies how the American nuclear family developed alongside the notion of a national identity, and argues that American colonial portraiture evinced a steadily growing emotional investment in the physical and emotional welfare of young children. But Lovell’s observations are limited to the period between roughly 1760 and the early 1800s. They also ultimately restrict inquiry to primarily adult concerns, with children as only one significant detail in a larger picture of social history.

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Sarah Burns’s text *Pastoral Inventions*, 1989, iconographically deconstructs the cultural significance of American country boys and the obvious market-based fixation on their visual depiction. Burns is unafraid to delve deeply into the political and cultural events as well as the popular and refined visual media occurring at the apex of the genre painter Winslow Homer’s career (and those of several antecedents in genre painting). She dissects the cultural mythos created around rural America during the anxious years of the Civil War and Reconstruction. In doing so, she convincingly argues that little boys were symbols, even mascots, of all that the implicitly masculine, rural, “unpretentious,” and young America wished to be. Burns indicates that there were visual clues about the role of children in American art that would have been iconographically obvious to visual consumers at the time. Rebellious farmboys’ bare-footedness and their insistent setting in the wilderness, in particular, are examples of these clues.

Barbara Dayer Gallati has written *Great Expectations: Sargent Painting Children*, 2004. Gallati’s text is an anthology of childhood images made by John Singer Sargent at home and overseas during the end of the nineteenth century. She sometimes compares Sargent to other (earlier and contemporaneous) genteel painters, and she implicitly involves children’s literature in the discourse. Even the title of her work is a wordplay on English author Charles Dicken’s popular novel about a number of adults’ upwardly-mobile ambitions for a single child—indeed, an

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15 In fact, Burns notably critiques the formalist bias of Homer scholar Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., with respect to Homer’s images of children and other bucolic genre subjects.
appropriate title for a period in which children were upheld to impossible standards and made to play the moral saviors of a decaying Western society. Gallati’s case studies of Sargent’s outstanding child portraits are often incredibly incisive, but her insights are frequently restricted to the bubble of the nineteenth-century elite—to the role of children as a topic in an ambitious upper-class artist’s career, an artist attempting to win over multiple and conflicting patrons, some conservative, and some avant-garde.

Erica Hirshler, in Sargent’s Daughters, 2009, produced a slim, narrowly focused psycho-biographical study of a single painting by Sargent: The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit (1882, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). The painting, which initially seems idyllic, portrays four girls in a dark interior. Closer examination suggest that it in some way reflects or foreshadows the psychiatric disturbance and personal tragedy that these four children would suffer as adults. Hirshler’s title, Sargent’s Daughters, implicitly proposes that the tragic circumstances of his sitters’ lives are inextricable from the childless painter’s aesthetic intentions. While undoubtedly fascinating, the book provides a dangerous model since it is often unclear whether Hirshler’s readings of the painting are projections based on historical hindsight or actually reflect qualities that are present in the painting.

The role of children in works by painters of the Ashcan School has been discussed in passing in two books by Rebecca Zurier: Metropolitan Lives (1995, a

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collaboration) and *Picturing the City* (2006).\(^\text{18}\) Zurier’s books are the dream of any social, cultural, or material historian: they are so interdisciplinary that the first rave review on Amazon.com claims “not just for art historians!”, a boast which is increasingly relevant to the field. Zurier explains in detail the uniquely populist training of the most prominent Ashcan School artists (Robert Henri, George Luks, Everett Shinn, John Sloan, George Bellows, and William Glackens). But her observations move well outside gallery space politics and aesthetic traditions. She examines the way in which the Ashcan School artists engage a mosaic of modern issues: complicated relationships that beget racial caricature; the new and implicitly classed nature of living space and privacy; changes in gender and sexual relations; ethnic ghettos and codes of conduct even within single national and religious bounds; and so on. Children appear in almost every chapter of her two texts on the Ashcan School. But they are never the central issue.

Much the same ground is covered in a book by Marianne Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America*, 1992, although this is scholarship devoted to examining the work of a single artist.\(^\text{19}\) As the title suggests, this is a somewhat dual biography: a biography of the young and precocious realist painter, draftsman, and printer, and a biography of New York City during the tumultuous, young years of the century, the period when Bellows produced his most original work. Discussions of children in America are subordinated to discussions of George Bellows and the subjects that he


chose to depict. The first two chapters of the book, which occupy at least half of the
text, deal with Bellow’s paintings of the landscape of New York and of boxing
matches. Children are discussed only in the final chapter, appropriately titled “The
Other Half” after the first famous American photo-documentary, by Jacob Riis.
Doezema places these works in the space between two different visual traditions:
that of the progressive reform literature of the time, and that of the racist
caricatures which were popular in cartoons and humorous literature, showing that
comical parodies of Bellows’s slum children were often accompanied by captions
that mocked Irish dialect. For the most part, however, the commentary is more
about Bellows’s artistic sources in popular imagery and his approach to issues of
race and ethnicity, than it is about children. Furthermore, because the point of
*George Bellows and Urban America* is to underscore the suddenness and starkness of
change in America, there is not much reference back to a previous time in American
visual history. Consequently, the text does not provide the comparisons to earlier
depictions of children and childhood that I consider valuable.

Generally speaking, the groundwork has been laid for a synthesizing study of
images of children in American art from 1870 to 1915. While there are some
significant gaps, most of the topics addressed by this dissertation have been
previously explored in some fashion. However, what is needed is a comprehensive
study that examines more than one artistic group, and explores the different ways in
which this subject matter was treated, including the changes over time, and the
differences within particular periods. In addition, the literature on art history and
the literature on education and social reform have interacted only slightly. Nor has
much been written on the abundant cross-influences between artists and authors dealing with the subject of childhood during this period. I propose that the value of my own research is *synthesis*. Much of what I state in the body of this dissertation has already been explored by social historians. Similarly, most of the artists whom I discuss are prominent and their careers, consequently, have often been given serious study. But while both lines of inquiry are extensive, they run parallel and rarely intersect in an understandable way. I aim to effect this intersection. By bringing these two bodies of scholarship into relation with each other, I am hopeful that new understandings will arise.

**Summary of the Dissertation**

As has been indicated, this dissertation will investigate images of American children in relation to movements of educational and social reform at the turn of the twentieth century. My study will differ from prior studies of children in American art in that it will span a broader chronology—shortly following the Civil War to just prior to World War I—and in that it will focus specifically on children and childhood, rather than treating childhood incidentally, within a wider spectrum of artistic and social issues. The study is based on a simple observation that has not received much attention: Children were an extraordinarily dominant and central subject for American artists in the years from 1870 to 1915—at exactly the period when children’s education and social reform movements were most active—and that both before and after this period children received less artistic attention. Many of the paintings that I will address are among the most famous in American art, such
as Winslow Homer’s *Snap-the-Whip* and George Bellow’s *Forty-Two Kids*.

This dissertation follows a particular, consistent structure. A “background” chapter first enumerates social changes that had a direct and demonstrative impact on all forms of cultural expression, including visual art, regarding the welfare of children. This is followed by a close analysis of pivotal works by notable artists who depicted children. Finally, at the close of each chapter, the discussion focuses on the manner in which each artist uniquely engaged children’s roles and rights in visual form. I indicate ways in which these artists sometimes uphold, and sometimes undermine, the ideas—personal, pedagogical, and legislative—that gave rise to social reform for children.

**Chapter Summaries**

Chapter one is a brief record of pedagogical reform movements centered in late nineteenth-century New England. I provide a history of the change from perceiving the child as innately sinful, to a being who, instead, possesses sentimental value and is treated indulgently.

Chapter two opens the visual discussion. I provide an overview of earlier artistic trends in the depiction of American childhood. I investigate growing signs of familial affection during the American colonial period. For instance, John Singleton Copley’s family portrait (1776-77, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), portrays the artist’s sons and daughters in various states of informal horseplay. I also examine images of children by genre painters such as George Caleb Bingham and William Sidney Mount. Mount’s *School Boys Quarrelling* (1830, oil on
canvas, Long Island Museum of Art, New York), is an early instance of the unruly child: Schoolbooks scatter forgotten behind the escalating fight while an elderly lady appears dismayed but unable to restore order.

Eastman Johnson was the first painter of the “Bad Boy” as a subject in its own right. Johnson’s *The Old Stagecoach* (1870-71, oil on canvas, Milwaukee Art Museum), is the quintessential example of childhood misbehavior in nineteenth-century American painting. As in Mount’s earlier image, children have discarded their schoolbooks. The boys and girls defy these symbols of adult control because autonomy, play, and permissive parenting have now become the keys to a healthy child’s development. The youngsters comically ape adult behavior, play-acting as drivers, delicate ladies holding “parasols,” and even horses. At the compositional pinnacle, a boy flings off his hat and whoops in barefooted, triumphal abandon.

Winslow Homer perfected the image of the unruly child. Homer’s paintings comment upon new pedagogical practices transpiring inside the quintessentially American “little red schoolhouse.” *The Blackboard* (1877, watercolor, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), illustrates the Walter Smith Theory, an actual method of teaching endorsed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that attempted to encourage children to grasp large geometric and intellectual concepts rather than simply learning by rote. Homer also acknowledged childhood’s darker moments. In fact, in paintings such as *The Boat Builders* (1873, oil on panel, Indianapolis Museum of Art) and *Dad’s Coming!* (1873, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), the artist implied that child’s play was a rehearsal for adult
hazards such as earning a living as a New England seafaring father, complete with the too-common risk of drowning.

I close this chapter by exploring the career of John George Brown, whose saccharine paintings of urban bootblacks are ironically the first American record of child labor. *The Teacher*, 1868, depicts a little girl trying to achieve order in her slum “classroom.” The painting reduces widely circulating ideas about new pedagogy, and its ability to “rescue” ragamuffins from the streets, to a marketable joke about a prissy youngster. Furthermore, the boy striking a picturesque pose in the watercolor *Perfectly Happy* (1885, watercolor, Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio), pluckily dismisses the genuine agonies of child labor.

Looking at these three painters, it is obvious that the treatment of the Bad Boy varies distinctly: with a pioneer in Johnson, a champion in Homer, and an apologist in Brown.

Chapters three and four form a discrete unit that I titled the “Genteel Tradition.” Chapter three addresses the image of the innocent, pampered child by painters with a cosmopolitan background. Genteel paintings too often represent childhood as a more pleasant experience than it truly was for many children, and those who have written about genteel children in art have upheld this criticism. But while these images certainly gloss over many forms of social ill, to modern eyes the works of William Merritt Chase, Abbott Thayer, John Singer Sargent, and Mary Cassatt seem filled with complex, sometimes troubling, psychological undercurrents.
Like the genre painters, the genteel painters espoused familial affection, indulgence, and learning through play. Significantly “Bad Boys” do not appear in these paintings: spoiled children do, effeminate boys and pampered girls who are sheltered from the more painful qualities of adulthood, and sometimes, because they are spoiled, children who are unhealthy.

Chapter four deals with images of children by art photographers. Peculiarly, there is little commentary on imagery of children in the work of Pictorial photographers, even though it is one of the subjects that most preoccupied Alfred Stieglitz, the father of the Photo-Secession, and his followers, such as Clarence White and Gertrude Käsebier.

Stieglitz’s early visual appropriations of Old Master paintings featuring children, such as the bare, haunting *Venetian Gamin* (1887, platinum print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), use an unsparingly direct documentary mode that is somewhat at odds with our usual picture of him as an artist preoccupied with formal concerns alone. Furthermore, Stieglitz made obsessively detailed records of his daughter Kitty’s mental and physical development, such as *Kitty* (1905, platinum print processed with mercury, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), which depicts an introspective child flanked by an illustration of the violent nursery rhyme, “Three Blind Mice.” These portraits echo the psychological concerns of painters like Sargent, who challenged society’s simple, nostalgic view that childhood was purely a time of innocence.

Clarence White’s photographs of children also drew on the formulas of genteel paintings, although interestingly, White was also a Socialist. For him
photographs of children were a means to elevate society, since the first step to utopia was to bring beauty and harmony to the domestic sphere. A representative example is the glowing allegory of a *Nude with Baby* (1912, gum bichromate print, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), which renders maternity, childhood, and nature synonymous. Interestingly, in photographs such as White’s, the nakedness of children is an emblem of innocence and holds different connotations than it would hold today, when viewers see child nakedness as vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Additionally, White taught many younger photographers, such as Dorothea Lange and Margaret Bourke-White, who adopted a more documentary style, and whose work raised awareness about the plight of impoverished children.

Gertrude Käsebier’s background at the Pratt Institute exposed her to Kindergarten. She depicted children learning through reading and play, in scenes of tender ordinary moments such as *Lolly Pops* (1910, gelatin silver print, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York), and *The Picture-Book* (1903, platinum print, Private Collection).

Yet, weary of her duties as a mother and grandmother, Käsebier masked her frustrations with domestic duty by transforming ordinary mothers and children into quasi-religious emblems untouchable by death or disease. A famous example is *Blessed Art Thou Among Women* (1899-1900, platinum print, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art), a symmetrically rigid icon that effectively hid the fact that the child depicted suffered from diabetes and died one year later.

Because these artists advocated “art for art’s sake” it has been customary to analyze their work on an aesthetic level. However, a social agenda also operates as a
powerful theme in their work. Notably, they held significant social and artistic connections with reform movements and documentary photographers.

In chapter six, after a background chapter enumerating the twentieth-century Progressive Movement, which flourished in New York City and impacted children’s social reform, I discuss the visual consequences of Progressive activism on photographs of children. My work specifically explores the careers of the documentary reform photographers Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine.

The police reporter Jacob Riis, a friend of Theodore Roosevelt, created a convincing rhetoric of “truthful reporting” by combining primitive camera technology, images that were both stark and staged, and a talent for writing heartrending essays. His illustrated manifestos are an accurate representation of the American attitude toward children at the end of the nineteenth century. In photographs of little boys hunched together like figures in a tableau set in a dirty gutter, such as Street Arabs (1890, gelatin dry plate negative, Museum of the City of New York), Riis mingled Victorian sentimentality with hard journalistic statistics, and he portrayed the working poor as victims of a flawed environment.

In photographs such as Newsboy on the Steps (1912, gelatin silver print, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York), Lewis Hine carried forward Riis’s approach into the early twentieth century. Hine was first and foremost a sociologist, and his network of friends both in child education and in the Progressive Party, such as Felix Adler of the New York Ethical Culture School, was enormous. Hine cast the government as an overseeing “super-parent,” supplanting parents, bosses, and religious institutions as the authority regarding children’s welfare. The battle
between men of Hine’s ilk and labor bosses was long and contentious, particularly in the rural trades. Hine’s images of children became the visual propaganda of the moderate-to-left-wing Northern middle-class reformer. Hine infiltrated children’s sweatshops, mills, and harvesting fields photographing over 5,000 negatives as an employee of the National Child Labor Committee. He visually pitted children against the machinery, both literal and ideological, that enslaved them, using scale, selective detail, dramatic lighting, and point-of-view to effect dynamic compositions. With varying degrees of success, using a sometimes-strained trope of victimization, Hine tried to make these records of child exploitation both emotionally provocative and scientific. Many of Hine’s images, such as the cringing *Postural Deformity* (1917, gelatin silver print, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), which forces three slouching bare-backed little girls against a blank wall, are so factual in approach that they do not seem artistic. Because of this, art historians have not recognized how important documentary reform images are in introducing a new mode of imagery and influencing painters, such as Edward Hopper, well into the twentieth century.

Chapter seven brings the narrative of the dissertation to a close. I explore the way that the first truly countercultural American painting movement, the Ashcan School, portrayed children. Specifically, I explore the careers of Robert Henri, George Luks, and George Bellows. These men were savvy self-publicists with backgrounds as illustrators in the newspaper world. Their reservoir of child imagery drew on the widely varied styles of the European Old Masters, the French Realists, popular English and American comic serials, and American documentary photographs. Notably, they often focused on immigrant children whose social place
was marginal and controversial. Their depictions alternate between idealizing these children and suggesting that they are inherently malformed or suffer from physical or mental handicaps.

Henri exalted the idea of the American melting pot and sought to represent individual sitters as dignified beings; a perfect example of his mission is Portrait of Willie Gee (1904, oil on canvas, Newark Museum, New Jersey), a portrayal of an African-American newsboy that was controversial solely because of the dignity with which Henri infused his sitter. Even Henri, however, used child portraits to illustrate “representative” racial traits.

On the other hand, George Luks’s satirical comic strips used a juvenile “wise fool” named Mick Dugan to critique the folly of adult society. Drawings such as Valentine’s Day in Hogan’s Alley, 1897, ridicule the efforts of reformers to indoctrinate slum kids in Anglo middle-class customs such as the exchange of valentines. Such immensely popular images both praised and made jokes at the expense of ethnic peoples.

Finally, George Bellows completely, pessimistically rejected the notion that social reform could have a lasting impact on slum kids, whom he depicted bluntly as deformed creatures or as offensive juvenile delinquents. Examples include Frankie the Organ-Boy (1907, oil on canvas, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri), apparently a victim of Williams-Beuren Syndrome, a form of mental retardation; the comically, sexually bold Paddy Flannigan (1907, oil on canvas, Private Collection); and the chillingly bleak, violent Tin Can Battle, San Juan Hill (1907, crayon, charcoal, and India Ink, Mead Art Museum, Amherst, Massachusetts).
After the conclusion of the text, I have also included an appendix that serves as a timeline of historical events pertinent to the social role of children in American art. This timeline spans the years 1693, roughly when the discourse of the child’s developmental uniqueness and intrinsic value began in Western Europe, to the 1920s, when several progressive American elementary schools shut their doors, important legislation for children’s rights was finally resolved, and this same discourse of the child experienced a marked decline in American popular culture. The purpose of the timeline is as a quick and comprehensive reference.

What is astonishing to me is how often these disparate resources make assertions about a particular aspect or event in the social history of American childhood which would enrich each other’s understanding of the subject: Yet they never acknowledge the existence of each other’s research, much less in order to obtain a better understanding of the role of imagery in this history. My hope is that I have achieved this goal in some modest way, by casting my net of resources broadly, but with respect to a single, focused subject: American childhood. Notably, this dissertation seeks nuanced similarities and differences between artistic groups ordinarily thought antithetical—such as genre painters and genteel painters, and art and documentary photographers. Examining these movements side by side proves that their views on childhood are inextricable and must be presented together for a fuller picture of the subject. With astonishing frequency, different types of artists were inspired by the same network of contentiously lively intellectual, literary, pedagogical, and political figures. The unifying factor of this vast web of artists was children: their role in society at the time that these images were produced. The
issue of childhood percolated all levels of society and forms of cultural expression. Thus images of children are a comprehensive microcosmic narrative of social and artistic change transpiring at the turn of the twentieth century.

If there is anything that this dissertation seeks to prove, it is that, uniquely during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when there was a shift in American cultural norms, children were symbols of this change. Broader society was never more sympathetic toward, even obsessed with, children and childhood than during this time.
UNIT ONE: THE GENRE TRADITION
CHAPTER I

NINETEENTH-CENTURY CHILDREN’S SOCIAL REFORM

Does the teacher awaken thought, strengthen the mind, kindle the affections, call the conscience, the common sense, into lively and controlling activity, so promoting the love of study, the practice of the virtues; habits that shall accompany the children outwards into life? The memory is thus best cared for, the ends of study answered, the debt of teacher to parents, of parents to children, and so the State’s bounty is best bestowed. ~Amos Bronson Alcott, Reports of the School Committee, and Superintendent of the Schools, of the Town of Concord, Massachusetts, March 16, 1861.

The Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, 1876, was a resounding popular success and a landmark in American self-assertion. It was loud, eclectic, well advertised, and extremely well attended. Featured in the lauded show’s stalls were seemingly limitless paintings by aspiring American painters. Most of these have long since been forgotten, but two notable works by aspiring young painters still strike a sympathetic chord even today. These are Old Stagecoach (1871, oil on canvas, Milwaukee Art Museum) by the Dusseldorf-trained American genre painter Eastman Johnson, and Winslow Homer’s competitive response, Snap the Whip (1872, oil on canvas, Butler Institute of American Art).

Both paintings feature a kind of imagery that was a novelty in this period: markedly, even shockingly, unruly children. And interestingly, nearby, at the same exposition, was an exhibition advertising the avant-garde teaching philosophy of a newfangled, borderline-Socialist doctrine that already garnered infamy by being banned from use by Prussian monarchs. This subversive educational system was called Kindergarten. Its practitioners glorified it at the Centennial and in broader literature as the “free republic of childhood.” Clearly some sort of change in attitudes towards children was taking place. This change affected artistic imagery, and it affected attitudes towards education and child-rearing. Curiously, however,
while often commented on, this phenomenon, this fundamental shift in American attitudes towards children, has never been the subject of a full-scale study. This dissertation will seek to fill this gap.

American art depicting children and social reform experienced an especially fecund period during the years 1870-1915. The art of this period may be divided into three distinct passages: the “genre tradition” (paintings), the “genteel tradition” (paintings and photographs), and the “documentary” or “social reform” tradition (paintings and photographs). The first passage is what concerns this and the next chapter of my dissertation. It is the work of post-bellum genre painters who derived style and subject matter from early greats, such as George Caleb Bingham and William Sidney Mount, but began to incorporate undeniable changes in American social and cultural customs into their iconography.

The emergence of what was termed the “Bad Boy” in nineteenth-century literature, by authors such as Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Mark Twain, provides a context for the first episode of child imagery in American art. This initial, abundant wave of American paintings, drawings, and photographs centering on childhood showcased the naughty and unfettered behavior of children born to the generation just after the Civil War. Of the literature, and general zeitgeist, surrounding this period, Anne Scott MacLeod has stated, “[A] shift away from moral didacticism that began after the Civil War has generally been hailed as the release of children’s literature from bondage...romanticism gave authors [and society at large] greater freedom to accept and enjoy children as children.”

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20 Anne Scott Macleod, American Childhood: Essays on Children’s Literature of the
The Cruel Precedent

Mark Twain’s tales of inordinate cruelty on the part of educators are not apocryphal, and they betray a larger cultural bias that was only questioned after 1800. The history of childrearing before the scope of my dissertation is immense, and could not be done justice here. However, it is important to briefly recapitulate Colonial American beliefs about the basic nature of the child and the way to incorporate children into society. I do this specifically to underscore just how revolutionary was what followed.

In Steven Mintz’s 2004 social history of American childhood, *Huck’s Raft*, he provides an exhaustive analysis of the children of Puritans. Puritans were a small sect of Protestants who emigrated to escape religious oppression in Tudor and Stuart England, and attempted to forge a new religious denomination in the colonies of the American northeast. Mindful of their status as a minority, and their isolation in a new land, the Puritans severely upheld their religious dogma not only in fellow adults but in children, whom they perceived as “filthy, guilty, odious, abominable” (Reverend Benjamin Wadsworth, referring to newborn infants), who “go astray as soon as they are born” (Reverend Cotton Mather).21 Inherently sinful, children must be baptized within two weeks of birth—otherwise eternal torture in hell awaited.

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They must also be reminded relentlessly of their mortality, of the torments that await in hell should they even minutely disobey their elder male authorities.

For instance, Reverend Cotton Mather reputedly tested his small daughter Katy’s faith by holding a private conference with her in which he lied to her that he would “soon die,” rendering it imperative that she remember his religious instructions. Further, anxious about the combined belief in Original Sin and the fact of high infant mortality rates, he mercilessly preached, “Go into Burying-Place [graveyard], CHILDREN; you will see there Graves as short as your selves; yea, you may be at Play one hour; Dead, Dead, the next.”22 Play was a sin; the crimes of “indolence, selfishness, and willfulness” had to be quelled in childhood or would become intractable character flaws. The optimistic view of children as malleable “moist wax, fair white wool” beginning to arise in Anglican and humanist England met with severe backlash from such Puritans, who scorned the culture that they had left behind and held no tolerance for its reemergence in the New World. Even the names given children born in the Puritan colonies evoked the worthlessness of the youthful sinner and his or her complete dependency upon Divine Mercy (Waitstill, Preserved, Hopestill, Thanks, and Supply numbering among these).23 A new form of sermon called the “jeremiad,” based on the Biblical book of Jeremiah, emerged to lament the perceived “declining faith” of the younger generation, and to prevent the total decline of American society by cautioning children to grow up somber and obedient beings schooled in Bible verses and catechisms.

22 Mintz, 20.
23 Mintz, 15.
Therefore, before the nineteenth century, and in its early decades, religious and educational authorities, almost exclusively radical, harsh Protestant sects, endorsed that a child’s “will” had to be “broken” and his self-assertiveness shed in order to make room for spiritual and educational growth. A seventeenth-century New England minister voiced his culture’s emotionally and physically punitive norms when he preached, “There is in all children...a stubbornness and stoutness of mind, arising from natural pride, which must in the first place be broken and beaten down...children should not know, if it could be kept from them, that they have a will of their own.”

Wooden rods were placed along children’s backs to straighten them in both the physical and moral sense. Despite the fact that most Puritan authorities cautioned against corporal punishment, “convinced that corporal discipline only induced resentfulness and rebelliousness in children,” as late as 1840 it was acceptable to whip, spank, and strike a child with a rod “for hours until [the child] was exhausted” and to deprive the child of food until he yielded to his parents’ commands.

In both America and Europe, there were more extreme, and, by modern standards, pathologically cruel, types of punitive childrearing considered utterly normative before the nineteenth century. For instance, the seventeenth-century Virginia aristocrat William Byrd proudly boasted of forcing a child to “drink a pint of piss” for wetting his bed.

Furthermore, men were the unquestioned heads of every unit, both the “little commonwealth” of the nuclear family and the larger community that families

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25 Mintz, 19; Fass and Mason also confirm this fact.
26 Fass and Mason.
symbolized. Instruction manuals on childrearing and didactic children’s stories were often dispensed by groups such as the American Sunday School Union. What may seem most alien to modern readers is the fact that these books were dispensed only to male parents.27 The period of childhood in which the mother held authority was brief—only until the child was six or seven years old. Even the godparenthood, a Catholic and Anglican custom, was eliminated in Puritanical America, because it conflicted with the father’s sovereignty.28

The patriarchy of pre-Civil-War America was inextricable from both religious rigor and from the household-industry. People earned their livelihood entirely through tasks conducted on the homestead, and children were not exempt. In fact, a highly common male child ritual called “breeching” married all three of these elements: boys began to wear pants at the end of infancy as a sign of increased household responsibilities, such as fetching water, tending livestock, and performing chores for the family or as a servant in another household—as apprentices, usually aged 7-12.29 Child labor existed, but was an accepted way to alleviate crowding of the nuclear home as well as earn a living, and was not yet recognized as a social ill.

It is hard to envision such a society now, but what we consider the axiomatic mode of childrearing was nonexistent until the nineteenth century. Even when leading educators broached the subject of a kinder, more indulgent childrearing, and the notion that children had emotional, physical and psychological needs distinct

27 Mintz, 13.
28 Ibid.
29 Mintz, 23.
from adults, the idea went through many internal wars and ideological revisions before it became a cultural canon.

**The Cultural Trope of the “Bad Boy”**

However, in the middle of the nineteenth century, a highly distinct and revelatory American cultural hero emerged in popular discourse. This figure was young, male, implicitly from agrarian pioneer stock, intelligent and pragmatic, who dwelt in harmony with nature. While possessing all of these sympathetic qualities, the little boy who became a nineteenth-century, nationalistic mascot was also a rebel: a rebel who got away with being rebellious. In fact, his defiance of authority became both synonymous with heroism, and implicitly indicative of a “healthy” stage of child development.

This paralleled an equally trendsetting, protagonistic tool in children’s literature which was called the “story of the Bad Boy”—not coincidentally, the actual title of one such book written by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and one such short story (“The Story of a Bad Little Boy,” 1875) by Mark Twain. In such a story, invariably, the male child protagonist struggles to behave within the parameters of an adult-run school setting. Ultimately, he openly challenges the adult’s authority, rejects school, and becomes a glorified truant engaging in all manner of small mischief. More serious mishaps befall the Bad Boy, who uses his resourcefulness, resilience, and, most importantly, golden heart to repent his ways, return to civilization, and save the day.
The Bad Boy was a distilled cultural trope inextricable from social advances taking place on behalf of children during the nineteenth century.

**Revolutions in Nineteenth-Century Childhood Pedagogy**

In 1833, the Reverend William Ellery Channing endorsed a Jacksonian self-help model of American social betterment. While reliant upon traditional Christian mores, his model also hinged upon improved techniques in child education:

“We know not how society can be aided more than by the formation of a body of wise and efficient educators. We know not any class which would contribute so much to the stability of the state, AND to domestic happiness. Much as we respect the ministry of the Gospel, we believe that it must yield in importance to the office of training the young.”

Channing’s remarks illustrated serious anxieties in mainstream America. Americans schematized school and childhood as inextricable. School became a synecdoche of childhood. Childhood is a time in which human beings are especially impressionable. It is the time when values are inculcated. School is the place, physical and metaphysical, where young, “new” human beings are exposed to the competing philosophies of adults.

Literary theorist Beverly Lyon Clark vividly analyzes children’s literature set in schoolhouses in order to make larger historical observations; her conclusion is that the schoolhouse in the nineteenth century is a liminal, marginal place between

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home and the larger world. School is the physical and symbolic site of a child’s rite of passage into greater community-based responsibility. Furthermore, because adults before the nineteenth century perceived children in disparaging terms and forced children to live by adult needs, standards, and even physical measurements, the introduction of new cultural ideas in a schoolhouse, where adults and children often clash for control, is poignant.32

Finally, America, itself a young nation, could be symbolically equated with infancy or early childhood. Whichever mode of educating the young became accepted and practiced would dictate the cultural milieu of the next generation, in a postwar era that was already fundamentally unstable.

Social reformers recognized this. They also recognized for the first time, as we shall repeatedly witness in art, that childhood itself was a cultural construct impacted by time and taste. As a result, the logistics of the schoolhouse became the ideological battleground for social reform to an unprecedented extent.

**Kindergarten**

In fact, in this period attitudes towards the education of small children were drastically changing, which was exemplified by the development of the

Kindergarten. Kindergarten, literally translated “the Children’s Garden,” was a

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32 Clark, 7: “The school story thus is and is about [in other words the school story and the school itself] a peculiarly marginal institution, a boundary institution between family and world, between private and public spheres. Schooling is, furthermore, addressed to marginal individuals, to those between childhood and adulthood, and adults always marginalize children and adolescents. For even now, however much we may think that we are child-centered, we still apply, unthinkingly, adult norms. When we use metaphors of juvenility, we use them to disparage: it is hardly a compliment to call someone immature or infantile. School is also curiously marginalized by its being a temporary site from the perspective of the individual. It situates the student in a position of always becoming; even its ending is called a commencement.”
school setting that allowed small children to behave without penalty in a child-like manner. Kindergarten broke fundamentally from all preceding beliefs regarding the nature of the child and the manner in which children should be treated by parents and educators. The dogma emblematized in the Ichabod Cranes of American literature was now abandoned.

Indeed, behind painted and written depictions of childhood was an extensive history of radical pedagogical reform. The pioneer of this pervasive cultural movement was the late eighteenth-century Swiss educator Heinrich Pestalozzi. Pestalozzi adopted John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s perception of the child as an innately innocent, developmentally distinct entity close to nature and the divine. He further believed that children mastered their social environment by observing the natural world, and learning lessons with concrete objects. He was the mentor of Kindergarten’s founder, Friedrich Froebel.

**Friedrich Froebel**

Froebel, a German teacher and natural scientist, absorbed Pestalozzi’s tenets and practiced them during the 1840’s. His system of education rested on three pillars. One: all children, regardless of class or gender, should be provided with a liberating, playful, and loving education. This was unique since, before this point, only children of the middle and upper classes attended school (which the target audience of contemporaneous children’s literature reflects), while poor children worked and could not afford school. Two: due to their innate capacity to nurture and encourage, women are uniquely suited to educate children. Only women should
be trained as primary school teachers. Mothers should obtain higher education featuring kindergarten training to prepare children for school. Three: children should first be provided with “learning gifts,” to enable them to comprehend concrete objects. It was necessary to accomplish this skill before they could grasp more complicated figurative and metaphysical knowledge. Training in language and ethics should be similarly delayed.

Beginning at age three, children of a Froebelian Kindergarten began receiving twenty “learning gifts,” which were conceptually incremental. They manipulated the gifts through play and experimentation, in a thematic sequence with minimal adult interference. The first gift was six rubber balls of different colors. The second was a sphere, a cube, and a cylinder. The third was a large cube divided into eight smaller cubes. In each case, the goal was to master concepts of totality and variation, through manual, artisanal labor. Other activities included singing and theater.

33 The following notes have been adapted from Elizabeth Peabody’s firsthand account of Kindergarten classrooms, Essays and Lectures on the Kindergarten; Principles of Froebel’s System and Their Bearing on the Higher Education of Women, Schools, Family and Industrial Life. New York: E. Steiger and Co, 1883:

GIFT 1 is a ball. All of same size, with short string attached. Variation is different colors. The child simultaneously learns of the “peculiarities” that make his ball unique, and the similarities that give it a commonality with the other objects. This provides sense both of the individual and the community. The “repression of selfishness” is important.

GIFT 2 are a sphere, cube, and cylinder. Now different shapes are introduced to heighten the child’s awareness of individuality. Important to note the ball (sphere), the familiar jumping off point from the last step, is still here. There is always continuity from the last gift.

GIFT 3 is a cube made of eight smaller cubes. “To lead the child to distinguish parts from the whole.” (Peabody, p. 12). Visually this is the equivalent of linguistic systems: words in a sentence. The child learns how to verbalize this discovery and other observations in his world.

GIFT 4 is a cube like gift 3, but this time the 8 smaller cubes are instead 8 oblong pieces or “bricks.” Length of each=twice its width, and width twice its thickness. Children already understand the cube and smaller cubes that echo it. But now they have a new series of lines and shapes with which to make connections and associations. “Thus the child acquires almost insensibly more and more acquaintance with different lines and figures, and their relationships to each other, laying the foundation for future study of geometry [see Winslow Homer’s painting The Blackboard, which
This was the birth of the now-familiar educational motto “learning by doing,” and it centered upon the physical and psychological agency of the child: a precious and separate being whose potential could be drawn out and nurtured. Basically, play itself was learning.

This revolutionary model of childrearing was quite different from the “ship-them-off-to-reform-them” mystique of the European boarding school. Even the physical setting of a Kindergarten was indicative of its nurturing philosophy of decentralized authority: the teacher’s desk, no longer in the center of the room surrounded by rigid pews, nor at the door marking possession of a parallelogram-like space, was now shoved to the perimeter, while children were encouraged to crawl around on mats on the floor.

At the root of all human knowledge was childhood play. It becomes clear why the painter, Winslow Homer, who was smitten with American schools, and his peers portrayed children engaged in play, largely liberated of adult authority, and centered around rudimentary exercises in the industrial arts.

**Froebel’s American Champions**

Froebel’s views preceded him to the United States in the work of another of Pestalozzi’s students—Amos Bronson Alcott, originally of Concord, Massachusetts,

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GIFTS 5 and 6 are small sticks and thin laths. This comprises continued arithmetic instruction. Laths are slightly longer than sticks (10 vs 25 cm). The laths are flexible and thus can be woven together. By weaving them together the child can turn them at different angles and begins to grasp depth perception in space, as opposed to only length and width. Relativity and shifting viewpoints are also learned, because the child sees how the same construction of shapes looks very different at different vantage points.
whose Temple School ("School of Human Culture" in the Masonic Temple of Boston) conditioned American schools to be receptive to Froebel’s views. A personal friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, Alcott was considered an infamous radical for his unconventional pedagogical customs, such as teaching small children sex education in the guise of religion classes.\textsuperscript{34} It should be noted that Alcott is mentioned here not because his impact was wide-ranging—indeed, educators continued to perceive his work as too extreme, and it was not until 1856, with Margarethe Meyer Schurze’s first Kindergarten in Watertown, Wisconsin, that Pestalozzian education began to spread throughout the American Northeast and Midwest. Rather, Alcott serves as a case study of a pedagogue who espoused new pedagogical practices for children with particular directness.

Alcott’s primary assertion about child education was that the teacher should be a potential equal to his students, dwelling among them and making no distinctions in authority from them, like the Christian savior, Jesus, with his twelve Disciples.\textsuperscript{35} His conversational teaching method has been compared with the latter-day “Socratic seminar.” He also stressed exercises in critical inquiry and emphasized them over exercises in rote memorization. Self-instruction and personal discipline became more important than rigorous religious instruction and


\textsuperscript{35} Vasquez reports Alcott as having said: “The true teacher, like Jesus, must inspire [rather than direct] in order to unfold. He must know that inspiration is something more than the mere impression on the understanding. He must feel it to be a kindling influence; that, in himself alone, is the quickening, informing energy; that the life and growth of his charge pre-exist in him. He is to hallow and refine as he tempts forth the soul. He is to inform the understanding, by chastening the appetites, allaying the passions, softening the affections, vivifying the imagination, illuminating the reasons, giving pliancy and force to the will.” (Alcott, “The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture,” 46-47, quoted in Vasquez, 59).
strict obedience. An eyewitness report of Alcott’s school quickly reveals how he fundamentally revised prior modes of childrearing and education:

"Mr. Alcott sat behind his desk, and the children were placed in chairs in a large arc around him; the chairs so far apart that they could not easily touch each other. He then asked each one separately what idea he or she had of the purpose of coming to school...they at last agreed that they came to learn to feel rightly, to think rightly, and to act rightly...Every face was eager and interested...by a series of questions, [Alcott] led them to come to conclusions for themselves...teaching them how to examine themselves, and to discriminate their animal and spiritual natures, or their outward and inward life, and showing them how the inward molds the outward...making books live, breathe, and speak... ‘Imagination is the soul’s shaping power, and, when rightly nurtured, it clothes the spirit in the robes of truth’...[Alcott] thought no punishment was desirable, and spent much time in reasoning.”

According to the report, Alcott eventually did administer modest “pain” on unruly children, particularly little boys, but what set him apart from earlier child educators was the way that he handled the procedure. Alcott immediately segregated the unruly children to a separate classroom and asked them to explain to him why they believed they had been punished, and what the role of punishment in learning should be. He permitted children to play a part in their own fate and he actively encouraged critical thinking skills.

Other innovations that informed Alcott’s Froebelian method are also readily apparent. He espoused egalitarian discussion sessions. In such sessions, even the

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physical space was revelatory: children sat in a Socratic arc, at eye level with their adult instructor, receptive and reciprocal, and they were respectfully granted enough personal space that their chairs did not touch. This is a far cry from the rigid-backed, crowded rows of desks overseen by a fanatically hierarchical adult looming at a remote desk. Perhaps the best evocation of Alcott’s teaching method is in his own words: “Teaching is an instinct of the heart; and with young children particularly. It needs kindly sensibilities, simple feelings and sincere; love abounding.”

Alcott listed nine principles by which child educators could improve their techniques. “Recitations” must be reformed; they grow lively when the educator encourages students not only to read textual passages but also actively interpret meaning. “Conversation” should be the primary mode by which teachers impart lessons, because it is symbiotic and organic, and cannot be replicated in the dull and rote sense. The book Pilgrim’s Progress “insinuates moralities” as usefully as the Christian Bible, perhaps better because of its accessible, anecdotal “charm,” which keeps the instructor as interested as his/her pupils. “Ancient culture,” by which Alcott likely meant a simpler pre-industrial life, offers relevant lessons by example, frequently indulging in “fresh air, the influence of sunshine,” (in other words, activities in communion with nature and the outdoors) and “play” which is “wholesome.”

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Children should keep “Letters and Diaries” because these encourage self-awareness and sharpen critical thinking. The school is only an “index to Home Influences;” family life must be healthy and parents must be ethical for school to have any positive impact upon a child’s life. Closely connected to this notion, “Parent’s Visits” to the school should be frequent. And “Studies in/of the Mind,” by which Alcott means the cognitive functions unique to a child that help him/her become a responsible and rational adult, are paramount.

Despite his extremely progressive outlook on childrearing and child education, at the end of his life, possibly brought on by a form of senior dementia, Bronson Alcott was also a proto-white supremacist. The suicide of his younger brother Junius Alcott caused Bronson to believe that there was “darkness” in their bloodline and to frantically research the Alcott family genealogy; his journals began to make irrational correlations between “angelic” humans and fair Anglo-Saxon complexions.38 Alcott sadly had many peers in this respect. His late life beliefs prove that even the most socially forward-thinking individuals were susceptible to the fear and reactionary conduct characteristic of any social milieu. We will encounter this paradox many times in the narrative on children and social rights in art, literature, and social policy. Some of children’s fiercest advocates were in other ways peculiarly backwards-minded.

Regardless of his later shortcomings, and despite arguments that he personally had less of a lasting impact than Froebel, Alcott was a perfect example of new child pedagogy in practice. Alcott and others like him, as well as Evangelical

Christians, championed what came to be known as "the Pestalozzian Model" of child education, which was in direct conflict with the long-accepted Unitarian "Lancastrian Model." The reason why the far more conservative, punitive Lancastrian model lingered was its reliance upon religiosity and the distinctly American culture of "self-help": something that, interestingly, would resurface at the turn of the twentieth century in the Ragged Dick myth of the self-made millionaire—a deliberate foil to governmental aid for victimized children and child laborers.

Lancastrian education was bolstered by the abundance of early nineteenth-century historical romances, questionable personal histories of self-improvement, essays and novels "warning of the dangers of a variety of sins," as well as sermons and tracts of reform societies, all aimed to be both didactic and moral. These forms of literature complemented one another. They all "asserted the autonomy of the audience yet moved the listener in a very controlled way toward some practical, reformative end." But just as children’s literature began turning toward Bad Boys and applauding their rebellious adventures, the society that produced these stories also became increasingly liberated from outdated social practices, and turn toward a gentler philosophy.

Elizabeth Peabody, one of Froebel’s pupils, brought English-speaking versions of Kindergarten to America in 1860. It is important to note that Peabody came from an old, intellectually connected American family that represents only a single specific view of childhood during the mid-nineteenth century. However, without Peabody’s championing of Froebel, Kindergarten would not have become an

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39 Clark, 32.
40 Ibid.
English-speaking form of primary education and it would not have been introduced ultimately, in 1890, to public schools in heterogeneous New York City, becoming an axiom of early child education. Peabody's own impact was limited, but the chain reaction of her influence was wide-ranging. Along with an army of other female pedagogues, Peabody stressed the superior nurturing tendencies of female schoolteachers. Peabody famously made statements in teaching manuals and at Kindergarten Association conferences that loyally echoed Froebel's tenets. Peabody insisted that children were the embodiment of potential: “The child is a creature of indefinite capability for doing and learning;” however it was the duty of adults to subtly direct “instincts and desires...turned toward things we deem desirable.”

In tandem with these ideas, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, where Homer worked, ruled in favor of making draftsmanship, a manual craft, a mandatory part of childhood education. Many American states followed suit. By the 1860s, due to being banned in Prussia for radical democratic and demi-feminist tenets, Froebelian Kindergartens moved exclusively to other countries, and in the United States, flourished in the Midwest and East Coast.


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43 For a primary resource see Bertha von Marenholtz-Bulow, How Kindergarten Came to America: Friedrich Froebel's Radical Vision of Early Childhood Education. New York: New Press, 2007 (translated from the German by Mrs. Horace Mann). For a comprehensive secondary analysis, see Michael Steven Shapiro, Child's Garden: The Kindergarten Movement from Froebel to Dewey. University Park, New Jersey: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983. The fuel for the controversy was an unsuccessful Socialist Revolution in Europe in 1848. Yet in America, along with Johnson's Old Stagecoach, Homer's Snap the Whip was displayed at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, 1876. Nearby was an exhibition advertising the avant-garde teaching philosophy of the German kindergarten: the “free republic of childhood.”
Educator Susan Blow held fast to Froebel’s original teaching sequence, but incorporated Sigmund Freud into her schema of childhood. Alice Putnam and Anna Bryan, American adapters of Kindergarten in 1890’s Chicago, earned the attention of both charity activist, Jane Addams, and the quintessential Progressive pedagogue, John Dewey. In 1878 New York, Felix Adler founded the Ethical Culture School and established a Kindergarten there. After 1900, photographer Lewis Hine became an instructor at Adler’s school and used its philosophy as guidance for his social reform images of children. Child portraitist Robert Henri avidly read Dewey’s *The School and Society* and shared his discoveries with his loyal band of realists. Thus Kindergarten educators were the bridge between Johnson, Homer, and Brown, and the twentieth-century painters and photographers whom I will discuss in the final unit of this dissertation.

**Reflections of New Pedagogy in Children’s Literature**

The Bad Boy who emerged in children’s literature as the result of these pedagogical shifts belonged to specific authorial innovators. The authorities on such stories were William Dean Howells, Charles Dudley Warner, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and, of course, Mark Twain. A brief introduction to Aldrich and Twain provides a solid foundation for not only paintings of children produced in the same decades, but also the social changes that inspired the inception of this new genre.

**Thomas Bailey Aldrich.**
Aldrich’s *The Story of a Bad Boy*, 1870, which coined the cultural and literary trope, praises rebellious child characters as the Robin Hoods of 1860’s America. These boys’ mischievous joint efforts invariably symbolize an inversion of social power. Aldrich depicts adults as strict, narrow-minded buffoons who are exceptionally easy to hoodwink. He writes light-hearted tales of rambunctious, exclusively male, children. They are portrayed in a dualistic tone that speaks colorfully to child audiences but with an undertone of wryness intended for adults. Protagonist Thomas Bailey’s makeshift gang engages in chicanery, most notably the destruction of adult-owned material possessions, simply to assert their freedom and to practice harmless rebellion against authority. On a deeper level, their rebellion indicates a similar frustration with the industrialized and stiflingly materialistic Gilded Age of the adult world.

Aldrich’s work has been called “a reaction against excessive sentiment and piety in earlier children’s literature…aimed to glorify the state of boyhood.”44 This is supported by one of the more famous episodes of Thomas Bailey’s mischief. The boy and his friends sneak out at midnight, on the eve of Independence Day to start a bonfire. Once blazing, they use the bonfire to destroy an antique carriage that is highly valued by the oppressive adult world. Yet when the boys approach the old “haunted” barn in which the carriage is housed, their fear amusingly—but poignantly—reveals the youthful timidity behind their bravado. Yet the boys prevail:

“In former days this was the stable of the mail-coach that ran between Rivermouth and Boston. When the railroad superseded that primitive mode of travel, the lumbering vehicle was rolled into the barn, and there it stayed. The stage-driver, after prophesying the immediate downfall of the nation, died of grief and apoplexy...The barn had the reputation of being haunted...Here, in a low voice, Jack Harris laid bare his plan, which was to burn the ancient stage coach. ‘The old trundle cart isn’t worth twenty-five cents,’ said Jack Harris, ‘and Ezra Wingate [the owner] ought to thank us for getting the rubbish out of the way’...The coach, with an intuitive perception of what was expected of it, plunged into the center of the kindling shavings, and stopped. The flames sprung up and clung to the rotten woodwork, which burned like tinder.”

A close reading of this passage presents some striking childhood iconography. First, the world of adults is equated, through the stagecoach, with post-bellum ambivalence toward the archaic past. The boys become, through their endearing youth, a disarming voice of the Reconstruction generation and its anxiety over America’s faceless, mechanical march toward urbanity. Aldrich accomplishes this effect by mixing amusement and fear in the description of the stagecoach driver’s “prophecy,” his death, and the haunted barn.

It is also important to note the simultaneous maturity and immaturity of the boys: their solid strategizing, cooperation, and “manly” syntax, and conversely, their utter terror of the “ghost” of the barn. They attempt to mimic the very adults

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against whom they rebel, and yet they constantly reassert their own childishness and dependence.

Later, when the boys are locked up for the night (among adult inmates) in the town jail, their glee at their surroundings reveals their naivety. They have no concept of the reality of adult correctional institutions.

Finally, Aldrich’s stagecoach episode betrays a terminology still steeped in the romantic dichotomy of adulthood versus childhood. The narrator personifies the stagecoach with “intuitive perception,” glorifying it for its turn of loyalties from the prim, socialized pragmatism of adults to the pure, natural “intuition” of children.

**Mark Twain**

Mark Twain’s view of childhood was harsher than Aldrich’s. Twain’s writing acquires a darker and more complicated bent. His short stories and novels ominously signal through motifs of childhood: the awkwardness of America’s relations to England; the rising problem of immigrant families and children; and, in the repeated use of lost, killed, or orphaned children, anxieties about the safety of the post-Civil-War family. Twain’s writing is, in many ways, less for children, and more for the wistful yet jaded adult reader. Perhaps because of the deaths of his brother and daughter, Twain suffered a profoundly disillusioned view of human mortality. The psychological effects of his disillusionment are revealed in his bitter

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46 It should be noted that Aldrich’s romanticism is intended on one level to be a spoof of more serious works of the same genre.
and sardonic letters, which depict a capricious, cruel God who creates filial happiness only to shatter it.47

Twain was determined to “keep the man out of the boy’s life.” He avoided altogether the presence of adult power and social institutions, except to critique such encounters in a seemingly accidental fashion through the first-person child narrator’s naïve voice.48 These critiques were numerous and reminded the reader insistently that, though they hoped to escape the anxieties of the adult world, children were doomed to repeat the burdens and mistakes of their elders. In attempting to avoid such a dismal fate, children openly rejected their elders, abandoning them before they could be themselves abandoned.

In rejecting parents and the homestead, truant children, especially boys, became symbols of a dangerously deteriorating family unit, the module on which postwar American society was built. Their identity, while on one level heroically resilient and rebellious, is also alarmingly anarchic. There is a chilling implication that such playful anarchy leads to an epidemic of orphans, children abandoned by the adults whom they have only temporarily rejected.49

48 Connecting Homer to Twain: John Wilmerding. Winslow Homer, New York, Washington, and London: Praeger Publishers, 1972: p. 92: “It is significant that Homer painted [works such as] Breezing Up the same year that Twain published Huckleberry Finn. These works were by artists concerned, on the surface, with humor but, beneath, with serious truths…about American life in the era of Ulysses S. Grant as well as something more profound about the human condition.”
49 James Grove writes of the Twain motif of the “endangered family.” Twain always writes of a disreputable but oddly sympathetic family in which the children most suffer. He introduces a moral superior who enlightens these derelict families and social outcasts as to the dangers of their deviance. Yet he subverts his own intentions because the reader almost invariably pities, and champions, the criticized family. This conflict of reader loyalties is another product of the raging arguments about the morality of the domestic space and its best use, stretching all the way back to Lily Martin Spencer’s paintings and Fourier’s writings. Twain, however, seems more concerned with
This message of precarious childhood resounds in all of Twain’s major works. The bad boy’s unintentionally cruel filial rejection reverberates in Twain’s 1876 novel *Tom Sawyer*. In the story, the titular protagonist allows rumors of his “death” to be prolonged simply to enjoy an extended period of freedom from school and home life. He savors the dramatic grief his loss causes his adult family and friends. Open amusement about social power inversions pervades such accounts of childhood. But, as is often the case, humor is a smokescreen over more serious cultural anxiety. For instance, in Twain’s short story “The Great Dark,” which is a commentary on threatened and inept parenthood, a phantom ship kidnaps the Edwards family’s children. After a fifteen year search, the parents come upon one of the children, their daughter, just as she has been brutally stabbed.

Never is this particularly aggressive rejection of adult society more evident than in Twain’s masterpiece, *Huckleberry Finn*, published 1873. In this story, the orphaned “river-rat” narrator, Huck, drifts through the American South, surviving on his wits, bemusedly observing the follies and evils of adults. Huck rejects adult society for numerous reasons and in various ways.

Huck’s experience of family authority is nightmarish: His father, Pap Finn, is a physically abusive drunkard. Pap seems to suggest that not just one slovenly tyrant, but the entire concept of the tranquil Civil War family, is a sham. Interestingly, though Huck does not discover it until later, Pap dies—eliminated by

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showing, through these sympathetic but deviant families, the fragility of domestic happiness, particularly as it relates to the safety of children.
the author, Twain. This death is part of a consistent pattern of destroying parental
or other authority figures under which Twain’s child protagonists suffer.50

Huck also finds discomfort in the rare cases in which he is restricted to
conventional domestic spheres. His tense episodes with the Grangerford family and
Widow Douglas serve as two instances of his bewilderment with the suffocating
adult world of socialization and refinement.

Finally, his most notable rejection of adult society, including adult values that
do not truly make sense to him, is also the most socially subversive in postbellum
America: Huck assists in the escape of Jim—a black slave.

Even the name of Twain’s hero, Huckleberry, carries a distinct ideological
charge. Jacob Biggle, a contemporary of Twain, wrote *Biggle Berry Book: Small Fruit
Facts From Bed to Box, Conserved into Understandable Form*, a manual describing the
general characteristics of indigenous American fruits. In it, the huckleberry is
described as an insistently wild fruit, the least successful to domesticate and breed
for market. Literary theorist James L. Colwell brilliantly draws connections between
the nature of this fruit and the nature of Twain’s character, who “never reached the
city. He, in his way, was a determined social innocent, preferring to flee American
society rather than to submit to its domestication.”51

**The Role of Gender in Children’s Literature**

50 John Daniel Stahl, “American Myth in European Disguise: Fathers and Sons in The Prince and the
Gender played an enormous role in the restructuring of childrearing and children’s social roles as reflected in children’s literature. To begin with, the tensions produced by changes in the function of the homestead also reflected on the behavior of the matriarch toward her household and children. The cosmopolitan “frivol” and the hardy female schoolteacher were pitted against each other. The latter was involved implicitly in the lives of children and was a mixture of old-fashioned American country values and newfangled pedagogical practices.

In an era in which the home and workplace had become separate, and the labor-based abuse of children was increasingly visible, the well being of the home was even more crucial. The morality of a fading culture was literally at stake in the way a household was run, and, in turn, depicted by artists such as Johnson. As we have discussed, pedagogical reform for children called upon the “innate” skills of womanhood to dutifully nurture and guide. Therefore, paintings of children evince the success of America’s domestic subculture (the counterculture to the cosmopolitan), and its two types of female champions: the mother and the female schoolteacher.52

Children’s literature reflects the role of gender in post-bellum childhood better than any other cultural expression. Before the Civil War, in children’s literature, both little boys and girls were unilaterally punished for moral wrongdoings. After the Civil War, however, differences in kind and severity of punishment became noticeable in written form. MacLeod has noted that, for

52 Jane Weiss comments extensively upon such tropes in the compendium by Teresa A. Carbonne and Patricia Hills, eds., Eastman Johnson Painting America, Brooklyn Museum of Art and Rizzoli, 1999.
instance, “Bad Boys” usually escaped wrongdoing unscathed—even praised—and the nature of wrongdoing was “lying, destructive pranks,” and “open resistance of community institutions,” in essence, a form of socially conscious rebellion that was quintessentially American.53

On the other hand, girls were still punished, and for being “overly imaginative”—for being reticent, daydreaming romantics. One example MacLeod offers is Susan Coolidge’s *What Katy Did*, 1875, in which the juvenile protagonist spends five bitter years convalescing from a painful spinal injury merely for becoming too boastful at a game: in an attempt to swing so high that her toes touch a house roof, she breaks the staple connecting the swing to its support and falls on her back. In this case play, though now seen as the natural property of childhood, still becomes a venue for moral corruption (here, pride and a lack of discipline) and a harshly moralizing message surprisingly reminiscent of Puritanical didacticism arises. Clearly the notion of childhood indulgence and disobedience, at least as of the Gilded Age, was unequally applied to boys and girls.

Indeed, as Mintz puts it, “Boyhood was defined in opposition to the confinement, dependencies, and restraint of the domestic realm. Boys were freer to roam than girls, and their chores, such as tending animals or running errands, took place free from adult oversight.”54 Taking into account lucid statements such as this, it can even be argued that the new model of American childhood, in literature, art, and praxis, was an argument on behalf of a quintessentially masculine national identity. Society therefore restructured itself so that it could continue to privilege

53 MacLeod, 75.
54 Mintz, 83.
boys and men in social ritual (such as the unsupervised, liberating, empowering nature of boyhood chores) and artistic expression (such as the genre paintings that we are about to consider), but for different reasons than in the Puritanical past.

There was still hope for girls in this new society. For there is also much to be said about the emergence of “sissy” boys and “tomboy” girls in the art and literature of the Gilded Age, new archetypes of childhood which reflect broad social shifts. Some of these girls were also the protagonists of important children’s stories that commented on new pedagogy and the increasingly important role of the female educator. Amos Bronson Alcott’s daughter, Louisa May, penned a new brand of children’s prose which literary historians coin “domestic democracy.” The term strikingly resounds with Froebel’s christening of kindergarten as “the free republic of childhood.” Frequently, Alcott’s Pestalozzian nurturance shines through the pages of these stories and demonstrates how the Temple School, with its romantic and Transcendentalist leanings, paved the way for Froebel’s Kindergarten.

In Little Women, published 1868, the protagonist’s mother, “Marmee,” becomes outraged when her daughter, Amy, is corporally punished at school for sharing candied limes and withdraws her for home schooling. Marmee, obviously a woman, models the new pedagogy of treating children in an indulgent and facilitative manner, rather than in the patriarchal, punitive, and authoritarian manner favored by Amy’s male teacher.

In Alcott’s Little Men, in which Jo and her husband, Professor Bhaer, run a reformatory school for boys, the author goes a step further, “cross-dresses” in

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55 This term was coined by Beverly Lyon Clark in her text Regendering the School Story: Sassy Sissies and TattlingTomboys. New York: Routledge, 2001.
literary historian Beverly Lyon Clark’s terms (narrating in certain passages as Jo’s husband), and applies her “domestic democracy” to often troubled male children. Just as in Little Women, the use of corporal punishment by a single male authority is soundly condemned. Professor Bhaer hands a ferule to Nat, a formerly physically abused student who is guilty of frequently lying to his elders, and asks Nat to whip him with it. Doing so “[inverts] the approach of an earlier generation” of childrearers and teachers and symbolically imparts the power to punish (as well as to recognize the wrongness of being physically harmed by an adult) upon Nat. Nat is offered agency for the first time—treated like a valued, precious being, even an equal—and as a result behaves far better in the future.

On the other hand, MacLeod, another literary theorist, points out the manner in which Little Women still clings to a pre-romantic morally didactic format. One instance is the passage in which Amy, in a petulant fury, burns her older sister Jo’s book manuscript, and in response Jo snubs Amy while ice-skating on a lake near the family property; Amy falls through thin ice and nearly dies because Jo allowed her anger to cloud her judgment. Therefore even stories that appear to offer subversive, liberal ideology must be carefully qualified as products possessing mingled progressive and reactionary elements.

Conclusions

Genre paintings celebrating childhood rebelliousness can be best contextualized as relics of an ideology that defined children as innately innocent.

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56 Clark, 177-178.
57 Clark, 187.
This was a distinctly nineteenth-century argument, a faith on the part of vanguard philosophers and educators in the inborn goodness of the young. This ideological bias was quite different from the Puritanical ideology of prior centuries defining children as imbued with original sin and in need of harsh, authoritarian supervision. It was also quite different from our own contemporary, often charged, admissions that children can be violent, unethical, even sexual beings, who, nevertheless, still somehow deserve our advocacy and care. Indeed, nineteenth-century childhood was the foil to what Anne Higonnet calls the “aware childhood” of the twenty-first century. Ideas about childhood purity that became overwhelmingly popular from the late 1860′s inaugurated the most prolific period of American art about children. Such ideas always, ultimately, instigated the art about children that followed— whether to quote, revise, or even satirize that initial belief even decades later. For that reason, the Postbellum Period is a perfect place to begin our analysis.

It is, therefore, important to note that these changed attitudes about children directly correlate to broader cultural changes in post-bellum America. The nation struggled to redefine itself as industrialized and urbanized—two aspects of the “Gilded Age” that were received ambivalently by average American citizens.

Nineteenth-century “Bad Boys” who sprung up in painting after painting possessed a mischievous abandon that was pardonable precisely because there was no real “harm done.” These Huckleberry Finns of imagery were a distilled symbol of many peculiarly American cultural facets. One was the nation’s own infancy and its

defiant roots. Another was a broad, liberal Christian philosophy of the human condition derived from the Transcendental thought of the prior century, which championed pragmatism, empirical “truth,” and closeness to nature. Still another self-consciously American aspect was the hope of a new generation mending physical and psychological wounds after a brutal war fought on native soil. There were also anxieties about industrialization, urbanization, and immigration, undeniable forces that the new generation would be forced to navigate. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, there were pedagogical reforms that addressed each of these socio-cultural elements.

Simultaneously, for the first time, religious associations, consumer leagues, and labor unions proposed that compulsory education was the solution to social ill done against children, especially child labor. But popular opinion regarding this social measure was heatedly divided.

It is hard to believe that Kindergarten was ever so transgressive that its earliest practitioners were exiled from Eastern Europe as Socialist, feminist agitators. It is hard to believe that this ideological diaspora destined these teachers and philanthropists to take root in American soil and permanently change the American schema of children in society, beginning in New England. But this is precisely what occurred, and American art powerfully, often directly, reflects it.
CHAPTER II

NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN GENRE PAINTERS (ca. 1870-1890)

"Whether saintly Little Evas or naughty Tom Sawyers…the charms of childhood were especially praised by a self-conscious America, a country that defined its self-image in terms used typically to describe children: youthful energy, unconventional daring, unspoiled naïveté, and moral goodness...healthy children were one of America’s prized national products to be nurtured carefully in order to swell the ranks of its future citizenry.” ~Patricia Hills, Eastman Johnson, 1972: p. 72.

Representations of children changed dramatically in the 1860s and 1870s when the unruly child became a central protagonist of major American paintings. Three figures were particularly significant to this development: Eastman Johnson, Winslow Homer, and John George Brown. To understand what they accomplished, it is helpful to look at their predecessors in American art, some of whom touched on similar themes, but in a far more restrained way. Throughout the nineteenth century, a tension and a division existed between painters who represented children in an idealized, sentimental manner, and those who adopted a more realistic, and often anti-sentimental, approach.

Let me first briefly recapitulate the major contributions to the imagery of childhood made by American genre painters during the early nineteenth century. I will then discuss how Johnson, Homer, and Brown built upon the work of their forerunners. I have already discussed how the literature and pedagogy of the Reconstruction Era developed new theories about the nature of childhood and new educational approaches. As we will see, paintings by Johnson, Homer and Brown actively engage this body of literature and theory and provide commentary upon it.
Indeed, there are often striking parallels between passages in the novels of this period and the work of these painters.

**Predecessors**

While the work of the painters of the 1860’s and 1870’s, particularly Eastman Johnson and Winslow Homer, presented unruly children in a particularly dramatic way, one may trace their approach to earlier periods. It is helpful to view the work of the genre painters within the framework of evolving sensitivity to the distinctive aspects of childhood in human development. In medieval painting children often appeared as poorly proportioned, doll-like miniature adults, frequently standing at rigid attention like soldiers. As visual forms of expression progressed towards the modern age, artists took increasing interest in presenting children more accurately, as lively entities from observed reality—as actual young human beings.

In Europe, Dutch genre paintings of the seventeenth century and French genre paintings of the eighteenth century began to depict boys and girls as human equivalents to innocence, sometimes using harmless and humorous mischief with a morally didactic punch-line. These painters portrayed children finding delight in simple pleasures but ultimately reminding the viewer of the fleeting quality of an “uncomplicated” stage of life and the larger mortality of humankind. For instance, the eighteenth-century French painter Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, a meticulous Salon painter who is best known for his meditative still life paintings, was influenced by the Dutch and Flemish masters of the prior century and consequently
depicted young boys and girls playing games of bubble-blowing and shuttlecock in quiet, simple surroundings. Perhaps the most famous instance of such images is Chardin’s *Soap-Bubbles* (1733-4, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, other versions in Los Angeles County Museum of Art and National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). In this painting, a boy impresses an attentively squinting younger compatriot wearing a hat, by blowing a large soap bubble through a long toy funnel, while leaning on a stone window frame. Combined with the potted plant to the viewer’s left, which curls around the top of the canvas and wilts, the image is a popular comment on the transience of life. Significantly, Chardin inspired Edouard Manet to make a similar though sparser canvas of the same subject a century later, *Soap Bubbles/Boy Blowing Bubbles* (1869, oil on canvas, Museu Calouste Gulbenkian). Manet’s work was an important inspiration for several artists who will be discussed in this dissertation, including Winslow Homer, Alfred Stieglitz, Robert Henri, and George Bellows.

Artists in America certainly furthered the idea of the playing child and the nostalgic transience of youth. Their contribution was still more liberal, perhaps as a response to the infancy of the American nation. Americans had questioned the rigid, patriarchal, disciplinarian view of children as early as the 1760s. While during this period it was not uncommon to represent children as schematized miniature adults, the more talented artists of this time, such as John Singleton Copley and Charles Willson Peale, recorded children and childhood more realistically. In their portraits, uninhibited children are often absorbed in activities different in nature than those of
adults—often play for its own sake, without even the didactic or practical value that can be assigned to European prototypes.

One of the most important aspects of early nineteenth-century images of children—mostly boys—is that they appeared frequently as illustrations of larger themes of the human condition. Little boys’ activities stood for the stages and transient qualities of life. They stood for the importance of the evolving nuclear family and its physical and ideological separation from the work sphere. They stood for the personal and cultural traits of a newly independent America searching for an “indigenous” (and implicitly masculine) identity. They even played a part in the narrative of genre paintings as naïve uncoverers of adult follies and moral wrongdoings. But rarely were little boys a subject in their own right until after the Civil War. Nevertheless, a few highly significant antebellum trends in the American depiction of (primarily) little boys may be underscored.

**Early Themes of American Childhood**

One notices at least two strong themes in the paintings of children that directly precede the American genre tradition. These themes are also the root ideology for imagery that openly embraces child unruliness: the subject that genre painters most distinctly utilized. These themes are family affection (wherein the child is permitted to behave indecorously because the parents have become lovingly indulgent), and the stages of life (wherein it is overtly acknowledged than humankind undergoes developmental stages and childhood is a distinct early stage with its own needs and—sometimes naughty—impulses). The theme of family
affection, and the theme of life stages, took nebulous form during the late the eighteenth century, and were more thoroughly developed in artistic portrayals of childhood throughout the nineteenth.

**The Theme of Family Affection**

John Singleton Copley’s family portraits engaged the theme of an affectionate nuclear family at a very early stage in the narrative of American art. Children in Copley’s art demonstrate early versions of key nineteenth-century concepts of permissible child misbehavior. These paintings also showcase doting adoration for the children in the family unit, because parents in Copley’s art are indulgent.

After he arrived in England, with over 300 portraits already completed, John Singleton Copley produced a number of large-scale family portraits, including one of his own family, *The Copley Family* (1776, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). The surprisingly informal scene celebrates the reunion of the Copley family, who were Loyalists gone bankrupt, in England after a yearlong separation—notably, of the artist from his children, whom he had left in his step-brother’s care. There are three adults in the painting: Copley himself, who perches in the back of the composition with an expression of longsuffering wryness; his wife (at the right of the painting, near the center); and his father-in-law, Richard Clarke (at the lower left). Each makes a valiant attempt to appear dignified. Their solemnity contrasts with four squirming, giggling, plaintively reaching children. Susanna, the youngest child, reaches up toward her grandfather, a stiff old Tory, requesting an improperly familiar, tender hug. The eldest child, Elizabeth, is the
calm—or petulant—center of the storm, like an imperious *Infanta* out of a European court painting. Son John, the half-naked brunette attached to their mother, practically headlocks the matriarch, appearing to share a secret or demand a kiss, face bursting with an impish grin. And the rightmost golden-haired little girl, Mary, smirking, looks askance at the audience, rather like her father, whom she compositionally echoes as a diagonal form. She is letting us in on the “joke.”

In the canvas’s lower left a ragdoll appears, a previously trivial element of daily living, an element of “mere” child’s play, but which now enjoys a focal spot in the group portrait. Moreover, during this period of American portraiture, depicting the children’s candor is nothing short of shocking. Furthermore, its humor is quite bold. Significantly, Copley has set the stage for more thorough changes during the nineteenth century.

Art historian Margaretta Lovell has thoroughly analyzed this noteworthy change in the artistic perception and portrayal of colonial families and children. She discusses the signs of domestic evolution in colonial painting by devoting an entire chapter of her book *Art in a Season of Revolution* (2005) to the subject, dissecting Copley’s group portraiture.\(^{59}\) She argues that the change in the portrayal of children within the family unit began with Benjamin West, an American Quaker artist of English origin, but was truly solidified in Copley’s work because the painter “used the canvas to fabricate and permanitize a family identity already shattered by death and war.”\(^ {60}\) But Copley combined this depiction of his family identity with a visual


\(^{60}\) Lovell, 141.
declaration that the reunited family enjoyed positive developments in husband and wife relations, as well as parent-child ones. It was not only Copley’s family, but all families, that experienced these positive trends. “Naturalness,” “feeling,” and “sensibility” are all terms that Lovell uses to describe Copley’s multiple-figure portraiture involving children—itself, evidently, a trend unique to colonial American art. While British artists composed portraits centered on an individual, American artists more often (though still with relative rarity) depicted the intertwined and dynamic psychology of a group.61 American colonial painters conceivably hung these ambitious family portraits in their studios as a way of reassuring patrons that they were capable of discerning the nuanced differences of visual code between male, female, and juvenile dress, gesture, and mood. The artists openly acknowledged that these differences, in fact, existed, and flaunted their ability to capture them as American social customs increasingly dictated. Children were no longer seen, nor depicted, as miniature adults.

Furthermore, it is important to note that artists such as Copley increasingly depicted the gentry, merchant, and professional classes with their children: as this particular social class was the “pacemaker of cultural change” and the most likely to purvey a vanguard attitude about children’s social roles.62 There are a number of formulas Lovell identifies which appear in Copley’s portraits. First, during the early 1700’s, artistic and social standards prescribed the patriarch as standing, or sitting in a position of relative authority, holding an instrument of action, such as a quill

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61 Lovell, 141. Lovell also cites the important contributions of West, Charles Willson Peale, John Smibert, John Greenwood, William Dunlap, and Joseph Wright.
62 Lawrence Stone, Neil McKendrick, John Demos, et all (social historians) quoted in Lovell, 143.
pen, a weapon, or a walking stick—or otherwise, if he was an artist, a drawing, because drawings were signifiers of the intellectual and rational ("masculine") components of art. This emphatic masculinity continued throughout the eighteenth century but decreased with time as the matriarch began to visually reflect her husband’s pose and stature, suggesting increased egalitarianism. Spouses were rarely depicted alone in pairs, but they often appeared together in groups with their elders and offspring. The father also begins to “lean toward, play with, look at, and touch” his children with unprecedented frequency; “clearly the (seeming) withdrawal from a position of authority involved an admiration for, perhaps even a nostalgia for, the special state of childhood, as it was newly perceived.” The father’s involvement remains muted; most of the time he merely leans in toward the youngster or allows himself to exist on the same physical level as his wife and children.

Mothers began to command a central position in colonial family compositions. Copley specifically reiterated Nativity motifs in his family portraits, rendering focal the Madonna-and-Child figures. English counterparts, such as Sir Joshua Reynolds, painted group portraits of mothers at a triangular compositional apex (such as in The Duke of Marlborough and His Family, 1778, oil on canvas, Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire). But a contemporaneous quote by John Adams points to the fact that mothers became visual highlights specifically because of their “feminine” docility, “purity, chastity,” and “liberal spirit” of kindness: increasingly

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63 Lovell, 189.
64 Lovell, 156.
praiseworthy traits in both the institutions of a “Republican Government” and parenting.65

As for the children themselves, the change in their portrayal was the most dramatic. The fact that children before Copley’s art were painted with extreme “verticality”—stiff-backed and upright—derives from actual cultural practices at the time. Swaddling, holding and wheeled apparatuses were used by parents through the eighteenth century to prevent children from assuming “bestial” postures—such as what is now recognized as the highly natural state of crawling. When, as Copley’s family portraiture reveals, children increasingly appeared in paintings assuming postures that were informal, playful, and horizontal, it suggests that simultaneously American culture came to accept a more “persuasive” rather than forceful method of childrearing, involving “every soft and gentle method.”66 Lovell refers to these visual clues as “body rhetoric” and attributes the change in attitude to the dissemination of humanist philosophy, such as that by Englishman John Locke, as well as the American painters’ increased mastery of physical anatomy.

Charles Willson Peale also portrayed children in a way that emphasized familial tenderness and the concordant freedom of children to be lively and active. His paintings and Copley’s were contemporaneous.

Peale, a scientist, statesman, craftsman, tradesman, and artist—rightly deemed a Renaissance man—created many portraits of families frozen in the middle of tender moments. Indeed, a number of his portraits tenderly depicted many of his own sixteen children. The Portrait of John and Elizabeth Lloyd Cadwalader and their

65 John Adams, quoted in Lovell, 161.
66 Reverend John Witherspoon, quoted in Lovell, 153.
*Daughter Anne* (1772, oil on canvas, Philadelphia Museum of Art) is one of Peale’s works featuring a vivacious child surrounded by an affectionate family. The heartwarming scene chronicles a dark-haired infant’s fascination with a piece of fruit proffered by her gently smiling, attentive father. Anne’s mother, Elizabeth, in turn observes John fondly. The gold of the fruit and the gold of John’s vest coat implicitly connect his psyche with the kindly gesture. It should be noted that the idea of rewarding a child for good behavior, rather than strictly punishing him or her for misbehavior—an early form of the psychological and didactic tool called “positive reinforcement”—first appeared during the Renaissance, in emblem books addressed to patriarchs, and in the writing of English, Italian, and Dutch philosophers such as Desidirius Erasmus. More than one of these early sources even suggested the exact practice of bestowing a young boy or girl with a piece of fruit for appropriate conduct or for accomplishing a lesson well.67 Given Peale’s background in the liberal arts, it is hardly surprising that he would take pains to record a contemporary American father’s adherence to such humanistic practices.

As a naturalist, Peale was also surely impacted by budding notions of children’s almost sacrosanct communion with and equation to nature.

Lily Martin Spencer was the first female American painter to consistently portray an indulgent social attitude toward children in domestic spaces. Her work reached its peak during the 1840’s. Her oeuvre is a quintessential example of nineteenth-century sentimentalism toward children and childhood.

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Spencer, a social Utopian, was born in Exeter, England, and immigrated to New York in 1830 with her French-born parents. Spencer settled for a time in Marietta, Ohio and was self-taught, although her advisors included alumni of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, such as Sala Bosworth and Charles Sullivan. With her large family, Spencer ultimately moved to New York City, where her portraits and group genre scenes became popular, and where she sold literally a million lithographs of her own work, but, somehow, always remained in financial straits. Spencer sentimentally commodified the child in art. This commercialized protective sweetness may have been due to the fact that, of her own thirteen children, Spencer only saw seven survive to maturity. While astonishing numbers by today’s standards, neither giving birth to extremely large numbers of children, nor high infant mortality rates were rare at the time—and her resulting devotion to the welfare of the young was empathetically keen.

Spencer’s Domestic Happiness (1849, oil on canvas, Detroit Institute of Arts) portrays a young mother and father overlooking two cherubic sleeping children, flaxen-locked siblings, whose recumbent poses are reminiscent of flying putti from the Italian Baroque. The mother’s Madonna-like serenity, the way she brushes the father’s chest as if to capture his attention and point out a particularly endearing aspect of the siblings’ slumber, and especially the father’s clumsily doting smile, are all outstanding compositional elements. The interior is warm and nondescript, a domestic womb. These children are angels, treasures, even to the patriarch, no longer a distant authoritarian, but an equally emotionally invested parent.
For Spencer, the child was the prized possession, the proof of a happy home environment. This treatment of the child was highly typical, though, for Spencer, slightly exaggerated.68 Spencer focused upon matriarch and child and upon fathers who are all but bumbling in their loving humbleness. Spencer continued to depict children as blameless and pure beings deserving of quasi-religious exultation: this was quite a departure from the domination, moral suspicion, or harsh punishment inflicted upon children in past centuries. Spencer’s art also foreshadows the indulgent, luxurious treatment of children that is epitomized by painters of the “Genteel” Tradition.

The Theme of the Stages of Life

Thomas Cole was the first American painter to use the trope of undiluted childhood innocence in a systematic way, as part of a larger program about the grandness of nature and the temporary impact that humanity exerts upon it. While doing so, he used allegory to clearly demarcate the stages of human life—infancy, youth, maturity, and old age. Cole, therefore, implicitly stated that childhood was by necessity developmentally unique, and that the state of being a child was existentially different than any other age. This revelation goes hand-in-hand with the revelation that children should be treated with permissiveness and affection,

68 David M. Lubin, *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America*. London: Yale University Press, 1994: 164: It was a woman painter’s marketing tactic, debatably conservative (against the Woman’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, 1858) or liberal (against the Orthodox Protestant view of a severely structured family in which the home is not a haven, but rather a place where social protocol is learned).
because the latter notion was a popular way to address this awakening idea that children, as different beings, had unique personal needs and inclinations.

Born in Lancashire, England, Cole was the founder of the “indigenously” American landscape movement known as the Hudson River School. He moved to America with his family in 1818 and quickly learned that portraiture did not suit him. His landscapes were exacting and precise, and intentionally showcased recognizable natural landmarks and unique American traits, such as the intense hues of autumn, in his compositions. Over time, Cole rendered the artistic theme of the “course of empire” his primary subject matter. Cole’s landscapes, an ambivalent commentary on “Manifest Destiny,” were allegories of the American psychological landscape: its controversial way of expanding into its own uncharted landmasses. Children began to play a very distinct role in this world schema.

In 1842, Cole produced his Voyage of Life painting series (oil on canvas, Munson Williams Proctor Arts Institute, Ithaca, New York). This series was the first to feature the “nature child,” or the “pure child,” a typology that became central to the nineteenth-century discourse on childhood. The first two paintings in the series particularly demonstrate this fact. Childhood features an exultant, glowing infant heralded by an incandescent angel, riding a golden boat. A lagoon flooded with fresh tropical flowers cloisters the boat. The time of day is sunrise. In Youth, this painting’s sequel, the infant has become a young man, clad in vibrant red, surrounded by more mature tropical plants and trees. He sails his boat down an unfurling river bend in the direction that his angel, standing on the shore, beckons: toward his resplendent future, symbolized by a fantastical castle in the sky. Because
he has listened to his celestial guide, and remains faithfully on course, he is sure to overcome future trials (as indeed he does in *Manhood*, which follows, by praying fervently while sailing tumultuous waters) and reach old age.

Cole’s little boy remains in close communion both with the natural and the divine, through the changing landscape that is equated with his level of psychological and physical maturity, and through the cyclical presence of the angel. Yet it is in the stage of childhood when the boy is a charming imp that in his freedom he is as close to God as humanity could ever be. Cole’s paintings of children, with a literary counterpart in William Wordsworth and the Transcendentalists, epitomized this early, romantic prototype, but were to undergo several revisions.

The powerhouse printing partnership of Currier & Ives was the first American entity to make the subject of children, childhood play, and even a touch of childhood unruliness, an object of mass media sale. Markedly, childhood play became a special, physically and emotionally segregated act in the work of this printing firm. Play, increasingly the progressive pedagogical solution to the problem “children are different from adults,” was demarcated clearly from adult activity as a necessary and natural stage of human development.

The printmaking firm headed by Nathaniel Currier of Roxbury, Massachusetts, and James Merritt Ives of New York City, was based in New York City from 1837-1907. These entrepreneurs referred to their business accurately as “the Grand Central Depot for Cheap and Popular Prints.” Any subject that Currier’s *New York Sun*-based work featured was sure to become nationally prominent; indeed, Harriet Beecher Stowe declared their work to be the ideal decoration for any
respectable American home. The firm functioned for 72 years and produced at least 7,500 lithographs. They used images created by many celebrated artists of the day, including Thomas Nast and, notably, Eastman Johnson. Subjects ranged from breaking news stories to popular entertainment and art reproductions.

In 1868, Currier & Ives produced a series that emphatically isolated childhood from other periods of life. The series was called *The Four Seasons* (lithographs, D-size, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). In the first image, *Childhood*, a children play with lambs and lounge on the ground in a summer landscape, on a country lane by a bucolic village. Sarah Burns states that the Currier & Ives prints were the first in a nineteenth-century lineage of childhood images that “seal off, suspend, and arrest” that precious period of mythic innocence. Rather than focusing upon an obedient march of time towards adulthood and its host of epochal concerns, childhood was an ideal haven. As we shall see, genre painters operating during the late nineteenth century both reinforced and rejected this schema of childhood.

All of these ideological trends manifested as early visual signs of a definitive change in the perception and treatment of American children. But it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the evidence of this change became consistent and programmatic.

**Genre Painting**

**George Caleb Bingham**

George Caleb Bingham was the first American painter to use children consistently in genre paintings as personifications of the American frontier. He was also the first to use childhood play as a focal activity in compositions about frontier American politics. These paintings quoted English and French predecessors portraying rustic “peasant” life, but were set in the American Northeast and West. Bingham's work, as an iconic landmark in the American genre painting tradition, marks a definitive shift in the portrayal of American children. Bingham portrayed children, on top of the innovations already begun in the 1700’s, as consistently unruly, and that unruliness as a positive index of the young country in which his children belonged.

Bingham was the second of seven children born in Virginia, but his family moved to Missouri, where his father died tragically young, and each of the children was put to work to keep the family solvent. Bingham never trained academically, but was apprenticed to two cabinet-makers who also served as Methodist ministers; before accepting the painting of portraiture as an early vocation, Bingham also considered ministry. The height of his career was in St. Louis after his marriage and the arrival of four children. By the mid-1850’s George and his family moved to Europe so that he could study the Old Masters and train with the Dusseldorf School of painters in Germany (where Eastman Johnson also trained). Bingham returned to America, served in politics as Missouri State Treasurer and briefly taught as the first art professor at the University of Missouri, before his death.

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Bingham’s paintings featuring children first and foremost addressed the issue of the American wilderness—its virgin state and its ambiguity, even its strangeness—and the way in which Americans confronted the unknown.

Bingham’s *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri* (1845, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art) is a famous example of an early genre painting of a child—a frontier “half-breed” of white and Native American descent. The boy loiters in a boat with his father, symbolizing the excitement and trepidation of broaching the American wilderness. His black-hued animal companion is tied to the front of the boat. The creature might be a cat, a fox, or a bear cub, or it may be envisioned as a mixture of all three: a hybrid, like his young master. The father pauses in the middle of rowing to grimly scowl at the viewer—an expression that Bingham had already assuredly decided upon, based on a preliminary brush-and-ink drawing of the old man’s face. His smoking pipe hangs crookedly from his lips. The boy, face in shadow, tucks a rifle under his arm at the ready, but languishes, and his gaze is a far more ambivalent mixture of bemusement and skepticism. The “simple, honest” manner in which both figures directly engage the audience is the first incidence of such a pictorial device in Bingham’s work.\(^{71}\) The river reflects the warm-hued lighting of a transitional time of day, sunrise or sunset, and the dusty wilderness opens onto a bay overhung by hazy golden clouds. The painting probably reflects the early American genre tradition’s penchant for quoting the restrained style of seventeenth-century European landscape masters, such as Claude Lorrain.\(^{72}\)

\(^{71}\) Shapiro, 45.

\(^{72}\) Henry Adams, quoted in Shapiro: 51. Additionally, this painting is considered loosely as a “pendant” painting with Bingham’s more menacing painting *The Concealed Enemy*, which features a Native American
As Barbara Groseclose has noted, Bingham was an avid participant in early American politics, specifically, the ongoing struggle between the Democrats and the Whigs. He used children as endearing and focal elements in clustered, chaotic compositions that directly addressed salient social problems.

For instance, Bingham’s painting *The Country Election* (1851-2, oil on canvas, St. Louis Art Museum) features a “panoramic assemblage” of rural American citizens—excluding women, who could not vote: It did, however, regardless of their non-voting status, include many restless children who entertain themselves in idle games in order to curb misbehavior. Bingham has arranged the composition, which would otherwise be cluttered and unwieldy, as a series of active clusters of people. Appearances of the colors peach and red on the attire of the adults segregates them into four discrete groups of forms: on the left, an African-American pouring a drink for a man who has already indulged too much, their heads connected by the emphatic gesture of a man behind them; next a slouching figure to the right of whom two men argue, one tapping his palm and the other in a blue frockcoat facing away from the viewer; a group on the right, piling backward, approached by a meek, skinny pointer dog and pinnacled by a man in bright red administering the swearing of the oath to the speaker; and finally a group of bored men in tophats, one of whom has slouched over in sleep. Most of the children are in the front of this painting. They, too, fidget or doze, at the drunk man’s feet. Two little boys are playing in the left foreground, shooting dice, a game that would later come to signify juvenile vice peering over a rocky hilltop down at what may be implicitly understood as white traders like the father and son. Both paintings were purchased by the Art-Union for prices now thought to be amusingly modest, considering how famous Bingham was to become.
in American visual culture. To the right, a boy wearing a bandana has lost his hat because his head is bowed forward. He is nodding off to sleep. The image explores the equalizing nature of political debate and does so in a cleverly accessible way by using children as comical highlight points, as individuals who are not yet caught up in the petty squabbles and social niceties of adults, and react with telling ennui.

There are two versions of this painting, which, aside the treatment of the clouds and the level of the porch on which the speaker prepares to orate, are impressively identical.

Similarly, in Bingham’s painting *Stump Speaking* (1853-4, oil on canvas, St. Louis Art Museum), children are endearing highlights in a larger-scope scene of American activity. An enormous tree bisects the composition. Underneath the tree is a panorama of frontier citizens, their forms sprawling deeply back into space, crowding around with striking casualness. Above most of them, a man in starch-white finery gestures at them while orating. His opponent, Bingham once clarified, sits behind him “shrewdly” taking notes in preparation for his onstage rebuttal. Two figures in the pensive crowd are emphasized: a man leaning on a crutch, his two dogs in tow, at the center of the canvas, and the only other man in a white coat, also sporting a top hat, hands on his hips, in the direct line of the orator’s gaze. The children congregate in the front and center of the piece. Two boys converse. The young face visible to the viewer is twisted in consternation. Another boy, clearly bored with the speeches, sits in the middle ground playing a game called “mumble the peg.” He is barefoot, with a satchel bag full of apples. Though I have not encountered commentary on such an interpretation, I wonder if the apples are an
allusion to Johnny Appleseed, and possibly a wryly humorous one. After all, this child pays no attention whatsoever to the candidate orating at the podium in the upper left; he is certainly no model citizen. Bingham sold the rights to this image to Goupil & Co., permitting them to reprint his painting en masse.73

Finally, in Bingham’s painting *The Verdict of the People* (1854-55, oil on canvas, St. Louis Art Museum), children not only make a political composition more accessible, they serve as bookmarks of the most significant social statements. In one case, a single child pores over a watermelon stand while being served slices of the fruit; simultaneously the adults either argue passionately over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, or drunkenly dismiss active involvement in the issue with equal vehemence.74 In another case, in the composition’s upper left, a boy in a bright pale hat serves as the wise fool or a child sage, much in the manner of Huckleberry Finn and his plain-spoken wisdom. He points out a sign in the upper left, to a sleeping or drunk male elder who disregards his urgency entirely—another allusion to popular disengagement with crucial social issues. Another boy in the lower left looks toward a laughing, white haired man. Meanwhile a slave struggles to push a wheelbarrow past and is obstructed by the fallen drunk. Bingham was known for such humorous anecdotal touches in his illustrations of the treacherous world of American politics—but the placement of these boys, who punctuate the image for emphasis, is simultaneously didactic.

73 Shapiro, 103.
74 This political move allowed “popular sovereignty” to decide on the status of the slave trade in a new American territory.
William Sidney Mount

William Sidney Mount was the other American genre painter to portray children, particularly little boys, as softening, humorous, or poignant lynchpins in quite serious images of the developing nation. Often he did so for the express purpose of self-reflexivity and nostalgia. Mount essentially used endearing children to provide commentary on corrupt adult activities. Interestingly, Mount moved closer than Bingham to the portrayal of children as subjects in their own right—particularly naughty boys.

Born in Long Island, New York, Mount was initially apprenticed to his brother as a sign painter, but he eventually trained at the National Academy of Design and became a full academician in 1832. He concentrated his early career, in the spirit of an academic, upon history painting, which may explain his rather fastidious hand, his large and ambitious settings, and his varied and lively placement of figures. Mount’s later work transformed into the “lower” art form of genre, for which he is posthumously famous.

Mount’s best-known works featuring children debut childhood naughtiness and cunning as a positive daily occurrence in the American countryside. His little boys are mascots of American ingenuity and American unruliness. Markedly, however, their behavior is still checked by disapproving adults who curtail their disobedience with a lesson.

In Mount’s oil painting School Boys Quarrelling (1830, oil on canvas, Long Island Museum, Stony Brook, New York), the little boys standing under a pair of trees and a rectangular wooden awning have tossed aside their schoolbooks, a
gesture that notably foreshadows a masterwork by Johnson, *The Old Stagecoach*—
and are preparing for a fistfight. One of the schoolbooks is titled “Grammar Simplified,” perhaps a comical reference to the reduction of human communication to its bare essentials when two little boys are angry enough to physically pummel each other, and school lessons are irrelevant. The book is propped against the foot of the smallest boy, a worrisome fair-haired child wearing a hat, who tugs up the sleeve of his stiff-collared shirt as if to nervously scratch his forearm or judge his own strength. Three other boys observe, one cheering on his chosen of the two champions, the defender on the left. One of the spectators is African-American and is holding a food basket; interestingly, of all the children, he is the most formally dressed. The most disheveled child by far is the instigator, who snarls his lip and points accusatorily at the taller boy who has somehow offended him. All are around ten years old. A woman in shadow looks through a door in the upper right and waits for the right moment to intervene.

The composition bears striking resemblance to French painter Jacques Louis-David’s *Oath of the Horatii* (1784, oil on canvas, Louvre), even to the extent that the males stand active and aggressive while the sole female, despite her greater age, cowers passively in a corner, uncertain as to whether she should intervene at all. Yet the boy’s features are surprisingly animated and expressive. The handling of their faces and anatomy foreshadows a handful of similar images, but of urban urchins fighting ethnically charged turf wars, painted with the same mixture of quaintness and vehemence by John George Brown.
School Boys Quarrelling was sold for a mere fifty dollars in 1832 by Pierre Flanden, a dealer of German genre paintings, then resold in 1858 to Caleb Jones of Philadelphia, and finally to the famous actor Edmund Forrest. John Ferguson and J. Alden Weir, American painters, both placed this painting in their private collections until it was rediscovered in 1982 and acquired by the Museums of Stony Brook.75

In Mount’s oil painting The Truant Gamblers (Undutiful Boys), 1835 (oil on canvas, New York Historical Society Museum and Library), similarly, little boys gamble with coppers on the floor, unaware that an old farmer is approaching to stop them. Other works such as this exist to fulfill a beloved popular formula of disobedient boys and ominously approaching, scolding elders, such as Boys Caught Napping in a Field (1848, oil on canvas, Brooklyn Museum of Art). In Boys Caught Napping, the effect is particularly comedic, because the boy on the far left, under a grove of trees, does not even acknowledge that an old man with a cane is wobbling over from the composition’s left. He daydreams, while an older boy shakes another slumbering compatriot who has lazily discarded his hoe. Notably, the old man, probably a parson judging by the shape of his hat, does not look particularly cross. In fact, he is trying not to indulgently grin; it is likely that his emotions reflect the artist’s.

In Mount’s well-known painting Farmers Nooning (1836, oil on canvas, Long Island Museum, Stony Brook, New York), three young men loiter under a leafy tree, out of the hot sun. One, on the left, focuses on sharpening his scythe, with a composed concentration; another sprawls at his feet with a jug of liquor, and

another stares out at the field. A plowing tool dangles from the tree’s branches, directing the eyes to a makeshift fence that encloses a field from a distant forest, and echoing the diagonal of a rake sticking out of a bale of hay. A young boy wearing a tam-o-shanter may also be the point of the third farmer’s gaze. The naughty child tickles the ear of an African-American farmhand, who is either exhausted or intoxicated by the same alcohol that has induced the second farmer to doze facedown. More tools and a washing pail cluster in the shaded foreground. The meticulously rendered vegetation sprigging up in highlights of detail from the similarly mimetic sunlight effect (which differs in quality from the dark stormy studio lighting of Mount’s preparatory sketch) is a virtuoso display of natural effects.\textsuperscript{76} While, in its time, the painting was praised for making a black man the brunt of a joke (in which he rests recumbently with feigned elegance on a hay bale)—indeed, Mount’s biographer, W. Alfred Jones, referred to the painting as proof that Mount could “worthily occupy” the position of painting “the Southern negro, plantation life”—reactions to the painting today are mixed.\textsuperscript{77} Most relevant for our purposes is the fact that the little boy’s misbehavior may have been a venue to evoke Mount’s personal opinions about American life: many art historians interpret the “harmless child’s play” as hidden socio-political commentary. Mount uses the idiom “tickling the ear” in painting the child poking straw into the African-American man’s ear, and perhaps alludes to the false promises of African-American freedom on the part of Abolitionists.

\textsuperscript{76} Cassedy and Shrott, 53.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
Farmers Nooning was purchased by New Yorker Jonathan Sturges and, later, his partner in the grocery business, Luman Reed. Alfred Jones and Joseph Gimbrede both reprinted the painting as engravings, for the Apollo Association (1843) and the magazine *Godey's* (1845), respectively, which popularized it, as well as the typologies of minorities and children that it presented.\(^78\)

Mount's painting *Catching Rabbits* (1839, oil on panel, The Long Island Museum, Stony Brook, New York), originally titled *Boys Trapping*, depicts a teenage boy kneeling in a snowy late autumn or early winter landscape. He smiles quietly to himself while dismantling his wooden trap, on which Mount's own signature appears. The trap's a-framed façade points upward to his younger friend or brother, who takes all the credit for his meticulous work, holding up a dead hare for the viewer's inspection, and grinning toothily directly at us. There is something simultaneously humorous and haunting about such an image. The winter landscape is one of nature's slowly, cyclically approaching death; the time of day, dusk, is similarly symbolic. In the center of such a poignant setting, a young, living creature brags of the death of an equally young, still warm, but dead, one. Therefore, looked at more closely, this is a painting about the brevity of youth, death, and necessity. Thus the painting carries additional import because it portrays two young boys being initiated into the role of hunter and provider, with adults completely absent. There are similar images in Mount's oeuvre such as *Boy Hoeing Corn* (1840, oil on panel, Long Island Museum, Stony Brook, New York), but these paintings lack the simultaneous pleasure and melancholy of *Catching Rabbits*. Still other paintings by

\(^{78}\) Cassedy and Shrott, 53.
Mount show children being initiated into adult roles and responsibilities, but with an adult present, such as *Ringing the Pig* (1842, oil on canvas, Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York)—in which a bearded father sits on a pig in a cornhusked farmyard while his younger son covers his ears against the animal’s cacophonic squealing, and his older son switches a resentful-looking swine behind them. Thus, *Catching Rabbits* is unique and powerful, because while these boys are notably hardy and ornery, significantly, even without adults to aid them, they begin to function as responsible contributors to a society steeped in harsh rural conditions and therefore distinctly American. This was a trend upon which Eastman Johnson and Winslow Homer would later capitalize.

Mount painted *Catching Rabbits* for Charles A. Davis of New York City, and the two boys within are identifiable; they are Lewis Davis (presumably a son or relative of Charles) and Henry Luke Rowland.⁷⁹ The National Academy of Design exhibited the painting and it was also shown at the New York Crystal Palace in the New York Exhibition of All Nations in 1853. It may have also been exhibited at the Tuilleries, and it enjoyed a reputation both in America and Europe. Clearly this image of children struck an international nerve, and exhibited something supremely resonant, something fashionable, in its time.

Mount’s cast of characters, then, were farmers and rural boys, who sported “unfailing cheer and innocence,” and who often hailed from Long Island. This is particularly significant—and shows that Mount chose this cast of stock types quite consciously—especially considering that he was also quite capable of creating

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⁷⁹ Cassedy and Shrott, 57.
stiffly formal, smooth portraits of male youngsters upon commission—such as the commemorative portrait of the young boy *Jedediah Williamson* (1837, oil on panel, Long Island Museum, Stony Brook, New York). In fact there is something about the airless formality of these tragically common death portraits that adds a rebellious, joyous exuberance to Mount’s genre scenes of misbehaving boys. His regular players appealed to patrons who projected their own “interior dilemmas” onto the happy life of rustic children. Interestingly, adult men who had not set foot in the countryside for many years related to these country boys largely because they too were scheming mischief-makers who skillfully avoided the blame for wrongdoings. Harmless children’s pranks microcosmically symbolized the very serious vices of the cutthroat urban entrepreneurs who would come to be the Gilded Age’s “plutocrats.”

Mount was extraordinarily popular at the height of his career. Mount and other genre painters pandered to a New York audience that was status-conscious and upwardly mobile. Playing to this audience enabled these artists to also rise in social influence and status. Mount’s work shows a vernacular subject to an elite audience and in doing so bridges the gap between the two. One of his best and most frequent ways of accomplishing this was through representations of childhood.

The art historian Elizabeth Johns argues that Mount’s strategy was cleverly self-promoting. Depicting children enabled a mid-nineteenth-century academician to present himself both as an accomplished professional experienced in the increasingly important urban sphere, *and* as a proud American (connotation: old-fashioned, plain-spoken, and implicitly “country”). She states,
“One strategy was to adopt a kind of whistling-in-the-dark cheerfulness; another was to assert complete sophistication and to attribute naivete to others, especially one’s rural counterparts; yet another was to clear oneself of guilt for complicity in the machinations of the urban social and economic worlds by imputing such scheming behavior to country citizens. Perhaps the most widely popular solution, however, was for grown men to look for images of boyhood to provide insights into their own situations.”

Thus Mount’s genre paintings mined contemporary storytelling, jokes, and folklore that were rural. This strategy—acquiring content from contemporaneous, cultural, often popular written, sources—was later used by Eastman Johnson and Winslow Homer, who clearly looked to children’s literature and intellectual theory for their inspiration.

The Predecessors: A Summary

We can be sure, then, that the body of precedents that depicted American children in new ways was enormous. Genre painting, a sister discipline and partial outcropping of the Hudson River School, was extremely popular and highly marketed. Its practitioners are sometimes household names today, but sometimes quite obscure. Nonetheless most of these genre painters at some point portrayed American children or adolescents as humanizing elements in a larger metaphorical or didactic theme, often centered on American nationalism.

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81 For instance, most people even slightly familiar with American art will recognize the names George Catlin, George Caleb Bingham, Lily Martin Spencer, and William Sidney Mount. But other prolific painters were less prominent: such as Samuel S. Carr, whose winter landscapes of children playing resemble the sturdy figures in the later work of Winslow Homer; Fitz Hugh Lane’s friend David Claypoole Johnson, who tutored Louisa May Alcott in amateur painting; Henry Inman; or John Ferguson Weir.
For our purposes, George Caleb Bingham and William Sidney Mount are perhaps the most significant of these progenitors. Their work most clearly foreshadows the work of Eastman Johnson, Winslow Homer, and John George Brown. But Bingham and Mount’s children remained smaller players in a larger statement about the evolution of American customs and norms—namely, boys exemplifying a rough-and-tumble frontier persona. Bingham and Mount’s children are personifications of the “infant” portions of American geography: a wilderness, or a “blank slate.”

Though the early genre painters showcase childhood in their work, it is never entirely a subject in its own right. It was only in the middle and later nineteenth century that this decisively changed.

**The Innovators: Painters of the “Bad Boy”**

Bingham and Mount’s paintings are best described as images *featuring* boys. What came after Bingham and Mount were images *of* boys: almost invariably, rowdy little boys. For those artists who would directly follow Bingham and Mount, children *were* the subject matter: their unique behavior, their unique way of thinking, and their unique way of either coping with or entirely fleeing from a changing world. Though children and childhood remained symbolically rich subjects, they were more than just items in the visual toolbox that alluded to larger themes. And it was a very specific type of child that Bingham and Mount’s descendants showcased: “Bad Boys.”
At the end of the nineteenth century, three genre painters solidified the new concept of painting rebellious boys. I will now discuss these three artists, the artists who made the strongest and most inventive statement about American children and the changed social attitude toward childhood. For these painters, Eastman Johnson, Winslow Homer, and John George Brown, childhood was less often an inviolably innocent state that adults looked upon in romanticized recollection. The direction was reversed. Boyhood was a way of looking at adulthood—from the viewpoint of a fresh being who was still unfettered by an accumulating pile of post-bellum problems.

As free beings, Johnson, Homer, and Brown’s children are markedly and unrepentantly rebellious. The rebelliousness of little boys becomes a form of heroism. Artists and viewers, capitalizing upon themes of indulged and independent children, and themes of the stages of life, now value child rebelliousness for its own sake, as a natural and healthy state of growth, and as a positive cultural symbol. Boys are no longer didactic tools whose insertion into a canvas’s larger human activity teaches adults moral lessons. With Johnson, Homer, and Brown, the audience relishes girls and boys in and of themselves, specifically because they are children. The real “apotheosis” of childhood has begun.

**Eastman Johnson**

Eastman Johnson was the first nineteenth-century American genre painter to portray the child in a manner that entirely contradicted the severe childrearing of the past. But he did so sporadically, at times depicting free-spirited little boys from
Romantic poetry, at other times depicting genuine war orphans, and, at still other times, depicting bourgeois group portraits with docile children at their center.

Johnson’s most recent biographer is the art historian, Patricia Hills. She writes, “his personality...embodied the conventional virtues of his age: he was a pragmatic, tactful man, sympathetic to the tribulations of his friends, chivalrous with women, and fond of children.”

Though his paintings of children are today less famous than those of Winslow Homer, Johnson’s images came first and established a foundation for Homer’s achievements.

Background

Johnson was born on July 29, 1824, in Lovell, Maine, but when he was three his family moved to Fryeburg, a place that would later be the subject of many of his landscape and genre paintings. Eastman worked in a dry goods store before, at age sixteen, this third of eight children was apprenticed to a lithographer in Boston, likely Bufford’s. In 1844 he moved to Washington, D.C. where gained notoriety for his portraits of famous Americans; likewise, in his next location, Cambridge, Massachusetts, he painted such celebrities as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Ralph Waldo Emerson—the latter of whom was a close personal friend of Bronson Alcott, an American pioneer in progressive child education. In 1849 Johnson sailed to Dusseldorf to train at the Royal Academy. He apprenticed with Emmanuel

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83 Johnson’s images of the new American child precede those of Homer with a decade of work that began with his painting of 1860, *The Barefoot Boy*, and reached a peak with his 1871 National Academy of Design hit *The Old Stagecoach*.
Leutze, the most famous American painter in Germany, whose reputation rested on the monumental painting *George Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art). Johnson finished training in Dusseldorf, visited London and returned to Europe to reside at The Hague. While there, he earned supporters appealing to the Dutch sentiment for humorous vignettes and incisive, individuated portraiture, often of or featuring children. *The Card Players* (1853, oil on canvas, Private Collection), which shows a worrisome little girl tugging on her toothless grandfather’s arm as he gambles his way into destitution, egged on by the leer of his opponent’s one-eyed son, and a diligently attentive portrait of an introspective young man called *Savoyard Boy* (1853, oil on canvas, Brooklyn Museum, New York), are definitive examples. Johnson also briefly studied in Paris under Thomas Couture, a well-known French history painter who had trained at Paris’s Ecole des Beaux-Arts and who mentored the next generation of “genteel” painters (such as John La Farge and Mary Cassatt).

After his German and French training, Johnson returned to Washington, D.C., and then retreated to Fryeburg, Maine, to paint stage-like compositions of his first rural subjects. Johnson’s acceptance piece as a full academician of the National Academy of Design was *Negro Boy*, 1860, a melancholic, but peculiarly unsentimental, rendering of an African-American child sitting barefoot in the foyer of a log cabin, playing a tin flute, his concentrated face mostly darkened by the shadow of the architecture.

By 1862 Johnson had returned to New York where he lived in the University Building, joined the Century Club and Union League Club, and had a unique neighbor
in the younger genre painter Winslow Homer. Indeed, Johnson notably had numerous painter-friends, such as Worthington Whittredge. He taught briefly at the National Academy and he began to paint the families of the urban cash-poor in a style that has been compared to Frenchman Edouard Frère’s soft genre interiors.

Johnson gratefully accepted acclaim for painting celebrity portraits and vignettes of wartime’s picturesquely dreadful effects. But he wanted to expand his repertoire. So during the middle and late 1860’s, he examined works in the collection of the wealthy American William T. Blodgett, particularly paintings by his old mentor, Thomas Couture. As a result of his exposure to Couture’s paintings, Johnson reprised an earlier subject: renderings of maple sugar camp workers in Maine, against a rural backdrop. These rustic images mostly featured women and children, with a smattering of older, pipe-smoking, tale-telling men. Johnson infused his compositions with a “frieze-like” format gleaned from Couture.85

Johnson translated Couture’s style into an American vernacular setting; Mr. Blodgett was pleased. He commissioned the artist to paint his family for the occasion of Christmas. The resultant cozy group portrait, which was praised by critics for handling the dual light source of the windows and the fire, was Johnson’s “artistic triumph of the war years,” and it sealed his reputation. The little boy in the painting holding a little doll meant to be a black soldier created a stir in its time, and has since been the subject of critical attention—the question of whether Johnson adhered to minstrel show tropes or was actually being subversive. Christmas with

the Blodgett Family (oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art) was displayed at the Century Association in 1864; shortly thereafter, Johnson received numerous commissions for family portraits with well-loved children as the center of interest and affection, such as The Brown Family (1869, oil on canvas, De Young Museum, San Francisco), a candy-hued scene in which a small child interrupts an aged male reading a newspaper. Strangely enough this work was received as a “bad picture” at the National Academy of Design, but it did not detract from Johnson’s volume of similar commissions.

Johnson also took the opportunity to illustrate his concern with the fiscal impact of the war on small families; Sunday Morning (1866, oil on canvas, New York Historical Societ Museum and Library), and Fiddling His Way (1866, oil on canvas, Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia), illustrating the difficulties of returning veterans and their families, were exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1866; Johnson reprised such social commentary with The Pension Claim Agent (1867, oil on canvas, De Young Museum, San Francisco), also exhibited at the National Academy. Like most art of the time, which seemed to conflate Americanness with fastidious recordings of reality, it was also praised for “its absolute fidelity to nature” and by the Ruskinian critic, Russell Sturgis, as “at once a memorial of the war and of New England domestic life.”86 In this way, Johnson’s art became equated with nationalism, agrarianism, a truthful visual record, children and other socially disempowered beings (such as veterans), and the best kind of nostalgia—that which escapes the trap of being trite.

86 Russell Sturgis, quoted in Carbonne and Hills, 70.
Johnson’s only daughter, Ethel, was born in 1870. In the early 1870’s, Johnson, his wife, and child moved to a studio on West Fifty-Fifth Street. By this point, Johnson was enough of a celebrity that collectors as unlikely as the French photographer, Napoleon Sarony, purchased his work.\(^{87}\) He was also now widely reputed as a painter of children in genre scenes. During the 1870’s, he painted children frolicking outdoors, inside barns, and at the side of adult family members harvesting cranberries. He displayed his works at the Century Association and Society of American Artists by the late 1870’s and early 1880’s—but he did not limit his repertoire to doted youngsters in ornate domestic interiors. Johnson would be the first artist to forge a clear new vision of American childhood. He did so specifically to reinvigorate a slightly stagnating oeuvre. Overall, he became an important portraitist and painter of New England rural and domestic life, in a highly refined academic style.\(^{88}\) He died in April 1906, after having risen to such fame that he painted a portrait of President Grover Cleveland.

**Johnson’s Early Images of Children**

Johnson certainly recognized the rhetorical power of the imagery of childhood. Paintings of children were able to comment on what was socially desirable in an American citizen during a tumultuous moment in American history. Johnson noted that images of American children exhibiting specific character traits

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\(^{87}\) Sarony purchased Johnson’s *Husking Bee*. Carbonne and Hills, 92.

\(^{88}\) Johnson’s fastidious paintings of wealthy families in their parlors became these agrarian anecdotes when the Johnson family moved to Nantucket, in 1870. Johnson burst with bucolic nostalgia during the execution of these works, stating for instance that he was glad no “roads or railways” could reach Nantucket culture. See Carbone and Hills, 79.
(robustness, resourcefulness, optimism, defiance of unjust rules) implicitly celebrated an American spirit in the early years of life. It also equated childhood with Americanness—young, unpretentious, unrefined, determined, and optimistic. A painting of a little boy playing in a rural setting, defying stacked odds and adult authorities, exhibited during and after a long and bloody civil war, therefore gratifyingly suggested that the reattainment of fading American cultural values was possible. Images of sad children commented on what was remiss in society, and why the need to reestablish American cultural values was so great. Images of adored children at the center of homespun domestic activity showcased these happy beings receiving the kindness they deserved, and indicated where good citizenship began: a loving household. Johnson utilized every single one of these types when he painted children. The value of his contributions is sometimes buried by criticism of his art as too hackneyed and formulaic—criticism which began when his work resurfaced from total obscurity during the 1930s and 1940s. But it is important to look past these criticisms, which fail to take into account that Johnson was on average two decades older than his bolder, more aesthetically stark, more famous colleagues (such as Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins). More important than these criticisms is the undeniable fact that without Johnson, Homer and compatriots would have no iconographical strategy of childhood imagery to build upon.

On the whole, works that Johnson completed during the 1850’s and 1860’s were quaint parlor portraits and landscapes dotted with women and youngsters tapping maple syrup and harvesting cranberries. Both types of painting, according to Patricia Hills and Jane Weiss, indicated America’s emotional ambivalence toward
Reconstruction’s industrialized, urbanized North, the new center of power that youth would inherit. But it was not long before Johnson’s images of children became trendsetting and iconic.

Johnson’s oil painting *The Barefoot Boy* (1860, oil on board, Private Collection), is his earliest “iconic” work. It is a full-length portrait of a shoeless, cherub-faced child. The boy’s proportions demonstrate a reliance on academic formulas: he is slightly stilted and his head is slightly too large for his short-legged body. He stands confidently on a rock by a stream, under autumn-hued foliage. His hands are stuffed in his pockets and he wears high-waisted britches with suspenders, a loose white shirt, and a straw hat under which his round face puckishly smirks. His gaze, shaded by his hat, is turned cunningly upward, above the head of the viewer—in fact, at the level of the implied tree line behind us. It is clear that he is aware of something naughty, something that belies the picturesque and slightly stifled quality of the rest of the painting. It is as if, caught in the act of shirking civilized duties to commune with nature, he slyly plots the prank that will liberate him from the encroaching viewer.

This nostalgic image is based on John Greenleaf Whittier’s poem of the same title. Boston lawyer Wilder Dwight bought the painting. The demand for images of unconcernedly lackadaisical little boys evinces a cultural correlation between a selectively idyllic agrarian past and personal and professional prosperity in an increasingly uncertain present. Paintings of happy little boys rewrote history for an America at war and undergoing undeniable social change. Further, this happy little

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89 *The Girl I Left Behind Me* is easily a “female analogue” to this work.
boy is a gentle early echo of art featuring a specific type of heroically rebellious male child. Such a stock figure would become a phenomenally popular American cultural statement.

Johnson’s oil painting *Warming Her Hands* (1862, oil on canvas, Private Collection), on the other hand, is a painting of a sad and neglected American girl. It was submitted to the National Academy of Design that year, and it is a social commentary urging American citizens to acknowledge little girls during the Civil War. Far more somber in tone than *The Barefoot Boy*, this image opens on a desolate vignette of the titular girl timidly extending small milky hands toward an old-fashioned coal-burning stove, a plain everyday sign of livelihood and humble charity. Johnson paints the young girl in a drab, chill palette, face stoic, wearing a tattered cape. The glow of the stove’s vented door is, indeed, the only bright and warm spot in the composition. A shadowed landscape painting that could have been executed by Johnson himself flanks the stove; everything else in the modestly sized room signifies humble, old but expertly handmade, and rustic possessions. As a complement to this setting, the child’s face is stoic, her eyes downcast at the source of heat; she does not theatrically swoon and she bravely does not weep. Yet her skin is an unhealthy yellow-gray, dingy like the nineteenth-century notion of the grimy and airless industrial city that has cost her so much. Her bonnet, coat, and rusty skirts are poignantly proper even though she finds herself in such a desperate state. Her basket sits behinds her, a white satin ribbon tied to the handle. Above it is a hand-stitched plaque that marks the date of such a sad scene—1861—as if to hint that the girl’s plight is tragically commonplace. This child has been orphaned or
temporarily abandoned, and her wretched state is a commentary on the folly of the North having once expected it could quickly and easily resolve its dispute with the South. It was implicitly socially active of Johnson to portray children in a way that broke temporarily from nostalgic pretense: underscoring the real wartime social menace of orphaning. The New York City in which Johnson lived was rife with cash-poor residents terrified of attack, yet even more abundant were the number of war orphans suddenly cast into the streets.

Johnson’s oil paintings *The Wounded Drummer Boy* (1863, oil on board, San Diego Museum of Art), *The Village Post-Boy* (1862, oil, Private Collection), and *The Young Sweep* (1863, oil on paperboard, Private Collection), were also Civil War paintings of children. They demonstrate Johnson at his most theatrically didactic, but they still use children to make a socially charged point. The artist submitted these works to the New York Metropolitan Fair of 1864. The drummer boy sits on the shoulders of a soldier who gazes up at him in wonder as he continues to optimistically, bravely beat on his drum even with fatigue, injury, and bloody battle ensuing all around. The post boy sits in an earthy-toned modest interior warming his hands by a tiny stove while an even younger sibling is corralled in a small chair. In a slight contrast in mood, the sweep leans against a starkly lit barn door, its latch locked in a quiet statement of finiteness, and gazes in an expression of understated anxiety to the viewer’s upper left. The lighting has an almost Rembrandt-like quality of the simultaneously grimy and ethereal.

Despite being early nods to a number of actual juvenile social problems, these paintings were not systematic, but episodic, in Johnson’s career. More
importantly, all but one, the stunningly intense image of the sweep, had a tableau-like and sentimentally emblematic quality still steeped fully in Romantic notions of wistfully bygone innocence. They are more poetic and artificial than documentary. Coupled with the image of the sweep, these paintings of children make a tidy summary of Johnson's diverse early career.

It seems, then, that by the mid-1860's, Johnson actively realized the rhetorical potential of images of children. Such images poignantly depicted the young as distilled literary and cultural tropes. They symbolically represented the wounded national psyche (girls in rags, drummer boys, etc). Interestingly this was exactly the time when Johnson studied photographs documenting the war front, such as Mathew Brady's wet-plate glass negative Death at Antietam (1862, wet collodion on glass, Library of Congress). Rather than directly imitate such gut-wrenching photography, Johnson adopted the subject matter, while distancing himself from the documentary genre. He, instead, portrayed quasi-sentimental vignettes of children. Imagery such as these paintings are valuable because they are the last remnant of an earlier program of depicting childhood.

Johnson's breakthrough oil painting Christmas Time (The Blodgett Family), 1864, also betrays the artist's more conservative side, but in doing so it shows an early American preoccupation with portraying unadulterated domestic happiness in childhood: spoiled children. This smooth-suraced, sharp-edged family portrait features a father actively engaged in the activities of his wife and children. He stands with his hands clasped behind his back, leaning in benevolently and enrapt, while his wife rests her feet in a nearby armchair, and their son poses dramatically
before their two demure daughters in an eager session of show-and-tell. The setting is warm and dark and vaguely like a cross between a typical parlor and a German tavern, with paintings on the wall, a fire glowing in the hearth, and the edge of a Christmas tree—a distinctly Victorian invention—flanking the family. The reds and greens accenting the carpets and tablecloth of the liquid-slick canvas tacitly reference the family-centric holiday that is the subject of the composition. Johnson’s painting *The Little Convalescent* (1873-79, oil on paperboard, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), is a more abbreviated commentary on the same subject of a happy child in a humble, clean, well ordered home. In it, a mother reads to a little boy reposing on a white-sheeted bed, with comforts such as a call-bell, medicine containers and a teacup. We read the beautiful picture book over the woman’s shoulder while the boy peeks backward at our intrusion.

Many art historians draw attention to this type of illustration of parental investment in the homestead and the immediate nuclear family’s wellbeing, which was a rising social trend during the nineteenth-century, both as an aesthetic and a social statement. They note that it is not portrayed universally, particularly not by expatriate artists. Additionally they contend that the caring and attentive father and mother in the home setting are evidence that the genre painters actively combated younger artists’ tendency to represent the effects of industrialization and urbanization as being a highly materialized, worldly, superficial, and “degenerate” domestic space. Implicitly, rich and worldly parents gave rise to emotionally neglected or spoiled children, who were just another of their possessions. Contrariwise, according to genre painters, a good “old-fashioned” American
homestead was still the center of both industry and the moral development of self and offspring.

Perhaps this series of early paintings raises the question of conscious social activism in Johnson’s work, and to what extent that might impact his portrayal of children. Johnson held affinities to certain causes—most notably the rights of African-Americans—but, with a few exceptions, it is difficult to locate explicit social statements in his imagery. It is more accurate to state that he advocated broad epochal changes in literary and visual discourse that began to surface concurrently with the increasing focus on children and changed childrearing styles.

Johnson was, for instance, not involved in the Civil War directly, but he painted many images of African-Americans. In fact these paintings also usually depicted children as seemingly casual but endearing scenic details. Johnson did not enlist, but was part of an Artists’ Patriotic Fund that auctioned paintings for the Northern war effort. Eastman’s brother, Reuben Johnson, enlisted, and he was able to visit Reuben’s camp at a Confederate stronghold in Manassas, Virginia, which left a strong impression on the painter.

Eastman’s sister also married the abolitionist, Samuel Joseph May. This is of particular significance to an inquiry about art of children because May was the brother of Abby May Alcott. Abby was the wife of the progressive child educator Bronson Alcott, and mother of the iconic children’s novelist Louisa May Alcott. It is quite likely that Johnson absorbed important ideas about the social role and

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90 One notable exception is the blatantly abolitionist oil painting A Ride for Freedom: The Fugitive Slaves, 1862.
developmental uniqueness of children through these personal ties to the Alcott family. The Alcotts exemplified the cutting-edge attitude of Transcendentalists toward childhood as a pure and unadulterated state of being deserving of “natural” freedoms, and we shall certainly see Johnson reflecting this attitude.

Johnson was an ardent Republican, who joined the Artists’ Patriotic Fund in order to auction paintings for the Union war effort. In these rare cases, he left open references to his political allegiance, such as in his painting *Corn Husking* (1860, oil on canvas, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York), where old men and little girls alike hunch over the titular labor, while on the barn door Johnson’s signature appears as “Lincoln and Johnson.” His allegiance is even more apparent in the explicitly abolitionist content of paintings such as *Ride for Freedom: The Fugitive Slaves* (1862, oil on paperboard, Brooklyn Museum), which, interestingly, was never exhibited. 92 To this day, Johnson may be best known for one of his more subtly abolitionist works, *Life in the South (Old Kentucky Home)*, 1859 (oil on linen, New York Historical Society Museum and Library), a sprawling and breathtakingly detailed vignette of African-American families sharing a dilapidated hut. In this work, boys and girls peer out of broken windows, regard banjo players, and in one case even rile an out-of-place poodle in a disagreeable tug-of-war “game.” Johnson also drew a crayon “portrait” of a *Boy Abraham Lincoln Reading* (charcoal, white chalk, and gouache on brown paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, as well as a finished painting of the same subject), a soft intentionally incomplete work that makes a portentious legend out of the Republican leader; the child’s narrow face, his hand,

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92 Carbone and Hills, 48-120.
and his little book emerge from charcoal-black shadow as he faintly smiles, absorbed in the pages. The connection between his forehead, his hand, and the book’s pages, all bright passages, suggests the culturally valued traits of discipline, intelligence, and composure, all prized and exciting prospects in the highly aspiring American youth. Johnson’s engagement in American social issues is not blatant, but it is present. Also, his choice to depict pre-industrial labor is implicitly a social statement. 93 Finding a “vernacular New England” spirit was one popular way Americans could resituate their national values. Artists such as Johnson often visually expressed his recuperating nation by using children in these settings as subjects—children who deserved to grow up healthy in a cherished America unchanged by troubling newfangled forces.94

It was two decades before Johnson’s paintings of specifically rebellious children surfaced, but when they did, a very particular painting and an archetypal child typology within it marked that transition.

**The Iconic Work: Boyhood Rebellion**

Johnson’s oil painting *The Old Stagecoach* (1870, oil on canvas, Milwaukee Art Museum), was his most important and lasting contribution to images of American children. He professed to having seen a similar scene unfolding in real life

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93 From Carbonne and Hills: A second trip to Maine’s countryside had Johnson declaring “Be true to the indigenous poesy of the soil which cherishes you,” (53) and making many images of “that peculiar [unique] phase of American rustic life,” a maple sugar camp.

94 “Authentic regional locations, details, and dialects” became significant to painters and writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and contributors to the Atlantic Monthly journal. Unitarian ministers were part of this movement. A rural culture and religious life became central to “reinvesting their lives with domestic values and stability.”
during his visit to the Catskills the previous summer, but the cultural references that the painter uses may be far richer than a remembered personal anecdote. The painting depicts children in wild play on an old abandoned stagecoach—schoolbooks scattered on the ground as if in defiance of adult authority. The various youngsters comically ape adult behavior. Four children lead the dilapidated carriage, play-acting as horses; one boy even lifts his arms and bobs his head in imitation of an equine prance, while the other exuberantly kicks at the front of the coach. The source of his annoyance is the red-shirted “coachman” behind him, who shouts at him and yanks too hard at his “reins.” Next to the “coachman,” a boy in blue suspenders splays his legs rudely and seems unconcerned at the rate of the carriage’s “progress” or, for that matter, the fantastical play itself. Above him, on the roof of the coach, two little girls sport parasols and pretend to be refined ladies. At the compositional pinnacle, a boy flings off his hat and whoops in barefooted, triumphal abandon. Boys peer out from inside the stagecoach—one dismounts entirely to gesture emphatically—at a passing pair of girls. One, older and clad in pink, clutches her basket to her chest and attempts to hurry past down the corn-husked lane. Another, younger and in blue, tugs at the skirt of the older girl and begs to be allowed to join the fun. The overall composition is meticulously detailed, an open field speckled with wildflowers and flanked by trees. While the stagecoach itself is partially dismantled, there are two—and only two—functional footnotes to adult civilization: the roof of a house in the distant left, and the roof and weather vane of a house in the near right.

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Notably, adult social hierarchies have been dissolved with black and white children playing together, as well as boys and girls. Most significantly, no adults chastise the children for their unruly behavior. Even the older girl rushes right past the youthful anarchy without attempting to intervene or seize control.

Johnson painted this image after having been inspired by Herman Melville to move to Nantucket in 1870. He wrote approvingly of his new home that it was a “place where railways can never reach, and where there is nothing to attract fashionable travelers.” It seems Johnson sought respite from the industrial, the urban, and the cosmopolitan, all social forces that were rapidly replacing an America of small-town and bucolic values and national borders. As Patricia Hills states, “The quintessential Nantucketer in this period of the island’s ‘decline’ was the aging sea captain, whose bent form and weathered face could speak volumes, of the adventurous nature of his former occupation, as well as of its demise.”

Most importantly, since this was precisely the era in which Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Mark Twain railed against the cruel schoolmaster of the “little red

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96 It is important to recall here that Johnson was abolitionist Samuel May’s brother-in-law, as this explains the bold racial heterogeneity in this painting.
97 Specifically, the children’s disobedience safeguards them against the dangers of changing American mores. Implicit in contemporaneous children’s literature and its visual equivalent is the dichotomy of nature and culture, masculine and feminine, rural and urban, antebellum and Reconstruction, played out in the larger nineteenth-century social theater. The target of children’s mischief is the dandification associated with the forces of too-rapid social change, which will be even more apparent in the work of Winslow Homer. If shifting standards fate a young male to become a pale city fop, then rebellious country mischief renders our bad boys heroic, for it entails unquestionable masculinity. Teddy Roosevelt’s “Cult of Healthy Living” and the founding of men’s Christian outdoor sport associations, such as the YMCA, evince the growing counterculture of bad boys monitored and raised healthily virile despite the emasculating effects of the Gilded Age. See Sarah Burns, Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded-Age America. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996: 54
98 Carbonne and Hills, 79
99 Carbonne/Hills, 79, 84. Such a whiskered wise old man is featured in Johnson’s What the Shell Says, 1875, indulging a precocious child in a dark earth-hued light setting as the child eagerly shares the sound of a seashell, putting it to the man’s ear. The content of this painting is “a child’s naive curiosity,” which “conjures myriad memories of a perilously adventurous, and bygone, life.”
schoolhouse”—the schoolmaster whom nurturing, female Kindergarten teachers were beginning to supplant—the rebellion of the children takes on a deeper meaning than that which is nostalgically and comically irreverent. Indeed, this was the painting that inspired a younger, more stylistically unusual artist—Winslow Homer—to create an entire subsequent program of childhood imagery. As we have seen, Johnson’s masterpiece directly illustrates scenes of childhood misbehavior in contemporaneous literature. It exemplifies how Johnson broke with earlier conventions for representing childhood.

Johnson’s oil painting *In the Hay Loft* (1877, oil on canvas, Dan Diego Museum of Art), is a painting about his daughter and her friends enjoying the pleasures of childhood unhindered by rules and restraints. It proves that *The Old Stagecoach* was not an isolated incident, but evidence of a paradigmatic change in the American artistic portrayal of the young. In this dusty gold-brown image, numerous little boys and girls daringly cross a wooden beam, one boy preparing to leap off, one girl standing, others more cautiously crawling, and a few even peeking out from the hay bales like barn kittens. Still more children watch their brave compatriots from shadow. Just as before, no adults are present. Only the adult audience viewing the painting is present. But even we viewers return to a juvenile age as complicit associates of these playmates, invited inside by one white-collared girl who peers out at us from the centermost hay bale. No adult disciplines the children for getting dust, debris, and manure on their Sunday best attire. Their play is justifiable for its own sake: because playing is what children naturally do.
Another painting of this sort was Johnson’s *Barn Swallows* (1878, oil on canvas, Philadelphia Museum of Art), which features the same cast of little girls and one little boy playing on the same barn beam. Hay spills out abundantly under their feet as the eight youngsters, obviously equated to the titular birds perching together as a roost, dangle their feet and converse in a lively manner. The child on the far left freezes mid-lean and scowls uncertainly toward something outside the picture plane, as if she is a member of an exclusive kids’ clubhouse and has heard noises of outside encroachment. The comrade on her immediate right giggles unconcernedly at the only boy in the picture, who stares ahead alongside a much older girl. The pair sport twin reserved smiles, sharing a private joke. Another older girl tends to a fidgeting, bonneted infant, and next to them, the two rightmost girls actively chatter, one crossing her legs in a casual, almost tomboyish fashion. One of these children has carelessly discarded a straw hat on the ground below, next to Johnson’s signature, wryly inscribed on the wooden wall attached to the “swallows’” beam. The two girls on the end share a snicker about the discarding of this item of ladylike propriety, as they sit directly above the place where it has fallen. The dramatic play and counterplay of the children’s gazes, the evidence of individuated emotion on their faces, is both endearingly quaint, and surprisingly modern in its psychological acuity. In this image, children are not stock characters of nostalgic allegory—indeed, if anything, their facial expressions are far more personalized than the generic features used by Johnson’s “more modern” peer, Winslow Homer. Johnson’s late-career children are a chorus of unique voices. Each has a distinct and clear personality that operates as a charming sub-rhythm to the larger ensemble of his
genre scenes. This acknowledgment of an active psyche, an inner life, to which the child has full entitlement—even in order to disobey the realm and rules of adults—is a novelty of the late nineteenth-century. The personally tailored, nurturing, and hands-on system of new child pedagogy was entirely concerned with this exact psychological epiphany.

_Barn Swallows_ and _In the Hayloft_ were part of a series depicting children in farmland interiors in 1877 and 1878. Johnson used the occasion of a visit to his sister, Harriet May, her abolitionist husband, Samuel, and their children at their vacation spot in Kennebunkport, Maine, to paint these works. The recurrent cast of child players included Johnson’s daughter, Ethel, and her cousins, the May children.

**Johnson: Conclusions**

Eastman Johnson was essentially the pioneer in depicting children whose misbehavior was perceived as entirely positive. For Johnson, children could represent the unspoiled awe coveted by an America whose innocence was prematurely fading in the face of postwar society. But children did so specifically by being unruly and rebellious. Johnson’s ties to abolitionism and his political conscience about working-class war orphans also prevented him from ever retreating entirely, culturally and artistically, into the secluded Nantucket villages of

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100 Though it does not have a place in the current discussion of unruly and rebellious children, still other paintings by Johnson make it clear that he enjoyed depicting the active, individual inner psyche of a child. One such _The Peep_, 1872, is a painting of a toddler grinning in delight and anticipation while covering a mother’s face with a handkerchief, in a game of peekaboo. _The Quiet Hour_, 1878, transpires in the famed hayloft under Johnson’s favorite barn beam, as a woman lounges next to a child studiously reading a pile of books. And perhaps the most blatant example is _Child Teaching Rabbit_, 1878, of a little girl draped across a wooden chair holding the fluffy beast at eye level, mimicking an adult pedagogue by “educating” it sternly in some matter of utmost importance.
bygone America that he so loved. Trained in a fastidious and “old-fashioned” mode, however, this painter could only break so far with tradition, and his professional reputation profited a great deal from more conventional images of poetic waifs and stuffy middle-class family portraits. The theme of the Bad Boy that Johnson introduced was to be seized upon with incisiveness by his unofficial successor, Winslow Homer.

**Winslow Homer**

Winslow Homer was the first nineteenth-century American painter to portray boys programmatically either as glorified school truants who escaped adult disciplinarians, or, alternatively, as the future recipients of ominous adulthood troubles. But he also made overt social commentary about children’s post-bellum race relations and the burdens brought upon young girls who became entangled in industrialized labor.

Homer took Eastman Johnson’s happily liberated boys ideologically a step further. He more aggressively suggested that being specifically unruly and acting rebellious are heroic American traits displayed by healthy country youths. He also more directly cited pedagogical advances in childrearing in his images because he actually visited American schoolhouses and observed new educational theories in practice.

**Background**

Winslow Homer was born in Boston on February 24, 1836, the second of three brothers. His parents both descended from long New England lines: Charles
Savage Homer, who would become a burdensome invalid in Winslow's later life, and Henrietta Benson Homer, an affluent amateur watercolorist educated at Cambridge. Winslow attended Washington Grammar School and from a young age exhibited curmudgeonly rebellion against adult authorities. This tendency to “resent being told what to do,” which led him to “not apply himself to his studies,” translated well into an entire program of oil paintings and watercolors of defiant country boys during the 1870's. Homer likely knew the work of William Sidney Mount as early as the 1850's, as his early engravings of children trapping animals demonstrate affinities with Mount's paintings of the same subject.

Homer started his career as a commercial illustrator, producing work for *Ballou's, Harper's*, and other weeklies. He moved back in with his parents in Belmont, Massachusetts in 1861, and jotted half-observed, half-nostalgic sketches of quiet and restful moments on the Civil War frontlines. Then, in his studio, Homer composed detailed, well-acclaimed oil paintings based on these sketches. During this time he was Eastman Johnson's neighbor, in the New York University Building, and many art historians believe that paintings such as Johnson's *Wounded Drummer Boy* influenced or were influenced by Homer's war paintings. The two were practically peers, Homer having been elected full academician at the National Academy of Design four years after the older artist, in 1864.

It is on this body of war images that Homer first built a professional reputation. *Veteran in a New Field*, (1865, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art), which portrayed the back of a man swinging a scythe at the endless sea of gold,

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with its obvious connotations to the grim reaper, the toll of death, and the hope of survival, was a breakthrough image. In 1867 Homer visited Paris to see one of his most famous war paintings, *Prisoners from the Front* (1866, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art), which had been purchased by a prominent New York Collector, and a companion piece, *The Bright Side*, 1865, exhibited at the Exposition Universelle. He painted the architecture of Notre Dame Cathedral (based, interestingly, on a Charles Nègre photograph) and absorbed the landscape paintings of the Barbizon School into his visual repertoire. He is never again recorded to have visited Europe, a fact that, alongside late-life seclusion in a lighthouse, jingoistically biased biographers have frequently exaggerated as evidence that Homer was hermetically self-educated. Many works that helped him develop his fame disprove this supposition.

After returning to America, Homer continued to live in New York City, though he was never interested in portraying scenes of urban living. Around the mid-1860’s, he ceased to paint the war and its effects on veterans, and began to portray the feminine leisure activity of croquet—awkward, stifled scenes of sturdy-bodied men and women with Classically generalized facial features that were reproduced in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*. John Wilmerding has indicated that Homer’s croquet paintings reflect the style and content of French Impressionist Claude Monet’s paintings of women in leisure activities during the 1860’s, such as an increased emphasis on natural lighting and the privileging of tonalities over details,
but also cautions that Monet was probably developing a parallel visual language, rather than directly influencing Homer.¹⁰²

On the other hand, there is no doubt that Edouard Manet’s “flat patterning, vigorous brushwork, and strong lighting” influenced Homer strongly. Two examples are Manet’s paintings *Olympia* and *Dejeuner sur l’Herbe* (1863, oil on canvas, Musée d’Orsay) which were rejected by the same Universal Exposition that accepted Homer’s work—but were hanging in Paris when Homer visited.¹⁰³ Edgar Degas is also purported to have been a European role model for Homer, for aesthetic qualities similar to those that Manet offered, and because Degas’s work provided an exposure to Japanese prints. Indeed, Homer was likely exposed to “Oriental” subjects around this time; Asian painting, with its spatial flatness and asymmetrical compositional design, had a lasting impact on Homer, who began to submit drawings of Chinese-Americans in New York to *Harper’s* in the late 1860’s.

As his artistic success accumulated, Homer began to focus increasingly on painting—first in watercolor, and then in oil. Even in an era in which other younger fellow artists were praised for training extensively abroad in Germany and France, Homer won countless accolades for a “coarse” style that has been compared to Walt Whitman’s contemporaneous poetry. Some critics, such as Earl Shinn, who was fashionably fond of French art such as the work by Eastman Johnson’s polished mentor, Thomas Couture, complained,

“Homer has learned to see Nature in breadths...admirable for a sketcher and for a colorist...an unusual power of balance and self repression...these are the virtues of a

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¹⁰² Wilmerding, 48.
¹⁰³ Wilmerding, 49.
sincere, direct style and an unsophisticated way of looking at things....[but they also demonstrate] all the ravellings and loose ends of execution.” 104

But as often as these complaints surfaced, largely in response to the Asian-inspired flatness of forms and space that would, ironically, inspire countless figurative artists of the next generation, so did compliments. The American public lauded the strength of compelling narrative in Homer’s work, the ability to combine formally interesting and appealing qualities with a clear story, which made it infinitely more saleable. By the late 1860’s he was producing remarkable genre paintings featuring children that seemingly built directly on Eastman Johnson’s work. Childhood remained a major focus of Homer’s work through the 1870s, after which he virtually dropped children from his work, turning to images of adults in conflict with nature, and then, lastly, to pure landscape. 105

**Homer: The Little Red Schoolhouse Paintings**

Many of Homer’s paintings produced during the early 1870’s are images of children interacting in or around a little red schoolhouse; how the children, and their markedly female schoolteachers, comport themselves becomes social commentary.

Homer visited a schoolhouse near Hurley, New York, in the Catskills in 1871 to witness newfangled childcare techniques firsthand. He also spent an entire

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105 Sarah Burns argues that Homer’s paintings of children are a calculated response to Johnson’s authority in the field of American genre painting. Like Johnson, Homer recognized the rich demand for the subject and the social change, or resistance to social change, that it represented in the face of post-bellum industrial America. See Burns, “In Whose Shadow? Eastman Johnson and Winslow Homer in the Postwar Decades,” 184-214.
summer and autumn producing thirty watercolors at a farmhouse called Houghton Farm in Mountainville, New York, a property owned by patron and friend Lawson Valentine, where he used the children of the Babcock family as his models. As a result of these two trips to rural New York, many of Homer’s paintings of this period focus directly on schoolteachers and schoolhouse settings.

During the mid-1800’s, there was no more popular subject of intellectual discourse than the “little red schoolhouse,” the icon of American simplicity and resourcefulness, the fact that it was physically and metaphorically “vanishing.” As Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., has noted, the subject matter of many books written during the 1870’s, but set a few decades prior, was the disappearance of the country school in the face of industrialization and urbanization. Edward Eggleston’s *The Hoosier School* (1871), is an example of such a text that engages this subject. The country school that was “threatened” by new liberal European ideas about raising and educating the young was a topic so popular, that those who painted imagery including country schoolhouses were clever “self-marketers” injecting themselves into the dialogue of popular social issues. Homer had already built a thriving career of popular illustration with his woodcut engravings; clearly savvy to the way topics marketed a career, he was one such individual—and indeed, *Snap the Whip* takes place in front of a schoolhouse.

Homer’s watercolor *The Blackboard* (1877, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), reveals that schoolteachers and specific debates centered on their small charges were frequently on Homer’s mind. The painting exhibits

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106 Cikovsky, 88.
stunning passages of precision and airiness, revealing Homer to be a true master of the medium. A young female teacher in sage green petticoats, a blue checkered apron, and wearing a tidy white bow in her hair places her free arm behind her back while pointing a needle-sharp baton at the chalkboard. Ten visible white chalk illustrations of geometric modules are visible behind her. The composition further echoes the notion of geometry by repeating the rectangular shape of the blackboard—in ghostly passages of cinnamon, slate, and sand hue. What are these shapes that she so intently discusses?

The teacher, practically a child herself, demonstrates the geometric principles of the Walter Smith Theory of drawing, which resonated with the most advanced educational precepts of the era. Homer’s signature appears on the board where the symbols of Smith’s theory appear, clearly endorsing the new pedagogy. Behind these novel teaching methods that Homer explored was the notion that children possessed specific cognitive and emotional needs.

In fact, Homer’s paintings of schoolhouses in this period alternate in tone. At times they evoke new, progressive approaches. At other times Homer renders humorous vignettes of the severe, borderline sadistic practices of the past. For instance, while the exclusive femaleness of educators in Homer's paintings displays that he supported vanguard pedagogy, the teaching habits within the iconic “Little Red Schoolhouse” that he painted were harsh. *The Country School* (1873, Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts), is one of two versions. In the painting, the teacher stands authoritatively at her desk, which is static, solid, and
central. She brandishes her lesson book and watchfully scans the activities of her students. At the viewer’s right, a very small weeping boy studies with a girl. He is still young enough to be part of a unisex classroom characteristic of nineteenth century children’s culture up until age six. In the later version of this painting, the weeping child and his female companion are omitted from the right, but the same cross-legged boy sitting closest to the schoolteacher buries his head resignedly in his book, and reappears in a painting as well as a woodcut engraving of the same school interior, called *Noon Recess* (1873, wood engraving after original drawing, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), in which insult is added to injury by the happy faces of other children playing freely and exuberantly right outside the window.

Homer’s oil painting *Snap the Whip* (1871-2), is the largest and perhaps the most famous instance of Homer’s dialogue with Eastman Johnson, and arguably the masterpiece of his early career. Insofar as it documents a large cast of children endearingly running amok, the painting is a clear tribute to the *Old Stagecoach*. A red schoolhouse in the middle background shines as the brightest spot on the canvas. Its windows and doors open, letting in the breeze, hinting that the building has quite recently been happily vacated. It is the prison from which the children are liberated. The only other human architecture is a white shed in the far left background. An array of adults, presumably parents, and little girls stand watch in front of the shed. Two dark-haired little girls carry a white hoop and loiter self-consciously. It is highly significant that they are dismissed from the rough game

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107 One version currently resides at the St. Louis Art Museum and is the principal, “detailed” (Randall Griffin’s words) version. The other resides at the Addison Gallery of Art.
played by the little boys, a game they are clearly deemed unfit to play because they are girls and implicitly more fragile—whereas in Homer’s prototype, Johnson’s The Old Stagecoach, differences of gender are not acknowledged by the romping children.

The only adults in the composition are the painted specks behind them who hail one of the wildly rollicking youngsters to stop playing and join their family. But the little boys are happy for the first time in American history to belong to a subculture in which adults permit them to socialize unmonitored for unprecedented periods of time (a distinctly nineteenth-century subculture that Anthony Rotundo has referred to as “Boy Culture”). And so, they are not listening to the beckoning of their parents. They work as a team, both loyal and violent, hands linked like a chain, to remain standing as long as possible through a series of gyrating sprints. Their game is the titular activity of the painting, “Snap-the-Whip.” Two comparably scrawny boys—the only two wearing shoes—fall out of the arc of tense motion created by their compatriots. A boy in white and a boy with a red cap watch their skinny friends collapsing into the grass and flowers. One of these observers clasps the hand of a stripe-shirted buddy on the right, and a much taller boy, both of whom are slack-jawed in their exertion. The tall boy clings to the hand of another boy in white, the next link in the chain. The boy in white, who stumbles, is a fulcrum. He is yanked taut between two opposing forces: the tall boy forces him forward, but his remaining team members, behind him, mightily pull him backward. The pinnacle of

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the red schoolhouse is directly behind him and compositionally reinforces this microcosmic dramatic moment.

The boy at the far right wins the title of strongest: he wraps his arms around and steadies a friend against the entire forward force of the team. The strain shows as he tosses back his head and cringes through a smile. Close-up views display great attention to the seven standing boys’ bare feet. Homer has emphasized their ruddy toes, the veins in their ankles, and the muscles in their calves. These are hardy country children whose hides are healthily toughened by their unbridled exertions.

Homer has painted a child’s game with austere, almost Classical monumentality. The winning boys’ bodies are statuesque and sturdy, which “enhances the mood of seriousness” about a subject that Johnson had portrayed as merely endearing. Significantly, this exuberant game is also slightly dangerous; a hat has tumbled off onto the ground behind the boy who is the lynchpin of the composition—the boy whose arms look like they will be wrenched from his body. The colors of the landscape reflect the autumnal hues indigenous to the American Northeast, further suggesting that the intrepidness of these youths is a proud native trait.

Essentially, Homer has recorded little boys roughhousing in an unstructured outdoor environment, without restrictive adult supervision. It is important to note that there are two types: the barefoot brawny boys, and the weaker, better clothed, boys who fall out of the arc of bodies and lose the game. As with many of Homer’s key works, there are two versions of this painting, one in the Butler Institute of Art,

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109 Wilmerding, 86.
Youngstown, Ohio, and one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The most visible difference is the Metropolitan Museum version’s omission of the almost ominous mountain range in the background. The Metropolitan Museum version also omits the parents and little girls and furthers the feral, unclaimed quality of the playing boys. The Butler Institute version came first. A graphite tracing by Homer owned by the Butler Institute shows that he copied the basic composition for the Metropolitan Museum version in 1873.

The Darwinian supremacy of the strapping country boys safeguards them against the dangers of changing American mores. The target of the children’s mischief is the dandification associated with the forces of too-rapid social change. If shifting standards fate a young male to become a pale, city fop, then rebellious country mischief renders our bad boys heroic, for it entails unquestionable masculinity.\(^{110}\)

But ties between the rich pedagogical reform dialogue occurring at this time, and Homer’s paintings, are even more direct. The freedom to play, to self-discover through disobedience, trial-and-error, and peer socialization, and the chance to connect to and learn from natural forms, that these "bad boys" enjoy, could be direct quotes from a Pestalozzian lecture or Froebelian Kindergarten manual—or a children’s book of the era influenced by the same intellectual reforms. It is, in fact, no wonder that the child-centric pedagogical revolution flourished most in America, considering how well its ideas about the role and identity of children harmonized with nineteenth-century American self-perception. Not only is it permissible here

for little boys to disobey, it is *desirable*: a measuring stick of their normalcy.

America’s self-image was the same. Americans, particularly the many disciples of Transcendentalism, saw nature and the wilderness as their peculiar fortune with an almost religious devoutness. They saw themselves as hardy and resourceful, champions of creativity, ingenuity, and democracy. And what else does this painting represent, but children acting out these very qualities in a wilderness setting, through the indispensable learning tool of play?

**Homer: The Gloucester Harbor Paintings**

Homer’s watercolors of fishermen’s sons in Gloucester Harbor belong to a series that he began to paint during his first major visit, summer 1873, and reprised during his second, July 1880. True to Homer’s tendency to render seemingly cute, trivial, and mundane subjects deeply and eerily serious, these paintings almost obsessively reiterate the theme of childhood doomed to end. Little boys will someday have to grow up and face adult worries and hazards.

Homer’s painting *The Boat Builders* (1873, oil on panel, Indianapolis Museum of Art), is part of an entire series of watercolors and oil paintings of small boys who, through playful mimicry, prepare for the hazards faced by seafaring fathers. The image features two little boys sitting on a rocky coast crafting toy vessels while three real ships perch on the horizon. Their faces are obscured by their straw hats, their heads tilted downward as they focus on their construction. Dead vegetation and harsh sharp rocks clutter the landscape around their two forms. One particularly large boulder behind the boy on the right almost exactly echoes his
pyramidal form. It draws the eye to his person, to the toy boat he fashions, and to the exact same sort of boat “behind” him on the ocean horizon line, which is real but ironically looks smaller—distant in space, and, symbolically, time. Several more actual white sailboats dot the bright blue sea. At the time, there was probably not a household in Gloucester that did not have a relative who had been lost at sea. The boys play without care, but their fathers may drown.

Homer’s oil painting *Dad’s Coming!* (1873, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), makes this fact even more explicit. While a mother or older sister with a telling expression of stoicism on her face holds an infant, a straw-hatted little boy perches on a rowboat tethered to a fallen wooden beam, and scans the sailboats on the ocean horizon. He patiently, faithfully awaits the return of a father whose homecoming may never take place. Behind the woman and infant, in the upper right, a fishing net dangles over wooden barrel. It is not difficult to make a connection between the limp net, which references the hazardous occupation of the absent father, and a hanged body.

Homer’s watercolor *Three Boys on the Shore* (1873, gouache and watercolor on paper mounted to board, Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago), featuring three boys sprawled to the left on the sand and watching boats pass them by, reprises this theme of tedious, tense waiting, but with the softening influence of a returned “lovably lazy truants” theme. Their three forms splay on a sandy, rocky hill like successive words in a sentence. Their backs are to the viewer, who may feel like an encroacher on their leisurely afternoon of ship-spotting. Once again they are implicitly linked to the sailors dangerously at sea by the presence of a partially
dismantled small rowboat peeking from behind their lounging spot to the lower right. Occasionally, as in his highly lauded Breezing Up (A Fair Wind), 1873-6 (oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), finished the same year as Mark Twain published Huckleberry Finn, Homer broke from this theme of forebodingly absent father figures, but these images were always accompanied by lesser-known works of the same subject, such as Three Boys in a Dory with Lobster Pots (1875, watercolor and gouache over graphite on paper, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri). In this painting, if one looks closely, the three young lobster trappers all turn mid-trek to stare at a sailboat ominously billowing smoke in the distant left of the composition.

Homer's watercolor How Many Eggs? (1873, watercolor and gouache on cardboard, Private Collection), demonstrates that some of these childhood games contain brutal undertones. Here, two boys in straw hats raid a bird's nest. The paper is cropped in a very modernist manner with a high horizon that helps to emphasize flat design over mimetic space. One of the boys sits right on this horizon line. He perches on a sand dune in a lush spot of sea grass. The boy's companion struggles up a steep incline and seizes a tuft of sea grass, pulling himself up to the point where the nest hides. He presumably asks his friend the question that earns the watercolor its title. Strikingly abstract black birds dot the sand dune and dark blue sky, frightened away from the nest, and become indeterminable from grass, driftwood, pebbles and shadows. Homer's amazing facility with the medium, the kind that earned him a position in the New York Watercolor Society and the right to 34 entries in a single 1875 exhibition, is apparent here, in deftly handled passages of
cool gray-blue wash that convincingly evoke the shadows of an early day. The little boys disrupt a life cycle, once more unattended by adults who would check their injurious behavior.

The borderline violence of *Snap the Whip*, the foreboding adult/child mirror imaging in the Gloucester Harbor watercolors, and their occasional allusions to death itself, point to a common theme: Homer apparently saw childhood not as an age of innocence, but as a period of conflict that sets the stage for the even more brutal struggles of the adult world. Possibly the most famous study on Homer to take this stance was by Jules Prown during the 1970's. Prown examined Homer’s schoolhouse paintings in conjunction with later images of adults in similar, but far more dangerous, situations of teamwork and alienation, such as *The Life Line*, 1884. Indeed, Homer’s work has been described as poignant and haunting specifically because of the “fugitive” nature of childhood. They infuse the brevity of childhood with melancholy because of childhood’s implicit transience.

Part of the reason for this ominous artistic tone may have been autobiographical. Winslow’s financial and emotional dependence on his older brother, Charles, is an autobiographical element in his paintings of male siblings. This ambivalence towards Homer’s own situation may be extended to his view of a child’s position in society. Children were free of adult responsibilities and concerns, and yet inherently dependent upon the care of the adults to whom they belonged.

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111 Conrads, 74.
113 Griffin, 74.
Winslow’s own father, Charles Homer Sr., was repeatedly absent from family life. Charles Sr. made foolish investments and left his wife and children to fend financially for themselves. Winslow depended upon Charles, not their patriarch, for personal and professional guidance from a time when both were young boys. Charles Jr.’s success as a chemist provided a steady income that ultimately freed Winslow to pursue painting full time. Charles also introduced Winslow to Lawson Valentine, the owner of a varnishing company and one of Winslow’s most important patrons during the 1870’s, when his earliest paintings of childhood emerged. It is no wonder that Winslow would think so highly of youth and attempt to supplant the complications of adulthood with paintings of children. After all, his hero, Charles Jr., became his hero while still a boy himself. Yet the disturbing signs of growing up remained in his images.

Social Commentary in a Farmhouse Setting: Gender and Race

It is sometimes easy to detect social statements about childhood in Homer’s early work. The enviable harmony between young white and African-American boys, and the unfair struggles of young factory girls, are two examples. Truant schoolboys in Homer’s paintings often bridged troubling social frictions that existed during the Reconstruction.

Homer’s oil paintings The Unruly Calf (1875, oil on canvas, Private Collection), and Watermelon Boys (1876, oil on canvas, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, New York), for instance, show white and African-American children interacting with ease in the absence of adults (though it should be noted
that, in the former, the white children do not trouble themselves to help the African-American child with the rebellious quadruped that represents them). Truant schoolboys in Homer’s paintings, rightfully free and unfettered, often bridged troubling social frictions that existed during the Reconstruction. It is nevertheless worth noting that even here, in the so-called haven of “boy culture,” Homer is careful to acknowledge differing psychological reactions among boys of differing races: based on differing social experience during the post-bellum period. It is the African-American child who sits upright and gazes with a nervous alertness over his shoulder—this child, unlike his compatriots, will face severe consequences should the truants be caught. Ultimately, though, Homer implies that the hope of racial harmony is more realized in the teamwork of unsupervised little boys than it would be among adult men.

Homer’s gouache *Feeding Time* (1878, watercolor and gouache over graphite on paper, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts), on the other hand, betrays that gender tensions in Homer’s work were never surmounted. A little boy and slightly older girl lounge at a broken wooden fence surrounded by fractured dollops of thin green wash that give a naturalistic impression of a thick woodland. Dappled brown and white cows graze directly behind them. The boy watches as the girl reaches over to feed and pet the livestock. He surveys her activity, hands behind back, but bashfully keeps his eyes averted from her face. In fact, Homer composed an entire sub-type of country children paintings, featuring far more overtly awkward young courtiers and bashful young girls, which are too numerous to examine here. These empathetic studies in
budding romance, as well as a possibly deeper autobiographical awkwardness on Homer’s part, remain among his most compelling images of children and adolescents.  

Homer’s oil painting *The Morning Bell/The Old Mill* (1871, oil on canvas, Yale University Art Gallery), demonstrates that the artist also made subtle nods to the plight of young working girls. The image is unusual in that it applies the Social Darwinism of his boy paintings to a female subject. This image shows a group of young ladies called to work by the factory bell which can be seen at the top of the mill to the left. A young girl walking to her workplace crosses a see-saw-like bridge. She wears a bright, Sunday-best red dress as she treads closer to her place of employment; her young, clustered companions on the right are resigned to a drab fate and wear equally drab attire. The girl in red is still innocent but the implication is that a wearying new industrial system will eradicate that innocence. As seems to

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115 There are many instances in Homer’s oeuvre outside his images of children that bolster the notion that he suffered from considerable anxiety over male/female social relationships, which is significant considering that the postbellum period was a time of rapid change in the role of women in society. Hunter Ingalls most closely studied this aspect of Homer’s content. Homer’s paintings of croquet players are painfully awkward images of stiff-bodied ladies and gentlemen who play the game side by side but fail to make eye contact. Homer’s many images of women in Culleroats, England, feature strangely statuesque beings with objects completely obscuring their rescuers’ faces (*The Life-Line*), cutting off their ability to communicate, or who even seem bizarrely passive and trancelike (*Undertow*). And Randall Griffin notes that in 1868, Homer completed a wood engraving for Harper’s, *What She Sees There*, based on a popular Offenbach opera that chillingly parodied a woman entering a room of beautiful severed female heads—a symbol of the vain extremes to which women went on behalf of “evening entertainments.” Furthermore, Homer’s sexual orientation was ambiguous. He found conventional adult romantic relationships strange and troublesome. To him, they were so unbearable that he avoided the use of female models in the process of making the art that was his livelihood. Henry Adams’s “The Identity of Winslow Homer’s Mystery Woman,” presents the likelihood that the model for Homer’s “stock gingerhaired female” was actually a young boy named Joseph Keenan. As avoidance of the melancholy topic of heterosexual adult relationships, Homer painted the preferred alternative of childhood: “The relaxed, bantering relationship between two boys and a young girl.” Adams, Henry. “The Identity of Winslow Homer’s ‘Mystery Woman,’” in *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 132, No. 1045 (April, 1990), 244-252: 249. Finally Griffin has noted that Homer regularly used a male model to paint female children: a boy named Joseph Keenan posed for several canvases, including for instance *Shall I Tell You Your Fortune?*, 1876.
be a consistent theme in the paintings of Homer, little girls are not permitted the same type of innocence as little boys to begin with, because Homer never depicts little girls at play (unless they are adolescents or young adults and it is a form of play meant to court men, such as croquet). Homer depicts girls reading, carrying out rural chores, or succumbing with docility to the adult responsibility of work.

An earlier wood engraving that Homer composed for Harper's, July 1868, shows a long line of “downtrodden workers” coming out of “an immense, prison-like building.” In the era of the infamous Lovell cotton mills, The Morning Bell satisfies two simultaneous readings. At first, it is a rite-of-passage image of youth assuming adult tasks for the first time. Upon closer inspection, The Morning Bell(e) is an unusually incisive critique of the anesthetizing forces of industrialization: “Homer only rarely revealed his moral views in images, which suggests that he felt particular bitterness about the industrial exploitation of women and children. The evident outrage expressed in this factory scene…suggests a liberal persuasion.” It should be noted that all progressive American pedagogical advances during the nineteenth century were made by liberals—further evincing ties between these cultural developments and Homer’s paintings. Industrialization was the most profound “cultural force that shaped the nation” in this time, when in 1868 more than half of America’s 40 million workers were still on farms; therefore, as Randall Griffin puts it, “For many Americans, factories meant oppression and exploitation—a view that we know Homer shared.”

116 Griffin, 67.
117 Ibid.
118 Griffin, 66.
Homer: Conclusions

Winslow Homer was essentially a key innovator in nineteenth-century child iconography. He used his popularity and prolific output to expound upon topics already broached by earlier, older artists. Homer and Eastman Johnson are often compared and considered two of the most influential American painters of the middle and latter nineteenth century. Their subject matter often cross-germinated, but Homer took Johnson's budding attitude toward childhood a step further. For Homer, robust little boys in agrarian settings became synonymous with anti-industrialist, “anti-modernist” sentiment. They became mascots of a well-developed and long-standing rhetoric for nostalgia. The child was the natural counterpart, in a binary of nature/culture, to the “over-socialized” adult world. Precedents as distant as Dutch and Flemish paintings of the seventeenth century are numerous. And in France, which Homer once visited, consequently to be impacted by the Barbizon School and Realists, painters such as Edouard Manet sometimes composed visual commentary on the subject of the child’s frank and sincere spirit, such as Soup Bubbles (1867, oil on canvas, Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon).

What set Homer’s depictions of children apart was not so much that they were romantically equated with nature, candor, and a simpler past—which they were—but that in the process, their disorderliness, their truancy from school and work and all other responsibilities marking entry into the adult sphere, also became markers of virtue. These children were symptoms of the new forms of child pedagogy that Homer witnessed firsthand and actively endorsed. On his canvases,
they play-acted a rejection of postbellum society and all of its new and unsettling foibles, an aspect of Homer’s work that makes his children implicit social statements. Yet their unruly activities were actually a poignant illustration of the fact that they were fated to become what they rejected. Play as rebellion can only last until the boy becomes a man and can flee responsibility no longer. Homer underscored this bittersweet fact by juxtaposing boys against exact analogues in the adult world for which, through disobedience and play, they were actually preparing themselves.

**John George Brown**

John George Brown was the first American painter to portray children in the urban street trades that exploited them. This complicated the cultural heroism of the Bad Boy, while also participating in such imagery. But his depictions of street urchins were more reactionary justifications than forthright records of childhood.

Whereas his colleagues, Johnson and Homer, clearly supported the developing social advocacy of children, the genre painter John George Brown felt differently. While sharing his colleagues’ taste for nostalgia and for rugged ill-behaved little boys, Brown also balked from the notion of charity aid for poor, laboring, and homeless children. His view of American pickpockets and guttersnipes, diametrically opposed to the work of the budding documentary photography tradition, was almost artificially picturesque. Ironically the obvious pretense with which Brown portrays unruly little boys—including the first sight of “Bad Boys” in an urban setting—underscores a much more tragic reality.
Background

Brown was born on November 11, 1831 to the working-class in Durham, England, trained as miniaturist painter, and like Winslow Homer was equally proficient in watercolors and oils. His life would have been limited to work at a glass factory had he not encountered an “enlightened” teacher in artist William Bell Stott, who taught night classes at the Government School of Design in Newcastle; Brown also trained in Edinburgh and was influenced by Victorian British artists such as William McTaggart, William Orchardson, and Hugh Cameron, and later by disparate sources such as the eighteenth-century satirist William Hogarth, and the Pre-Raphaelite John Everett Millais. Brown came to America in 1856 and settled in Brooklyn. Despite being born in England, Brown spent the majority of his life in America and was classified as an American painter. He enrolled at the newly reopened National Academy of Design in Manhattan, where he attended Antique and Life school classes for a year. He also attended Brooklyn’s Graham Art School, where he studied drawing and trained as a portraitist; he soon learned that his skills were better served in genre painting—particularly of children. In fact, a critic once declared of his child subjects that he was “without a rival.”

Martha Hoppin has suggested that Brown also took note of the popularity of Winslow Homer’s watercolors of country children during the 1870’s and wisely followed suit. Brown even served on the board of the American Society of Painters in Water Colors and proposed Homer’s election as a member.

In 1860 Brown moved to the Tenth

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120 Hoppin, 86.
Street Studio Building, inhabited by many American art notables such as Albert Bierstadt and Worthington Whittredge, who became his friends.

By 1863 Brown was a Full Academician at the National Academy of Design. The now-missing painting *Brotherly Love* (1859, oil on canvas), featuring a pair of siblings wincing almost comically in a cold rural landscape, is generally acknowledged as his breakthrough work. His first major commission, which earned him the position of academician, is considered *Curling: A Scottish Game at Central Park* (1862, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas), a sprawling panorama produced for the St. Andrew’s Curling Club members. Brown often used his own wife and children (especially daughters Charlotte and Isabelle) and his sisters-in-law, Emma and Jessie, as his models for rural scenes of children. He used lower-class boys in Brooklyn as his models for his urban scenes of children. His phenomenally successful commercial career, which pivoted on images of poor country and city children, spanned fifty years.121

**Brown’s “Happy” Urchins**

During the early 1860s, Brown split his commercial work between Pre-Raphaelite-inspired paintings of girls and straw-hatted boys in sun-dappled forests

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121 It is important to note that not every faction of the American art market had an appetite for Brown’s saccharine, anecdotal genre paintings of children. Barbara Dayer Gallati has noted that John Singer Sargent acknowledged a profound fatigue on the part of the National Academy of Design, private galleries, and European Salons, toward such “Christmas card” imagery, and consciously sought to reinvent the genre by combining the conservative innocuousness of a child subject with subversive aesthetic experimentation. Sargent did so to mixed degrees of success, which proves on the one hand that the demand for the Brown prototype of child imagery was high in the United States, and on the other that child imagery was relegated to a markedly inferior status in academic circles until Sargent, the reform photographers, and the American Realists began to radically change its conventions. See Gallati, *Great Expectations*. 
and charming urban street urchins. In most instances Brown portrayed working-
class children as well fed, clean, and content. In Perfectly Happy (1885, watercolor
on paper, Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio), for instance, a little
boy tugs on his suspender straps and strikes a charming carefree pose at his
bootblack stand.

Bootblacking was a relatively new profession. It became common in 1851 in
England for little boys to shine the shoes of visitors to the Great Exhibition in
London. Brown, an English native, most popularly portrayed happy-go-lucky
bootblacks, capitalizing on the novelty of the “profession.” Paddy Ryan, his
documented favorite child sitter, and others were handpicked by Brown off the
streets. Brown refused to paint any of these little boys until they had been scrubbed
clean of dirt and grime and clothed in materials provided by his studio.

Brown’s oil painting The Passing Show (1877, oil on canvas, Private
Collection), is one such conscious exercise in tableau-like artifice. The work was
exhibited at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1878 and at the Royal Academy in
London in 1880, featuring a group of little boys pointing at the viewer and heartily
laughing.

Brown’s oil painting A Jolly Lot (1885, oil on canvas, Private Collection), is
another representative example of his urban work. In this idyllic scene of boyhood
camaraderie that crosses racial lines, an African-American boy regales a group of
white boys who clap and egg on his storytelling. A Card Trick (1891, oil on canvas,

122 In Martha J. Hoppin, Country Paths and City Sideways: The Art of J.G. Brown (George Walter Vincent

123 See Martha Hoppin.
Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska), features an identical scenario, with the compositional direction reversed and the African-American child showing a cardsharp tactic to his three toothily grinning white compatriots. *A Card Trick* was one of three paintings that Brown targeted for audiences of the Chicago World’s Fair, 1891, which is where he primarily exhibited the painting. Brown understood well the phenomenal popularity of this particular way of presenting children.

Significantly, however, the African-American boy is serving the other boys by providing them entertainment between jobs, something that, despite the glowing humor in the image, tacitly upholds social hierarchy. Most of these images featured semi-circular clusters of children with a focal boy between eight and thirteen years old in the center.

Brown’s oil paintings *The Teacher* (1866-8, oil on canvas, Private Collection), and *What’s Your Name?* (1876, oil on canvas, Private Collection), address new ideas about educational practices. Both feature a small girl imperiously leading a “class” presumably in the cause of “social improvement”: the former painting shows her pointing bossily at an unruly gang of street children; and the latter shows her in the same position as the young schoolmistress of Homer’s *Blackboard*, holding a piece of chalk. The model is Belle Brown, Brown’s own daughter, whose name appears as a private joke on the chalkboard under the column “Bad.” Brown’s boy ruffians are humorous and do not necessarily espouse social reform measures. In fact he openly mocks female schoolteachers as uppity, bossy intruders upon the happy freedom of unruly young males.

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It is clear that Brown espoused no reformist goals in this painting. Despite	his own poor background, Brown persistently dismissed social measures aimed at
changing underprivileged children’s living conditions. In numerous public
statements, Brown derided attempts to eradicate child labor. Nonetheless, Brown
was the first American artist to feature the work of poor urban children—especially
bootblacks and newsboys. Thus, by admitting they existed, he unlocked the topic of
their exploitation.

I should acknowledge that Brown’s paintings of little girls did not implicate
that female spunkiness alone was undesirable. The Three Tomboys (1868, oil on
canvas, Private Collection), depicts a triad of schoolgirls, notably safely removed to
the haven of the countryside, sharing a swing, lurching along with its backward and
forward motion and laughing in happy abandon. The work might almost be
compared to Homer’s Snap the Whip, only with female participants. And in The
Peacemaker (1867, oil on canvas, Private Collection), it is a sturdy blond girl,
clasping the white apron of her blue dress, who shoves a street tough away from the
frightened, redheaded, barefoot boy whom he was pummeling. One reviewer
identified the beaten child as the heroine’s little brother.

But on the same token, Brown painted images that explore polite behavior,
such as Street Gallantry (1884, oil on canvas, San Antonio Museum of Art). In this
painting, three flower-vending boys surround a girl in a white frock and red tights,
peddling blossoms to her. The blossoms are the same color of her attire, equating

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her symbolically with what is being sold. In shadow, two more boys watch the
transaction and one even scratches his chin as if appraising the little girl;
presumably this is meant to be humorous but it is definitely not a demonstration of
children play-acting forward-thinking gender roles.

In still another image, *Tough Customers* (1881, oil on canvas, Museo Thyssen-
Bornemisza, Madrid), the girl is the flower vendor, and she scowls in frustration as
three flirtatious boys essentially heckle her into creating the perfect bouquet. From
the appearance of clipped petals and leaves at her feet, she has been working at this
product for an infuriatingly long interval. Brown’s goal is to create a comical
vignette of gold-hearted urchins who mean no real harm by their mischief, though
they are complacent to the status quo; in other instances, these urchins rescue lost
children and patch up wounded, stray dogs.

Brown’s oil painting *The Lost Child* (1881, oil on canvas, Private Collection),
shows that he was also an apologist for the status quo in other ways. The little girl
featured in the center is dark haired, olive-skinned, has a tear in her red tights, and
wears a green beaded necklace. She is clearly Italian. The little boy reaching out to
embrace her is a pink-cheeked redhead—obviously Irish or Scottish. Hoppin
indicates that the leader of this bunch and most of his compatriots are German or
English. All of the passive players are likely to be Italian or Jewish. The cultural
typology is remarkable and is not resolved by Brown. Indeed, his broaching of the
subject is only the beginning; it is also only occasionally, in paintings such as *Greek
Vs. Greek* (1866, oil on canvas, Private Collection), featuring two little boys ready to
engage in fisticuffs, that Brown even acknowledges real social tumult.
Despite these elements of the reactionary, Brown must still be credited with drawing attention to street children and child laborers as an undeniable American social reality. His depiction of the subject never subverted the quaintness of a Victorian English genre painter, and his children are always physically and psychologically appealing characters. But he did, on occasion, acknowledge the hardship that they faced. Paintings such as *Tuckered Out—The Shoeshine Boy* (1888, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), painted in the same year as Jacob Riis’s iconic photo-journalist testimony to slum life, *How the Other Half Lives*, quietly comment on the exhaustive nature of child labor: the little golden-haired boy slumps against a wall, tools dropped at his feet. Yet even Martha Hoppin, Brown’s foremost scholar, acknowledges that Brown shied from acknowledging that the child was a “vagrant” by placing him against a situationally nondescript green wall.127 Another painting, *Eyeing the Fruitstand* (1884, oil on canvas, Private Collection), poignantly depicts a street urchin’s moral struggle between stealing an apple and remaining an honest but hungry little worker.

**Brown: Conclusions**

John George Brown was essentially a reactionary artist. Brown used ethnically diverse subjects—but usually from earlier generations such as the German and Irish, not current generations, such as the Eastern Europe and Italians. This was because the Germans and Irish had already been culturally assimilated and were more picturesque, less threatening subjects. If Eastern European or Italian

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children were portrayed, it was in order to lionize the storybook heroism of the
German and Irish immigrant children who befriended them—something that was
quite distanced from the reality of immigrant turf wars erupting in city ghettos
during the late 1800s. Brown’s work carefully flatters the picturesque realm of the
rising American urban center, particularly with respect to its child laborers; the
value of his work is that, placed next to other images of the subject that come later, it
exposes the artificial, culturally constructed views that Americans held toward
children in need. Finally, for all its reactionary qualities, Brown’s work also forced
American viewers even to contemplate the fact that child labor existed.

Conclusions: Painters, Pedagogues, and Authors of the Post-bellum American
Children

The children’s literature that I have already analyzed runs directly parallel to
much of Johnson, Homer, and Brown’s art. One discovers exact correlations between
many of Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Mark Twain’s stories, and paintings of
childhood being produced simultaneously. This attests to the powerful cultural
influence that social advances, such as new pedagogy, exacted on American art.

Take, for instance, the scene of Eastman Johnson’s Old Stagecoach and scenes
in contemporaneous children’s books about rebellion. We recall that the stagecoach
prop is central to one of Aldrich’s short stories. It is an adult accoutrement similarly
victimized by little boys, who ignite it and push it into a river. The blazing object of
the children’s wrath, as pictured in a printed illustration accompanying Aldrich’s
original text, is like a more violent echo of the way that Johnson’s children transform
their stagecoach into a plaything obsolete to adults, a tool of truancy and make-believe.

We also find a powerful visual analogue between Mark Twain’s stories and Winslow Homer’s paintings. Like Homer, as a youth, Twain lost his father figure. As did Homer, Twain seems to have lamented an ambivalent human condition at once joyfully free and “naturally savage,” yet still bound to Reconstruction-Era social conflict. And like the famous painter, Twain “used the Dear Reader narrative device to rouse the reader from complacency through intimacy rather than alienation.”

The obvious comparisons are between Twain’s rebelliously gold-hearted child protagonists and the loafing mischief-makers in Homer’s schoolhouse series. But also, Twain’s “children’s” books, their disturbing hints at self-orphaning and the dissolution of the nuclear family, are visually analogous to the solitude and stillness that permeate much of Homer’s imagery. This is particularly true of Homer’s paintings of fishermen’s sons—building toy boats, and facing the still, seemingly infinite horizon on which their fathers disappeared and may never return. Scholars have even noted that the primary difference between Homer and his most obvious predecessor of an earlier generation, William Sidney Mount, is that Mount’s paintings of little boys still feature a humorously didactic “irate adult.” Homer’s adults are quite often absent altogether. The effect is sometimes liberating in tone, as in Watermelon Boys and The Nooning. But more markedly, at other times, as in

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128 Lubin, 176. Or, perhaps, it is more accurate to say that both Twain and Homer used intimacy alongside alienation: Both author and painter draw the audience close to their everyday subjects, only to forcibly push the audience away. This is achieved by the narrator’s mixture of warmth and conversational circuitousness. It is similarly achieved by the painter’s mix of intensely engaged human subjects viewed from an unbreakable distance.

129 See Sarah Burns. See also Randall Griffin.
Crossing the Pasture, the absence of adults adds something faintly eerie and
menacing to the glowing good humor. For instance, in this painting, two young male
siblings balk in their path across a grassy field. The elder brother grasps a twig that
he will use, in the absence of a father figure, to protect the cowering younger
brother from a temperamental bull who has already seen them entering its
territory. Their wide-eyed, anxious gazes, and the naïve use of such an impotent
weapon against such a dangerous beast, is both comical and psychologically tense.
The Huck Finns of American popular culture have exiled adults from their world of
nature and free play, but with ambiguous results.

Twain’s literature in particular berates the harsh prior views of childhood
with surprising acrimony. Once again, the usurping of cruel, stupid, and senseless
adults is a central goal. Huck Finn and slave friend Jim switch roles of adult
authority and juvenile submission as they sail down the Mississippi marveling at the
general cruelty, hypocrisy, and stupidity of adults. Similarly Twain’s Tom Sawyer
pranks his own “death,” unthinkingly pains his aunt, and temporarily escapes the
confines of a civilized household. Like Huck and Tom, Johnson’s children
dismember and defy the property of adults. Twain’s boys, like legendary patriots,
become heroes for mischievously defying the rules of a tyrant—the teacher. For
instance, “His rod and his ferule were seldom idle now—at least among the smaller
pupils,” Twain, as Tom Sawyer, vilifies a malicious old schoolmaster. Tom muses
about the pomposity of final examinations, in which the wreathed schoolhouse has
the schoolmaster “throned” and “rows of small boys washed and dressed to an
intolerable state of discomfort...plotting revenge,” while a little girl with a lisp is “cruelly scared” delivering an oral presentation.

While Homer is never documented to have read Mark Twain’s novels, their popularity was so absolute, and their publication, alongside many satirical short stories set in the schoolhouse, so directly contemporaneous to Homer’s first paintings of children that it is impossible to dismiss affinities as mere coincidence.

Taken as a whole what these correlations reveal is an epochal cultural shift in the perception of childhood’s very nature. Up to this time, society perceived the disobedience of children as a problem of original sin. Children’s innate wickedness could only be checked by constant religious instruction and fierce physical punishment.¹³⁰

On the other hand, Twain and Aldrich celebrated the unruliness of children as a natural phase of moving towards adulthood. Contemporaneous painters such as Johnson, Homer, and Brown responded to this new, popular impulse in the perception of American childhood. We have seen genre painters taking firm positions on these issues, which are visible in their paintings of children. For instance, while Homer’s work seems to endorse educational reform as in his painting *The Blackboard*, Brown believed compulsory education laws were detrimental to the survival skills of young children in the street trades. This he believed despite his awareness of “padrones,” or middlemen who supplied these children involuntarily to the United States from the Neapolitan Alps. Brown in fact called compulsory education “a new kind of padrone system” that “enslaved”

children.\textsuperscript{131} His images concordantly deride the little schoolmistresses who satirically represent kindergarten’s newfangled educational practices.

\textbf{Conclusions: The Genre Painters.}

One afternoon in 1871, an illustrator well known for his austere war-front woodcut engravings in \textit{Harper’s Magazine} paid a visit to the little one-room red schoolhouse at the outskirts of the Catskill Mountains, near Hurley, New York. He sported a typical bushy moustache, his manner was quiet and taciturn, and his cynical eyes had the baggy sleepiness of a Basset hound’s. This was the now-famous American master, Winslow Homer. With some uncanny instinct, he recognized that battles had become less significant than a seemingly more ordinary subject: the American schoolroom. Indeed, it is telling that Homer’s paintings of schoolrooms have become American icons to a degree that his Civil War paintings never did.

Shortly thereafter, Homer completed a panoramic painting of the “sacrosanct national icon” of American primary education in the late nineteenth-century: \textit{The Country School}, in which “the good boy knows his lesson, the sulky boy...does not, the studious boy...syllabl[es] his lesson, and there is a little boy sniffing” next to an awkwardly glancing little girl, while her older reflection, an ideally beautiful female schoolteacher, surveys the proceedings.\textsuperscript{132} A verdant mountain, symbol of freedom, the national wilderness, and timeless youth, swells like an ocean tide out the window, beckoning to the stifled children. One painting later, Homer explored many of the same themes in a more rebellious manner. The exuberant \textit{Snap the Whip},

\textsuperscript{131} See Hoppin, \textit{Country Paths and City Sideways.}
\textsuperscript{132} \textit{New York Evening Telegram}, 20 April 1872, p. 2, quoted in Randall Griffin, \textit{Winslow Homer: An American Vision}, 69
chronicles the country boys abandoning their schoolroom prison to engage in rough
county games at the foothills of the wilderness.

A new mode of portraying childhood was being invented. While Johnson,
Homer, and Brown owe a tribute to traditions already built, it is important to note
that they also rendered the “Bad Boy” archetype—that clear symptom of a shift in
the perception and treatment of children—the center of their work. They achieved
this unapologetically, and increasingly without the safety net of moral didacticism.
Even within the three painters’ work, however, it is obvious that the treatment of
the Bad Boy varies distinctly: with a pioneer in Johnson, a champion in Homer, and
an apologist in Brown.

The genre painters set the stage for an artistic trend: portraying childhood,
whether intentionally or symptomatically, as a symbol of evolving American values.
Indeed, as each chapter will aim to demonstrate, the changes undergone so rapidly
in American society at this particular moment—its fears, hopes, and larger social
agendas—were the reason why childhood became such a phenomenally popular
artistic subject. But while they all worked from the same basic paradigm—that
childhood was developmentally unique and children deserved more special
attention—artistic portrayals rarely showed ideological consensus. The next
chapter examines a completely different mode of portraying children—completely
different, but no less startling and innovative.

If there is anything that this dissertation seeks to prove, it is that, uniquely
during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when there was a shift in
American cultural norms, children were symbols of this change. Broader society was
never more sympathetic toward, even obsessed with, children and childhood than during the nineteenth century. Evidence of this fact begins with the American genre painters.
UNIT TWO: THE GENTEEEL TRADITION
CHAPTER III

LITERATURE AND PAINTING OF THE GENTEEL TRADITION (ca. 1880-1900)

“Family life was transformed at this time and...children became the center of the family’s existence. As living symbols of the family’s continuation, children were seen to deserve and require special education and protection, all in preparation for their futures as inheritors and perpetuators of the family’s legacy—material, genetic, and spiritual...As representations of actual people, they show only one side of the larger cultural picture since the children they portray belonged, for the most part, to families who could afford to commission works of art...intended to preserve the likeness of a precious child and to function as objects of aesthetic value.” ~Barbara Dayer Gallati, Children of the Gilded Era, p. 14.

Beginning in the 1880’s, a steadily growing oeuvre of paintings, prints, and pastels began to represent another distinct nineteenth-century schema of American childhood. This was the schema of elite childhood. Children became mascots of the genteel tradition, synonymous with abundance, personal and material success, and purity of creative vision. But markedly, strange new products resulted, and the dissonance between genteel ideals and genteel images deserves serious examination.133

The world of an affluent child, or at least the idea of it, was at once antithetical and complementary to that of barefoot boys and unruly schoolchildren. What was antithetical was the sense of privilege and social class. Genteel painting flaunted symbols of wealth such as servants, fine furniture, grand interiors, and

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133 Why is it that, for instance, in 1872, Whistler completed a portrait of Cicely Alexander, titled Harmony in Grey and Green, depicting a London banker’s white-clad daughter as a pale and somber being? Why, aside the characteristic love of uproar, would Whistler risk a seventy-sitting exercise in severity, the first in a series of “white girls” that important acolytes such as William Merritt Chase would emulate? See, for instance, Chase’s Girl in White, c. 1898-1901. Why was this “melancholy” type of child-likeness so important to Whistler and his ilk that the process reduced Cicely to tears, and caused critics to reject her disquieting visage? For more information see Barbara Dayer Gallati, Children of the Gilded Era: Portraits by Sargent, Renoir, Cassatt, and Their Contemporaries. London; New York: Merrell, 2004: p. 10.
fashionable clothes and jewelry. What was similar was the notion that childhood was a state somehow at odds with the adult world, and that it was not free from anxiety and emotional tension.

Like the genre painters, the genteel painters took increasing interest in a child’s separate, unique, and valuable place in human development. Their visual content suggests that they understood that a child needed to play freely, in a realm apart from that of adults, in order to mature healthily. And like the genre painters, the genteel painters borrowed actively from budding intellectual and literary discourse in order to portray children in the manner that they did. But their sources were very different, their audience was very different, and so were their artistic products.

Unlike the genre painters, the genteel painters suffered a more troubled relationship with the binary of child innocence and child misbehavior. Children painted in the genre tradition were virile, openly rebellious, masculine males, celebrated as symbols of rough-and-tumble America. Their defiant nature was equated with quintessential “Americanness,” their unruly conduct celebrated as a kind of spiritual, Darwinian liberation from tyrannical adult authority.

Contrariwise, genteel painters attempted to depict children as faultless, beautiful, docile, and pure. The logical conclusion was that these precious little possessions deserved to be sheltered, protected, and pampered. But peculiarly enough, sometimes this presumption exchanged child misbehavior for child ruination: spoiled, maladjusted, sometimes even neurotic youngsters. The genteel painters’ interest in children’s “inherent” goodness, perfection, and purity became obsessive
and compensated for a less happy reality, both inside and outside the world of the rich and famous.

The genre painters were from rural New England and the genteel painters were wealthy expatriates who often pooled their American patronage in the American Northeast, but also extended it across the Atlantic. It should be noted that many of the differences perceived between these two groups of artists relates to both the development, and the transatlantic mobility, of the distinctly American middle-class at the end of the nineteenth century—and the desire of lower classes to join these elite numbers. As Richard Butsch has noted, in his *Making of American Audiences* (2000), a distinct factor of the American middle-class was that it was not the same as the concept of the European “bourgeoisie.”

Rather, the American middle-class de-emphasized concepts of landownership and aristocratic bloodline in favor of a wealth of knowledge. To be learned was to evince that the individual possessed the personal resources to gain a proper education, and connoted a form of eliteness. Similarly, ignorance of contemporary political, literary, and artistic discourse became a social marker of the underprivileged. As we shall see, both

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134 Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990*, Cambridge University Press, 2000. Butsch describes the simultaneous “demise of sovereignty” in American audiences, and rise of the “value of knowledge,” when he discusses the emergence of a type of American protagonist called the “green’un.” Simultaneously Butsch indicates the emergence of the theater-goer who identifies a sense of superiority to the green’un protagonist. This sense of superiority is what makes the green’un story so appealing to Americans, beginning in roughly 1840 and steadily increasing. He states, “Green’uns were exemplars of the common man—generous, possessing a strong sense of fairness, uncorrupted by civilization, and unsophisticated in city ways. Green’un stories offered readers an opportunity to feel knowledgeable by contrast, and thus highlighted the value placed on knowledge...a bemused superiority. A green’un story is a kind of insider joke shared by the readers and the audience within the story, both at the expense of the greenhorn. The core of all insider jokes is to demonstrate membership within the group through insider knowledge...Knowledge of the theater [and cultural endeavors] represented cultural capital exchangeable in different specie depending on the in-group, within the...subculture or dominant culture. Ironically in both cases this valued knowledge became the fulcrum for the demise of their sovereignty as the audience” (57-58).
forms of popular literature, such as novels and magazines, and forms of visual art, such as portrait paintings of children, reflected the ambitious upward-mobility of the new American middle-class: its need to distinguish itself based on its capacity to be “cultured.” Both the American genteeel painters and their middle-and-upper-class American patrons came from this background, which equated materialistic and cultural sophistication with a new type of social privilege.

The Genteel Tradition: A New Aesthetic, a New Mode of Painting Children

Thematic Overview: The Issue of Nationality

The movement broadly referred to as the “genteel tradition” had sprouted mid-nineteenth-century but took clear form at the end of the century. One of the peculiarities of this movement was that it generally assumed that high culture was synonymous with the culture of Europe, and that American artists should assimilate European styles, including both those of the Old Masters and the latest fashionable trends. During this period most ambitious American artists studied for several years in Europe, particularly in Paris, which became the world’s artistic center in this period, in large part due to lavish government sponsorship of the arts. Centers of artistic education such as Paris and Munich, with new schools of painting in portraiture and landscape, increasingly emphasized a love of material and artifice, the surface effects of an individual artist’s brush, plein-air observation, and luxurious subject matter. Exhibiting one’s work in the major annual exhibition of painting and sculpture, the highly competitive Parisian Salon, became a rite of passage that established one’s credentials as a serious artist and opened the way to
sales and other forms of patronage in the United States. Indeed, in this period many Americans chose to pursue their careers in Europe, although they sold their work largely to collectors in the United States.

In fact, some artists became so cosmopolitan that they challenged and still challenge, the usual categories of national identity. John Singer Sargent, for instance, spent his childhood in Italy, studied painting in France, and, after a famous scandal over the portrait titled *Madame X* (1883-4, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art) eliminated his French patronage, moved to England for the remainder of his career. Fluent in several languages and widely traveled, he returned to the United States only for relatively brief visits, but never gave up his American citizenship and always retained a loyal group of American patrons—although his sitters were by no means exclusively American and included prominent figures of many nationalities. It seems peculiar to categorize Sargent as “an American,” yet Americans always regarded him as such. His work was widely publicized and exhibited in this country and commented on by American writers and critics. Thus, it becomes appropriate to view his work as an integral part of American “visual culture.” Other artists who were Sargent’s peers, such as Mary Cassatt, also studied and largely practiced abroad, but had an enthusiastic American audience and created art specifically to ornament American cultural events such as expositions and world’s fairs. Still others, such as Abbott Thayer and William Merritt Chase, pursued their careers in the United States, but, like Sargent, studied abroad and painted in a way that reflected the latest European trends.

Therefore, whether the art of these American painters of the genteel
tradition was created here or overseas, whether it featured subjects who were European or American, a comprehensive account of American images of children would be incomplete without addressing these artists. This group of artists created a new image of childhood which permeated America—one that was at once imbedded in notions of luxury and social privilege and related to new, liberal, indulgent notions of childrearing. Yet paradoxically, this art often contains undercurrents of psychological unease, and raised profoundly disturbing questions about the supposed “innocence” of childhood.

Thematic Overview: Gender-Inclusivity

One of the major innovations of this school of artists was that it introduced a realm of sensitive feelings that could be characterized as “feminine.” And one of the major consequences of this movement was the emergence of large numbers of woman artists, who went through a course of rigorous study, mostly in Europe, and actively pursued professional careers. At the beginning of the nineteenth century no American women exhibited in the French Salon, whereas by 1900 about a third of the American artists who exhibited there were female.

Thematic Overview: A Parallel Literary Tradition

Notably, the painters of the genteel tradition were closely associated with a group of genteel writers, such as Henry James and William Dean Howells, with whom they often had close social ties: John Singer Sargent, for instance, was a friend of Henry James, who played a major role in boosting his reputation. Like the
painters, many of these writers (such as James) spent much of their career in Europe. Because of common language, however, American literary culture exhibited particularly close ties with England rather than France. Indeed, many major English writers, such as Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling, lived for a time in the United States, wrote for American magazines, and derived much of their income from American publishers. This group of authors also often belonged to the same social circles as the American genteel painters: John Singer Sargent, for instance, painted two portraits of Robert Louis Stevenson, both of which were highly informal in character and created out of friendship rather than on commission. Once again, questions of nationality often become confusing, but for our present purposes it makes sense to cross national boundaries when the occasion warrants. Rudyard Kipling was English, for example, but his novel Captains Courageous is set in Gloucester, Massachusetts, was first published in an American magazine, and provides what is arguably the period’s most striking presentation of the character of the affluent “spoiled child.”

Notably, the masters of the genteel tradition often took care to separate themselves from the crudities of vernacular American culture. Henry James, for instance, loathed the paintings of Winslow Homer. As he once hissed, “We detest his subjects—his barren plank fences, his glaring, bald, blue skies, his big, dreary, vacant lots of meadows, his freckled, straight-haired Yankee urchins.”¹³⁵ Comparing the young girls whom Homer painted to “plates of rural doughnuts and pie,” James pulled no punches. On the other hand, James lauded Sargent’s lushly appealing, yet

bizarrely, psychologically incisive, society portraiture.

**Thematic Overview: the Genteel Tradition and Ambiguity**

“American” authors often crossed boundaries in another way—they often set their stories in Europe, particularly England, as Mark Twain did in *The Prince and the Pauper* or as Frances Hodgson Barnett did in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. What is striking, in fact, is that whereas images of “the bad boy,” whether in the paintings of Winslow Homer or the writings of Mark Twain, have a distinctly vernacular, American character, images of the genteel child, whether by John Singer Sargent or Henry James, have a more ambiguous, international character, that might belong to either America or Europe.

Indeed, one of the major characteristics of the genteel tradition is its new emphasis on things that are in some way uneasily indeterminate, whether issues of place, or social relationship, or even issues of gender.

**Plan of Study**

I will focus on four of the key figures of this genteel tradition: William Merritt Chase; Abbott Henderson Thayer; John Singer Sargent; and Mary Cassatt.136 These were arguably the major trendsetters of this movement. While their work is closely congruent, in some respects they looked at childhood from

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136 Even these new painters’ living spaces signaled a shift in American artistic taste. For instance, in 1879, Chase moved into New York’s famed Tenth Street Studio Building, once populated by Winslow Homer, as well as Frederick Edwin Church and Albert Bierstadt of the Hudson River School. This former generation of artists had covered their walls with imagery and accoutrements of the American West, the frontier, and consciously forged an “indigenous” tradition. Chase replaced such décor, and ideology, with the lush bric-a-brac of aristocratic Europe and the Orient. He waxed his moustache and painted portraits in his best waistcoat. He made artistic success, filial happiness, and domestic luxury indecipherable from one another.
divergent viewpoints. For instance, Chase presented an almost purely idyllic view of
the childhood years. On the other hand, Sargent introduced a hint of darker
undercurrents and a greater variety of child personalities. The observations made
about the work of these key figures are applicable to the many dozens of skilled
American painters and society portraitists who formed part of this genteel
tradition.

What really transpires in these images? Their roots rest in the broad literary
tradition that swiftly changed and helped to form the key qualities of genteel
painting. For this reason, let me first describe the literary atmosphere in which
genteel images of children were produced. Next, I will review a line of predecessors
who set the stage for the most striking innovators of the genteel tradition. Then, I
will discuss the careers of the most important artistic contributors to genteel images
of childhood: Chase, Thayer, Sargent, and Cassatt. Finally, I will analyze how, once
again, literature and social discourse intersects in surprisingly direct ways with the
paintings of children produced by these masters.

**Literature of the Genteel Tradition**

**Novels and Children’s Literature**

In the nineteenth century, a world without television or radio, reading held
even greater importance for the purpose of entertainment than it does today.

Not surprisingly, the late nineteenth century erupted with children's books
and adult novels that described in detail the lives of genteel children. These books
provide further insight—at times disturbing insight—into images of children that would be produced by expatriate painters. With one or two brief exceptions, I will focus on books written by American and English authors.

In general, I have chosen books that were enormously important for this period in creating images of childhood. It has been said that “a text that reaches an exceptionally large audience does so not by its particular uniqueness but by its common embrace of the values most widely shared;” thus, there is much to be learned culturally about one form of creative expression (visual art) made in a particular historical moment by studying the most popular and influential examples of another (literature).137

These novels, then, illuminate choices made by painters in representing children, and prove both a story and a painting to be symptomatic of common cultural assertions about children’s roles. In several cases, new assertions about childhood were made in these books, and this generated discussion and controversy that flowed from prose to painting.

As we will see, each of the books that I discuss provides striking thematic parallels with specific works by one or another painter of the genteel tradition. In one or two instances a painting exists (such as Chase’s Portrait of Elsie Lyde as Little Lord Fauntleroy) that directly relates to a specific text. In other instances, the connection is not so securely documented, but the parallels are so striking that one could almost imagine that a painting was created specifically to illustrate a

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particular text. Because the novels that I cite were all part of the popular culture of their time, it is unsurprising that painters created works which are close to them in spirit.

**The Growth of Luxury Magazines**

The late nineteenth century witnessed a remarkable proliferation of magazines--a development spurred by innovations in printing, such as the invention of the rotary press; by developments in transportation, which made possible mass distribution; by a general increase in prosperity which made magazines affordable to a larger audience; and to an ever-increasing emphasis on literacy, both as a form of pleasure and education and as a pathway to greater income and social status. Studying nineteenth-century magazines enriches our understanding of attitudes about childrearing.

Frank Luther Mott’s exhaustive surveys of American bestsellers and American magazines still provide the most comprehensive and useful studies of American nineteenth-century leisure-class reading. In these volumes, Mott meticulously dissects overarching cultural trends, carefully considering everything from general quarterlies to magazines on specialized topics such as dressmaking and bee-keeping.138

At least as far as magazines are concerned, this was an age that strongly

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138 Other such specialties included magazines of dentistry, yachting, the raising of hogs and sheep, marine engineering, and croquet, specific muckracking crusades, the esoteric political iconography of comic serials, religious and scientific diatribes, and women’s journals about the care of babies.
emphasized optimism, genteel values, and moral uplift. Prosperous families cultivated a distinctive set of social values that are illustrated in the pages of periodicals such as *Scribner’s* and *Atlantic Monthly*.\(^{139}\) While painters in the genteel tradition did not often build their mature careers on the trials and errors of serial magazine illustration, they strikingly shared cultural ideas with the families of the affluent children whom they so often portrayed. For this reason it is worth briefly examining the development of the luxury magazine in American popular culture.

Mott’s fourth volume is dedicated to the years 1885 to 1905. It opens with the usual observation that the Gilded Age, particularly during and after the Panic of 1893, drastically heightened the class gap “between the proud battalion of new millionaires and Coxey’s shambling army,” and that magazines reflected this gap.\(^{140}\) While genteel magazines sold for a mere 35 cents, they increasingly targeted “the moneyed and well-educated,” and deliberately distinguished themselves from the ten-cent magazines, which featured more lurid stories for a less-educated, working class audience.\(^{141}\) Even though the leisure magazine was reasonably priced, the advent of the comparably sensationalistic, pedestrian ten-cent magazine heightened

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\(^{139}\) Both Randall Griffin, in his work on Winslow Homer, and Barbara Weinberg, in her 1994 study of John Singer Sargent as well as her broader Smithsonian survey of nineteenth century American art, have commented upon the following: Artists such as Winslow Homer, who aspired to be painters of fine art, also forged a reputation in this world of elite entertainment, as woodcut illustrators, as early as the 1860’s. Indeed, the American artist’s early or developing career in the graphic arts has been characterized as a highly representative national artistic tradition. This tradition continued well into the twentieth century with the artists of the Ashcan School, who were almost entirely magazine illustrators and press reporters before they were “fine artists” who showed in galleries and museums.

\(^{140}\) Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1938-1960 (5 volumes): p. 1: Mott wryly indicates that an unremitting “variety of factors” in America’s changing cultural landscape explains the success of select periodicals—urban growth, the Spanish Civil War, the immigration problem, radical political movements and labor organizations, women’s emancipation, the rise of the social sciences and new educational practices numbering only a few.

\(^{141}\) Mott, 2.
its perceived eliteness. Culture and sophistication were now attainable via the guiding pages of relatively affordable serials in a time when self-made status and public spectacle were paramount. The American leisure classes took great stock in what these publications printed.

The values of this burgeoning genteel class were particularly well exemplified in literary journals, such as The Dial, Atlantic Monthly, Collier’s, The Critic, Harper’s, Booklover’s Magazine, and Ladies’ Home Companion, which featured short stories by figures such as William Dean Howells and Henry James.

An important new subcategory of magazines was the woman's magazine, often specifically focused on childrearing. The list is, again, long, although a few titles provide the flavor of this genre: Babyhood, American Motherhood (originally Mother’s Friend), and Trained Motherhood. Each of these journals provided practical and intimate advice about childrearing, directed at the gender who were the “angels of the household.” Medical doctors edited each of these publications. Their “authority” projected an aura of institutionalized, data-backed support that was highly esteemed by the white educated elite with a background in the new social sciences. Babyhood’s editor was Dr. Leroy M. Yale; American Motherhood’s editor was Dr. Mary Wood-Allen of the University of Michigan. Everything from how to

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142 Only a few examples were Drake’s, a newly cheapened Lippincott’s, (illustrations and the cost of producing them were omitted) Scribner’s (which actually ran at twenty-five cents but was still ten cents cheaper than Century and Harper’s), Cosmopolitan (twenty cents), the American Strand (twenty cents), the Ladies’ Home Journal, and McClure’s. Mott, p. 10: “Every interest had its own journal or journals...all organizations of importance, all hobbies and recreations...it was an era of multiplicity, if not of plenty. There were more money and leisure than ever before, and more slums in the city and more misery on the farms. There was more ambition...than ever before, leading to its climax in a ‘success’ cult at the end of the century. There were more sports, more popular songs, and more humor than ever before. There was a deeper social consciousness and there was a greater enthusiasm for adult education than America had ever known before. In short, the nineties were an era of more of everything in America.”

143 Mott, 11.
change a diaper to how to broach the topic of sexual relations to juveniles was covered.¹⁴⁴

**What Best-Sellers Revealed**

In addition to studying magazines, Mott also wrote an exhaustive history of American best sellers. His volume *Golden Multitudes* (1947) dissects best-selling novels, both native and imported from Europe, based on decade of publication. The types of novels that middle-class and leisure-class Americans published, republished, and used as guidelines for self-comportment reveal their larger customs and social values at the close of the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁵

The most important thing to remember about American literary taste during the 1880's is that it mingled scientific facts with romantic, florid embellishment in order to champion passionate social platforms. Of particular note is the trend of narcissistically placing an American abroad in Europe at the center of the plot. The hybrid identity of the American protagonist abroad resembles that of the genteel painter, who projected his/her transatlantic identity and experiences into paintings of children.

For instance, Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* centers on

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¹⁴⁴ Mott, 364.

¹⁴⁵ Interestingly while some of these titles are modern axioms of great literature, others have not withstood the test of time or the vicissitudes of American taste, and are now remarkably obscure. Mott characterizes the 1880’s as a period in which “less controversial” titles such as by Robert Louis Stevenson, Mark Twain, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle floated through publication rings—and interestingly, these are the authors whose names we still easily recognize. But these publications also shared printed space with an unremitting “procession” of diatribes of the “intellectually exciting” sort: books such as *Progress and Poverty, Looking Backward,* and *Robert Elsemere,* which mingled prose and social inquiry and tackled major budding controversies over labor and poverty, women’s rights, industry, and the role of religion in social activism. Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States.* New York: MacMillan & Company, 1947: 172.
the event of Americans inheriting European property, and having to move to Europe in order to manage their inheritance.146 The cast of Europeans—the servants and solicitors of the deceased—fear the worst, that a shiftless pedestrian cowboy will wreak havoc on cherished Old World traditions. As it invariably turns out, the American protagonist arrives and is pious, intelligent, and kind. Most importantly, the protagonist is graciously compatible to Old World customs and decorum, but also distinctly American, particularly, as in Burnett’s book, with respect to socially charged issues such as class relations.147

Some of the best sellers of the 1880’s dictated the most popular names given babies in a particular year. These include Augusta Evans Wilson’s St. Elmo, and Thelma (1887) by Marie Corelli, writer of “purple” prose par excellence.148 The practice of actually naming one’s child after a fictional character in a popular novel attests to the power these publications had over social opinion.149

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146 Ludovic Halevy’s writing is another clear example of this trend, but falls slightly outside the circle of writers that I wish to examine.
147 Far more obnoxiously self-congratulatory, but in the same vein as its predecessors, is the book Mr. Barnes of New York, by Clavering Gunter, published in 1887, about a “clever, self-assured” American surgeon traveling in Europe. Barnes easily settles fierce disputes between his English, French, and Italian compatriots, in a “schoolboyish” novel that “did not pretend to have any idea except that of American superiority in everything,” but, fascinatingly, while unanimously rejected by English publishing houses, was phenomenally popular in the States. This is indubitably because the book denotes that an American’s plain-speaking, pragmatic “Americanness” sets him above and apart, while somehow not compromising his capacity to adapt to and flourish in foreign cultures. As a cosmopolitan, or even an expatriate, he may have simultaneous and contradictory identities (like Gertrude Stein, whose “country was America” but whose “city was Paris”), which is after all exactly true of most of the patrons and child-sitters of the genteel painters. Mott, Golden Multitudes, 176.
148 Mott, Golden Multitudes, 126-7, 178.
149 During the 1890s, “cheap books” became central to publishing houses. Lack of international copyright agreements led to the frequent publishing of multiple simultaneous editions of an inexpensive novel, and “this movement had given the middle class its first lesson in the pleasure of owning books....it had brought millions of books into American homes,” including because of the proliferation of clubs and public municipal libraries. In short, the influence of the best-selling novel over popular social opinion only increased up to the beginning of the twentieth century. It continued to create a new target audience with new, upper-middle-class and educated, ideas and beliefs, including those about childrearing.
A final, somewhat obvious example of the cult of childhood among genteel audiences which Mott does not discuss is J.M. Barrie’s British stage play *Peter Pan, or the Little Boy Who Would Not Grow Up*, which debuted in 1904 and was tellingly one of the playwright’s first real successes. In 1906 Arthur Rackham drafted a sometimes startlingly ghoulish series of illustrations for the first book edition of the play titled *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. In 1907 Alice B. Woodward, known for illustrating Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, created a whimsical print series based on the play called *The Peter Pan Picture Book* (1907). Other illustrators, such as Kathleen Atkins, followed suit. Barrie revised his play extensively into another novel, *Peter Pan and Wendy*, in 1911, and into final form as *Peter Pan* in 1928. Barrie’s tale has subsequently been transformed into countless theatrical, animated, and live action film adaptations, and even a psychological apologia on behalf of emotionally immature men raised from childhood in too insular a fashion, *The Peter Pan Syndrome* (Dr. Dan Kiley, 1983). Peter Pan is and was a Western cultural emblem. The entire premise of Barrie’s story is fascinating and revelatory. Its basic idea is that innocence and the homestead cannot really be recaptured once lost—which equates with metaphorical orphining. The attempt to remain forever a child escapes the evils inherent to modern society (symbolized in the pirate captain James Hook). But such an attempt also deprives the self of some of the most consoling, enriching qualities of maturation (such as parenting and the nuclear family). Barrie’s ideology was particularly relevant during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet Peter’s dilemma seems to carry a timeless quality and invite perennial revisitation. For instance, in 2011, Maria Tatar released a lushly
illustrated and impressively footnoted cultural study involving the original Barrie
text, titled *The Annotated Peter Pan*.150 The notion of a child’s rebellious escape
from adult concerns, and the envy adults feel toward children’s “carefree” lives,
seems to have percolated from the children’s literature of the thoroughly patriotic
American authors Twain and Aldrich into an international sphere, which
indubitably influenced expatriate painters of childhood.

**Frances Hodgson Burnett: The Model Child**

Many children’s stories of the late 1800’s reaffirmed that children were
innocent and deserved to be pampered, in highly idealized terms. The English
immigrant Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) was and is the
quintessential tale of the “good little rich boy.” Burnett’s story, a “Cinderella-like"
mongrelizing of English and American influence, reflects her own biography.151
Born in Manchester, England, in 1849, Burnett emigrated to America in 1865. The
circumstances of her exodus surely influenced her riches-to-rags-to-riches-again
tale: Burnett spent her first sixteen years as the daughter of a prosperous
tradesman who sold furniture to the wealthy British aristocracy, but upon her
father’s sudden death, was abruptly penniless and sent to live under the thumb of
American relatives in Tennessee. Like many key figures in the genteel tradition,
Burnett placed her foot in both the old and new world, and she understood acutely
the emotional strife of losing everything at a tender age—something that all of her

most famous child protagonists (Cedric Errol of Fauntleroy, Sarah Crewe of A Little Princess, and Mary Lennox of The Secret Garden) suffer. Burnett was a largely self-educated author of popular romance, the wife of a doctor (Swan Burnett), and the mother of two boys (Lionel and Vivian). Her career began in writing “formulaic” vignettes for ladies’ magazines such as Godey’s and Peterson’s, and her heroes were Charles Dickens and the Bronte sisters, whose stock characters (the doting mother, the curmudgeonly and mysterious benefactor, the gold-hearted poor folk) are easily perceivable in Little Lord Fauntleroy. Beginning in 1879, Burnett built her formidable writing career by sending story excerpts to the children’s magazine St. Nicholas. In the course of her career, she met other masters of American literature, such as Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emily Dickenson, Charles Dudley Warner, and Harriett Beecher Stowe. Famous writers as disparate in tone as Mark Twain and Oscar Wilde deeply admired her hybrid writing style. Her writing has posthumously come to be seen as hopelessly saccharine, but in her day, few authors were more popular, and almost no book, aside from Uncle Tom’s Cabin and Ben Hur, had more copies published than Little Lord Fauntleroy. For instance, in 1883, a Century article coined Burnett among the five most famous American authors, alongside William Dean Howells and Henry James.\textsuperscript{152} Audiences were not satisfied merely with a book version of the story, so in 1888, Burnett adapted Fauntleroy into a play; it ran for four years on Broadway and was a favorite in America, France, and England. Burnett became extremely wealthy from the sales and toured Europe, caring for needy relatives, meeting celebrities, and attending Queen Victoria’s

\textsuperscript{152} Bixler, 7.
Diamond Jubilee. Burnett’s astonishing popularity over a series of children’s stories reveals that she seized upon some highly fashionable nineteenth-century social schemas about childhood, resonating both with children and adults.

Because *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was so widely successful and influential, it would benefit us to look closer at Burnett’s most famous story. Burnett’s little-boy-Cinderella book secured her fame as an author of children’s literature on both sides of the Atlantic. The story features Cedric Errol, the sweet seven-year-old son of an earl who was disowned for marrying an American woman. Cedric’s disowned father and two elder uncles die. His mother is forced to transplant him from New York to an English estate over which he is heir apparent. Entirely out of angelic guilelessness, and ignorant of England’s strident class distinctions, the egalitarian Cedric brings his grocer and bootblack friends to live with him. In a voice that could belong to a reformist photographer or muckraker, Cedric declares that the lives of the estate’s tenants are “so poor and miserable…it makes them wicked to live like that.” Cedric therefore orders an entire dilapidated neighborhood to be torn down and rebuilt. He finally mends the rift between his mother and his grandfather, the man who had disowned her earlier along with his son.

Throughout the story, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* proselytizes for the progressive views of childhood—the same views that provided the basis for the new Kindergarten curriculum—such as the importance of free play, of decentralized authority, and of responsiveness to the special needs of children. The explanation for Cedric’s guileless sweetness is his mother’s excellent and indulgent childrearing skills and above all, her abstention from punishment or cruelty. As the book noted:
“He had never heard an unkind or uncourteous word spoken at home; he had always been loved and caressed and treated tenderly, and so his childish soul was full of kindness and innocent warm feeling.”

Cedric’s idyllic upbringing and resultant angelic purity make him a mascot of genteel childhood. In fact, Cedric is a perfect hybrid of Old World refinement and American democracy. This also makes him a symbol of the American expatriate, and one in a long line of protagonists in the type of best-selling novel that helped Americans “see how they appeared to the rest of the world.”

Intriguingly, Cedric is also an exemplar of ambivalent gender identity—a child beautiful and dandified, docile and generous in the truest gender-coded ideal of a female. His “girlishness” was apparently acceptable in genteel circles of “effete” cosmopolitan readership, and yet Burnett, an English immigrant still learning the rudiments of American culture, also at times reflects a curious nervousness in portraying an American-born child in this manner.

Therefore, while many of his traits were feminine, Burnett also periodically asserted Cedric’s energetic masculinity. Clearly enamored with, as well as bewildered by, the virile vernacular tone of America, Burnett painstakingly qualified aspects of Cedric’s appearance as unquestionably male. Her efforts are highly self-conscious, and sometimes she tries too hard. For instance, she states at least four times in the body of the text that Cedric’s face, while “beautiful,” is also “manly.” In fact, this manliness seems to be a secret weapon of some sort,

154 Mott, *Golden Multitudes*, paraphrased.
particularly in his dealings with his churlish grandfather. Always the “manliness” of Cedric’s face is the source of rapt praise and provides a handy explanation for his seemingly miraculous ability to win over everyone, whether servants, young heiresses, or grumpy old men.

Perhaps the most peculiar of these visual odes to Cedric’s masculinity is Burnett’s obsession with his calves and with the color red. Cedric’s calves are “lordly little red legs,” “shapely,” in bright red stockings, slender but also muscular. They are the subject of considerable attention when he races little boys in Central Park, and later as he sits talking with his grandfather’s lawyer, Mr. Havisham, about becoming an earl. Cedric’s enviable calves become focal yet again as Cedric poses at parties at his grandfather’s estate, and when his worthiness to inherit the property is closely examined.

Cedric is the cultural prototype of the colloquially termed “mama’s boy.” He is almost unnaturally close to his mother, whom he calls “dearest,” because this was the term of endearment his late father had used for her. A sentence in the opening chapter of the novel aptly summarizes their enmeshed relationship: “He was so much of a companion for his mother that she scarcely cared for any other.”155 While this provides seven-year-old Cedric with many opportunities to take up the role of the strong, rational head of household to his frail and weepy mother—highly impressing his old-fashioned, patriarchal grandfather—at some level it is disturbing.

Images of “Little Lord Fauntleroy” pervaded the magazines and serials of

155 Burnett, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. 
the late nineteenth century. But there was also a backlash. A popular tale of the
time chronicled arson and other impressive forms of misbehavior on the part of
boys who were outraged when they were forced to wear “Little Lord Fauntleroy
suits.” In fact, the humorous hyperbole of this bit of popular folklore reflected an
undercurrent of discomfort. At some level, Americans of the time sensed that Cedric
was a child whose behavior bent normal categories of gender, and found this
discomfiting.

**Rudyard Kipling: The Little Boy’s Adventure Story**

The issues of masculine identity that were sidestepped in *Little Lord
Fauntleroy* became the subject of another runaway bestseller of the period, Rudyard
Kipling’s *Captain’s Courageous*. This novel explores the sad consequences of being a
child who had become too soft, too feminine and too spoiled—who doesn’t properly
respect and pay heed to his elders who fail to set reasonable limits on luxury. But
like Burnett, Kipling wrote a book that was relentlessly optimistic: the young hero
hidden inside the spoiled brat could be cured by a proper reinstatement of
discipline and hard work.

While some of the popular stories of the time, such as H. Rider Haggard’s
*King Solomon’s Mines*, took place in exotic locales such as the African bush, many of
these stories were called “sea adventures.” They became popular in Britain and
the United States in the 1850’s, and formulaically featured a little boy displaced

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from home, facing perils aboard a ship. The boy always surmounted the danger and obtained either treasure or moral betterment, sometimes both.

During the 1890’s, Rudyard Kipling, who achieved his first successes in England writing stories about India, was at the pinnacle of his American fame. In 1899, when he fell critically ill during a stay in New York City and lay bedfast in a hotel, press coverage was relentless. For two months, journalists covered Kipling’s every change in condition. Special issues of popular periodicals were printed lauding his career and anticipating his martyr-like demise, including a major tribute by William Dean Howells, the friend of Henry James and Mark Twain. Unfortunately for the hovering press, he lived, and continued to write for two more decades.

The earliest “sea stories,” by writers such as Captain Mariott, focused on military exploits. Kipling’s *Captains Courageous*, 1897, presents a creative variation of this formula. The novel focuses on Harvey Cheyne, the rich and lazy son of an American millionaire. While sailing with his mother, Harvey falls overboard, only to be rescued by the New England fisherman Disko Troop. Troop instantly recognizes Harvey’s soft hands and impudent tone and institutes a program of reform, teaching the boy to be a tough and resilient youth by spending a fishing season aboard his boat. Disko’s crew, a microcosm of the American “melting pot,” initiates Harvey into a manly fraternity with blood rituals and a secret language of sailor jargon.

In fact, Burnett and Kipling are easily diametrical opposites in the argument over the merits of progressive, indulgent childrearing. Burnett argues that pampering a child is a necessary form of kindness toward the young, which gives

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rise to an equally kind and angelic child, a champion of the deserving poor. But Kipling—also a British citizen who spent time in America—argues just the opposite. To pamper a child, especially a boy, is to spoil him, making him unable to accept hardship without complaint, and incapable of treating others with respect and decency. Little Lord Fauntleroy enjoyed no companion so much as his adoring mother. But Kipling, perhaps speaking as a kind of cultural ventriloquist for his intended American audience, views Harvey Cheyne's over-exposure to the world of his “tearful” mother as an infernal trap. His falling off her boat and nearly drowning is what has saved his character from effeminate degeneracy. Harvey shall be no Little Lord Fauntleroy.

Robert Louis Stevenson: Perfect Childhood and Perfect Children

Scotsman Robert Louis Stevenson was a friend and sitter to many genteel painters, including John Sargent, and the idol of many others, including Abbott Thayer. He is best known for contributing to the swashbuckling “sea adventure” genre for boys by writing his iconic novel Treasure Island (1883). But Stevenson also portrayed childhood through poetry, with a markedly different tone that reveled in childhood's peace and purity. Yet the mood was ultimately melancholic, conscious of the hasty passage of time. Youth was doomed to fade alongside the innocence that made children such special beings. Stevenson's collection of short, sentimental, didactic poems titled A Child's Garden of Verses (1885) deserves analysis. It obviously influenced certain impressionable painters who suffered tragedy in their personal lives, driving them to eternally arrest childhood in its pure, deified state.
Stevenson’s poetry book attempts to portray the world of a child, with moments of self-discovery, emotional and cognitive development, and moral reckoning, from a child’s eyes; in this way Stevenson is a man of his era, which was preoccupied with the developmental distinctness of a child’s needs and experiences. But as Peter Hunt, a leading authority in children’s literature, indicates, the resulting collection of rhymes possesses a more complicated mixture of earnest youthful experience and sentimental, heavy-handed idealism. At one point the verses praise a child’s every episode of sweet and blameless curiosity (observing the rain falling, watching an old man lighting lamps or a cow crossing a pasture, for instance). But these little moments are always happy events experienced by happy children. And other verses seem peculiarly stern and didactic, openly forecasting doom should children venture to be anything but pleasant, honest, and docile: reticent angels. For instance, Stevenson’s poem “Good and Bad Children” begins by admonishing the young that they are perilously fragile—“little, with bones very brittle”—and in order to age into graceful beings, indeed to survive childhood at all, they must comport themselves with calm and dignity. Furthermore they should display a laundry list of favorable traits: intelligence, docility, and honesty, as well as an abundance of unconditional happiness. In order to validate this prescription for childhood safety, Stevenson compares contemporary children with those who grew to be “kings and sages” in “ancient ages,” and he finishes his poem with a kind of poetic Bogeymanism that condemns “unkind and unruly” children who eat poorly and cry freely to a life shunned by other human beings.159

As literary historian John Goldthwaite scathingly put it, “No one had ever lied up a stereotype so sweetly or at this artistic level before, and a genteel reading public doted on Stevenson's image of itself ‘[s]itting safe in nursery nooks, | Reading picture story-books.’”

Louisa May Alcott: Empowering Women and Children

Louisa May Alcott, born and raised in Concord, Massachusetts, was an author, social activist, and the daughter of the famed Pestalozzian pedagogue Amos Bronson Alcott. Literary historians have agreed for nearly two decades that Louisa invented an entire subgenre of genteel children’s literature that they call the “domestic democracy story.” In such a story, girls and boys cohabit the same household space under egalitarian conditions, no harsh, old-fashioned forms of punishment exist, and little girls are given the spiritual and cognitive tools to surmount traditional gender-sanctioned social bounds—to live and feel and think freely. Furthermore, as early as Little Women, the matriarch, heroine Jo March’s “Marmee,” delivered swift verbal rebukes to a schoolteacher who dared use harsh physical punishment on children, consequently choosing to home-school her youngest child, Amy.

Alcott’s leading literary analysts, such as Madeleine B. Stern and Elizabeth Lennox Keyser, believe that the author’s overt interest in feminist issues expanded

(First edition Penny Whistles, 1885): 30.
during the 1870’s, with books such as *Little Men* and *Jo’s Boys*. However, they also state that Alcott espoused an indirect mode of female influence over the socio-political sphere. In other words, Alcott’s women had a voice, but they spoke comfortably within traditional social bounds, and they encouraged sympathetic men to speak on their behalf. This makes Alcott’s attitude toward women and children strikingly compatible with the art of Mary Cassatt. Despite the fact that Alcott remained in America and Cassatt was an expatriate, Cassatt also produced work that remained traditionally feminine (because it was almost entirely comprised of mothers and children in domestic spaces), but emboldened, empowered, and psychologically complicated women and children from within these confines. Lines of influence between the writer and painter become more plausible when we learn that Louisa’s sister, May Alcott, admired Cassatt’s art and once wrote a defense of one of Cassatt’s exhibitions, against a male critic who preferred the work of the male French Impressionists.

In *Jo’s Boys* (1886), we see evidence of Alcott’s feminist sympathies, however tempered. Female protagonist Nan, who wishes to become a medical doctor and is the autobiographical character Jo March-Bhaer’s protégé, erupts into a Suffragette tirade at a group of adopted male orphans under her care:

“Let us have equal opportunities…I like justice, and we get very little of it…I went to a suffrage debate in the Legislature last winter; and all of the feeble, vulgar twaddle that I ever heard, that was the worst, and those men were our representatives…I want an intelligent man to represent me, if I can’t do it myself,
not a fool.”

Even earlier, in *Little Men* (1871), Nan is content to let politics remain monopolized by men, but also clearly argues that for them to deserve having her as a constituent, they should be intelligent, considerate, and egalitarian in thought. Furthermore, despite being explicitly described as a “rampant reformer” in the earlier text *Little Men* (1871), Nan becomes a project for wiser matriarchs such as Jo, her little sister Amy, and Amy’s daughter Bess, to “tame.”

Plumfield is the recurrent setting of Alcott’s fictional school for often troubled children, such as the diamond in the rough character Nat. It is widely recognized as a fictional version of Alcott’s father Bronson’s actual experimental academy “Fruitlands,” and it has become canonized as a “feminist utopia” by many literary historians. Nat’s treatment at the hands of Jo’s husband Professor Bhaer exemplifies the pedagogically progressive tenets of permissive and nurturing childcare. When Nat breaks rules, Professor Bhaer quietly takes him aside to discuss why his behavior has been disappointing. Furthermore, Jo declares her home a place for “family as a small world,” a domestic model for good citizenship, as well as a place for “bringing up little men and women together.” Yet on the same token, children retain conventionally sanctioned gender roles throughout their lessons and activities. Jo takes care of ill children, and her husband educates them, particularly the boys, for college and a vocation; “if Plumfield is Alcott’s model for society,” Elizabeth Keyser notes, “then she envisioned one in which women still

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nurse the body and nurture the emotions while men stimulate the mind and foster, as well as pursue, careers.”

Interestingly in October 1885 Alcott was provoked to write a rather indignant letter to the American Woman Suffrage Association. In this letter she pleaded her case on behalf of “woman suffrage and all other reforms,” denying apparent accusations that she had “gone back” on the issue and citing “ill health and home duties” as reasons why she had not been a more active member. On a previous occasion, in March 1883, while taking care of her father who had just had a stroke, Alcott was similarly defending herself to the same Suffragette body. The subject of her letter was a vehement defense of women who spend their lives in care of the young:

“When our town meeting comes I shall be there, glad of a chance to help secure good schools for my neighbors’ children. Surely this will be as feminine and worthy an act as standing behind a stall in a charity fair or dancing in a ballroom. The assertion that suffragists do not care for children, and prefer notoriety to the joys of maternity, is so fully contradicted by the lives of the women who are trying to make the world a safer and better place for both sons and daughters, that no defence [sic] is needed. Having spent my own life, from fifteen to fifty, loving and laboring for children, as teacher, nurse, story-teller, and guardian, I know whereof I speak.”

Clearly the roles of homemaker, professional writer, and feminist were constantly at war within Alcott, but she counted herself among the social reformers

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164 Keyser, 90.
who championed the rights of women and children.

**Henry James: Childhood “Innocence” Interrogated**

Despite their differences of interpretation, both Burnett and Kipling presented an uplifting, idealized view of childhood. Stevenson carried this ideal to a romantic extreme, and Alcott, while she broadened the psychological scope particularly for female children, always ended her tales on a happy note. But another kind of story about genteel children also began to appear during this period. This was the story that proposed that children were not necessarily incorruptible. In particular, John Singer Sargent’s close friend, Henry James, prolifically produced stories that explore the psychological unease of childhood in a way that seems to challenge the notion of childhood virtue and innocence. Perhaps the most iconic example is James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, published 1898. Somewhat ironically, the story was inspired by a ghost story told to the author by an archbishop. But the themes of the story seem to stray far from churchliness into a world of jealousies and delusions and strange sexual undercurrents.

The child characters in James’s novella are Miles and Flora, the charges of a distraught English governess, and the nephew and niece of a playboy aristocrat who deserts them. The central debate of James’s tale is to what extent Miles and Flora are truly under the influence of two malevolent ghosts. The ghosts are their uncle’s former valet, the no-good thief, womanizer, and alcoholic Peter Quint, and the far
more elusive character of the current governess’s predecessor, Miss Jessel.

On one level, James’s immensely controversial story is simple: childhood innocence is not inviolable. Children are not impenetrably pure and innocent; this renders them vulnerable to corruption on a more profound level than that of mischief and obstinacy. Drawing these conclusions, the governess becomes paranoid and neurotically over-possessive, perceives wicked conspiracy in even the most innocuous of acts, and seems to lose her own sanity and self-possession. Indeed, by the end of the book it is unclear whether we have read an account of actual events or of the fantasies of a hysterical female narrator.

The book is filled with sexual implications, which are all the more frightening because they are never quite spelled out, and because they seem to allude to some sort of unmentionable form of abuse or molestation. For instance, the ghost of Quint was “much too free” with Miles, a statement which elicits “a sudden sickness of disgust” from the governess.¹⁶⁷ Even more explicitly, Flora sits before Miss Jessel’s ghost repeatedly shoving a thin rod of wood through the hole of another, a “pliant morsel,” while the governess watches stupefied.¹⁶⁸ Her act is all the more disturbing because why she is doing this is never explained. Is this because children are inherently preoccupied with sexual matters? Or is she acting out some traumatic event buried in her past?

These dark hints of sexual molestation provide the foundation for something even more terrifying: a present that is based on lies and deceptions.

¹⁶⁸ Henry James, The Turn of the Screw, 45-46.
Throughout the story, for instance, Flora pretends that the ghost of Miss Jessel is not there, and hopes to conceal her presence. Notably, James remains ambiguous about whether this is due to dark motives on Flora’s part, or is simply a form of natural self-protection from the intrusive new governess who serves as narrator. In other words, Flora’s “hideous deceit” in socializing secretly with ghosts may be due to the scars of sexual abuse, or it may merely be an ordinary child’s healthy psychological need for privacy and make-believe.

What is most horrifying about the story is that it asserts that childhood is dark and more complex than the patterns imposed upon it by genteel Victorian culture—something that James’s psychologist brother, William, was simultaneously exploring.

**An Illustrator of Idealized Childhood: Kate Greenaway**

An illustrator whose work was pervasive in this period was Kate Greenaway. An English artist who had tremendous impact in America, she was a contemporary of many genteel painters who portrayed children and childhood in a programmatically over-idealized manner. Greenaway deserves attention because she represents an entire subgenre of illustrators who made an extremely sanitized view of childhood commonplace. Though the appearance of her work differs from Abbott Thayer’s, the mood that she presents is highly sympathetic with his work. Furthermore, the venue through which Greenaway became phenomenally popular—children’s book illustration—provide us with one explanation for the extensive dissemination of idealized childhood imagery throughout nineteenth-
century visual culture.

Born in London on March 1846, Greenaway vividly remembered her childhood as the second of four daughters and used it often as inspiration for her paintings. These images almost always coupled highly controlled, highly regulated imagery of women, children, and formal gardens. Her adult life was quiet and uneventful and is punctuated, sadly, with tales of her fear of men and her love of the scent of roses.\textsuperscript{169} Greenaway studied at what is now the city’s Royal College of Art, in the separate women’s classes of Richard Burchett. Her first book, \textit{Under the Window} (1879), was a collection of paradisiacal children’s verses set to her illustrations—watercolor paintings that were reproduced by the firm of Edmund Evans as prints from hand-engraved woodblocks. Some of the more noteworthy titles that Greenaway illustrated include the \textit{Mother Goose} nursery rhymes, a book of Christmas carols, Robert Browning’s \textit{Pied Piper}, and several books about the “day in the life” of a young child or baby. Greenaway was a champion of the Arts and Crafts Style of art and architecture, also deeply interested in English Regency-Period imagery. She was elected a member of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Coulours in 1889. She enjoyed such fame that families began to dress their children in the nostalgic, intentionally anachronistic attire in which her young subjects were pictured; for instance, a liberal society of mothers called “The Souls” devoted themselves to dressing their sons in smock-frocks and skeleton suits, their daughters in pantaloons and bonnets—which is reminiscent of the popularity of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s “Little Lord Fauntleroy suits.” The famous English

philanthropist, artist, and art critic John Ruskin, best known for championing the Pre-Raphaelites and the broader Romantic tradition, adored Greenaway’s illustrations. He raved about their preindustrial idealism, “There are no railroads...to carry the children away...no tunnel or pit mouths to swallow them up...no vestige of science, civilization, economic arrangements, or commercial enterprise.”

Greenaway’s youngsters dwelt in a flawless, temporally arrested, insistently isolated heaven: and late nineteenth-century audiences loved it. Greenaway’s early work consists of illustrations to children’s sheet music; illustrations to didactic rhymes (such as “Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary”); Romantic book illustrations often set in Medieval times; highly technical studies of flowers; cloying paintings of flower girls; and the iconic book A Day in a Child’s Life, which resembles child caretakers’ new obsession with understanding the world of the young from a child’s vantage point. Edmund Evans and John Ruskin were probably Greenaway’s greatest champions; during the height of her fame she was parodied as a matronly, bonneted “horror” which actually delighted her. During her middle years, Greenaway was commissioned by Routledge to paint detailed watercolor cover designs for their annual “magazines for girls.” On the pages of these curly line drawings, filled in delicately by muted watercolor pigment, Greenaway fastidiously rendered floral sprigs and prettily dressed young women, but who somehow looked incredibly aloof and unreal in their quaint and tidy perfection.

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For Greenaway herself, life was not always so heavenly; during the 1890’s both of her parents died, and sale of her watercolors slumped. Her attempt to make up for the loss by learning oil painting failed, placing her in a constant state of fiscal crisis. She died in 1901 of complications from breast cancer, after even John Ruskin, during a mental breakdown, rejected their friendship. Like so many artists of children, Greenaway never married nor had children of her own.

A typical Greenaway illustration, *May Day* (1884, watercolor, pen and ink, Private Collection), closely resembles Thayer’s pastoral paintings, but is even more straightforwardly idealized because it lacks an oxymoronic brooding quality. In it, eight children, a pipe-playing boy and seven girls of varying ages all wear white, cream, peach, or pink clothing. These children frolic, fashion floral wreaths, and play musical instruments. Two beautiful adult women, carrying baskets of blossoms, attend the children; the compatriots march toward the viewer’s right in a grove of trees flanked by rolling hills. All participants in this ushering-in of summer are idle and untroubled. The image somehow resembles a cross between an eighteenth-century English portrait painting and a Sandro Botticelli allegory. It is vaguely Pre-Raphaelite, but also far more saccharine. “In a Greenaway world,” author Ina Taylor notes, “it is nearly always May.”

Another well-known Greenaway illustration is *Marigold Garden* (wood engraving after original watercolor) the cover of a book of poems and rhymes for children, published 1885 by Routledge and Sons in London and New York. The illustration depicts a bonneted girl with black curly hair standing at a picket fence.

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172 Taylor, 87.
173 Taylor, 8.
The fence flanks the perimeter of a topiary maze. The fence appears green but the color is an elegantly simple print technique to imply that it rests in the shadow of the darker green foliage; the fence is white. Robin’s egg blue bows, fingerless gloves, and dainty slippers accent the child’s white Empire-waisted dress. She folds her hands in front of her, knitting her tiny fingers, and her pretty round face gazes uncertainly, even somberly, at the viewer.

The girl is probably around 11 or 12 years old, on the threshold of adolescence, and it is notable that where she stands is transitional: the literally and symbolically liminal space where the fence ends and the open arch of the maze spills out into a much more feral wilderness (indicated with clever simplicity by a scraggly tree and moat). The woods outside the “civilized” maze adhere retrospectively to a late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century craze for landscaping elite estates in the “Picturesque” and “Sublime” traditions.

Interestingly in later life, when burdened by financial strain, Greenaway occasionally acknowledged the possibility of childhood distemper and rebelliousness. However, even these instances were rare, and they remained tepid compared to openly strange child portraiture that would be produced simultaneously by genteel painters such as John Singer Sargent. 174

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174 Even more interestingly, watercolors of this sort were well received particularly in America. In notable contrast to Kate’s usual tone, an illustration from *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, 1888, depicts a woman in a black gown and Wedgwood-blue hairpiece clasping the edge of a dinner table, next to a perfectly orderly china closet and a wall-clock striking the highly regular time of 10:10. While its little gold pendulum swings toward her, the source of her distress is comically evident: juvenile disarray unlike anything else in the scene. Three little girls of varying ages burst from their seats at the table and rush off the canvas to the viewer’s right, hair streaming and arms flailing in wild dance. The evidence of their eruptive departure is plentiful: a spilled cup of porridge, a spoon lying on the ground, even an overturned chair. These are not the serene darlings depicted in a typical Greenaway work. Greenaway borrowed liberally from the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to form her late
Taken as a whole, then, Greenaway’s illustration (one made in tandem with a watercolor book, 1884, studying the “language,” or visual symbolism, of flowers) suggests that there is no more enviably safe haven than childhood itself. To leave childhood behind—as all people inevitably must—is to risk a host of spiritual and moral perils, or at the very least, the leadening sadness of simply being an adult. Thus one mourns the passing of the age. Obviously due to his own personal sorrows and the flavor of his milieu, Abbott Thayer could not agree more.

In the compendium of literary critiques titled *Literature and the Child* (1999), Anne Lundin suggests that almost every derivative of the Romantic child in popular illustration—“decorative and domesticated”—is ultimately patterned after Greenaway’s work.¹⁷⁵ Lundin cites American illustrators such as Jessie Wilcox Smith, Rachel Field, and Tasha Tudor when she evaluates Greenaway’s impact on the field, and credits female librarians as well as the burgeoning “picture book tradition” as the main reason why Greenaway’s work spread so pervasively into nineteenth-century visual culture. She even goes so far as to say that copying Greenaway’s particular type of childhood imagery was (and is) the *raison d’etre* of many illustrators’ entire careers. Lundin’s primary assertion, which seems salient here, is that the timing and the magnitude of Greenaway’s personal success in marketing her images (she illustrated 61 separate books between 1861 and her

death in 1901) was no coincidence. Nineteenth-century English and American culture craved prints of a “reconstructed eighteenth-century” featuring perfectly beautiful costumed boys and girls in nondescript scenery that combined nature and domesticity (such as gardens).\textsuperscript{176} Greenaway drew inspiration from the artifacts of an earlier time in England, such as Queen Anne architecture, William Morris furniture and textiles, Chinese blue-and-white china, and “the soft colors much in vogue: apple blossom pink and moss green.”\textsuperscript{177} She suggests that Greenaway and the many (notably female) illustrators who pastiched her illustrations specifically sought to assert a “feminine” counterpart to the all-male movement of Romantic poets: a counterpart that increasingly equated feminine characteristics with the family, the homestead, and high personal ethics. Audiences were receptive to this notion, and Greenaway was a runaway hit.

**Painters of the Genteel Tradition**

We have seen that during the late nineteenth century, a rich intellectual and philosophical tradition of childhood and childrearing arose specifically catering to the elite. This particular strain of discourse on childhood was inspired both by paradigmatic changes in the perception, rearing, and teaching of children, and by the rise of a leisure class that measured personal success by domestic luxury. Such changes inspired an entire genre of popular literature both in the form of books and periodicals, abundant with new types of child protagonists quite unlike the Huck Finns arising simultaneously.

\textsuperscript{176} Lundin, 158.
\textsuperscript{177} Lundin, 160.
What, then, were concurrent developments in art, and how closely did such developments relate to changes in broader culture and literature? Did the painters of the genteel tradition know, or hear, or read about, what childhood was to the leisure class—directly through acquaintance to the individuals whose opinions most swayed popular discourse? In many cases, sometimes surprisingly, the answer is yes. Clearly, there was a parallel “genteel” ideological and written tradition to the story of the “Bad Boy.” Was there also a “genteel” visual tradition that ran parallel to the nostalgic childhood narratives in American genre painting? Absolutely, yes, and I will attempt to describe this tradition.

**Some General Trends and Lesser-Known Practitioners**

At the turn of the twentieth century two schools characterized genteel images of children. One was the somewhat saccharine family portrait, crisply and plasticly rendered. This standard image relied upon a series of well-used tricks, centered compositionally on the (always happy, always healthy) child and the (always happy, always adoring) parents. This was a trend so rampant in galleries at the time that it was disdainfully christened “the baby disease” by mid-1880's English art critics. Of this sort of artist, there are limitless numbers, and only a few will be mentioned here, to illustrate general representations of childhood in the high art market.

The other type of childhood imagery emerging among artists of the affluent was unique in composition, style, and especially mood. It was at times even

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bizarre, both to turn-of-the-twentieth-century peers as well as modern viewers. Such art showcased the individual psyche of the child sitter. It did not pretend to congratulate affluent parents on the assumption that their pampered child was a content one. In a few instances, it conveyed childhood disturbance or pathology as an integral part of its aesthetic. This trend will be examined shortly through the careers of four specific painters: William Merritt Chase, Abbott Handerson Thayer, John Singer Sargent, and Mary Cassatt. As we shall see, Chase, Thayer, Sargent, and Cassatt sometimes deliberately relied on extant conventions of child portraiture, but other times, deliberately defied them.

First, let me mention general trends in depicting childhood shared both by famous and lesser-known “genteel” painters. By the mid-nineteenth century, the most common form of portraiture for children was photography. Paintings that achieved a reasonable level of verisimilitude were much more expensive than photographs and thus were generally commissioned only by families of substantial wealth and social standing. In the early nineteenth century, many portraits included the entire family—father, mother, children, and often other relatives as well, grouped together. Lilly Martin Spencer, for example, created family portraits of this type. But as the century progressed, this type of group portrait fell from fashion. Increasingly, portraiture focused on a child or small cluster of children. If a parent appeared, it was generally the mother with an infant or young child: increasingly the father was not included, perhaps in part because by the mid-nineteenth century, with changing business practices, fathers increasingly worked outside the home. Even when paintings featured men, the home came to be distinctly conceived as a
feminine domain: one where women played the principal role, often as guardians of children.

An excellent example of this new type of family portrait is John Singer Sargent’s *The Birthday Party* (1885, oil on canvas, Minneapolis Institute of Arts), which uses the color red to strategically spotlight key compositional elements: the red-clad mother, Charlotte Dubray Besnard; her son Robert; the pink birthday cake she dotingly slices for the toddler; and the red walls of the professedly content domestic space. In this case the father, Albert, in a black-waistcoat, is allowed to participate in the activities, but he is of secondary importance and plays a completely passive role: except for a moustache, Sargent has not even granted him facial features. A more blatant example of the semi-absent father is *Tous Les Bonheurs* by Alfred Stevens (1880, oil on canvas, Musée d’Orsay, Paris), a crisply delineated image of a bejeweled mother and infant daughter. They wear vapid expressions and are surrounded by bric-a-brac, while the father, an afterthought, with his back to the viewer, sits in shadow doing business at his desk. Significantly, this new type was popular in Europe as well as the United States.

Often domestic portraits featured a nurse, rather than the mother: Mary Cassatt, for example, produced many paintings of this type. In the handling of this genre, Cecilia Beaux’s *Ernesta with Nurse* (1894, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art), was innovative in many ways. In a fashion reminiscent of a camera snapshot, the image crops the nurse from the wrist down. Beaux lowers the artist’s eye to the child’s level. The image portrays with vivid clarity the very moment at which Ernesta chooses between the guidance of an elder and the freedom of
autonomy. Reviewers of the exhibition of the Society of American Artists, 1894, raved about the work, which clearly combined an unusual tone and visual atmosphere with a subject matter that was familiar and reassuring.

Often these portraits made reference to earlier pictorial formulas. Surely the most popular of these was the Madonna and child. Many artists presented modern figures as if they were a Virgin and Infant Christ from a Renaissance altarpiece, as in George de Forest Brush’s *A Modern Madonna* (1919, oil on canvas, Brooklyn Museum, New York). In other instances, the monumental mother and infant refer back to Grand Manner portraiture. Sargent’s *The Countess of Warwick and Her Son* (1905, oil on canvas, Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts), for example, recalls the regal poses and lush foliage of Thomas Gainsborough’s portraits of wealthy English landowners and similarly celebrates the inheritance of titles, in this case from Frances Evelyn to her son, who possessively tugs on the strand of pearls hanging from her maternal bosom. But by focusing on the small child and his recognizably juvenile gesture, Sargent endowed this theme with an informality and intimacy not found very often in the work of eighteenth-century portraitists.

Another common trait of portraits featuring children was a taste for symbolic overtones. English painter William Clark Wontner’s *Edith Francis Moir (Connie)*, 1898 (oil on canvas, Private Collection), depicts a dreamy, curly-haired toddler flanked by a vague screen of flora and clutching two poppies. The poppies serve as symbols of sleep, and by implication of death—the poignant brevity of childhood. On the other hand, sometimes this imagery was presented with a stark directness that completely lacks sentimental overtones and seems disturbingly
modern. William Merritt Chase’s *The First Portrait* (1887, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas), for example, is not a didactic and saccharine vignette of family bliss, but a wall of black canvas broken only by Chase’s wife and daughter. What captures our attention is their bright attire, and most of all, his daughter’s intense stare. Even more shockingly intense is the frontal, black-eyed gaze of *Dorothy*, 1900, an imperious infant painted by Sargent.

Though these portraits were manifold and immensely popular, professional artistic circles received them ambivalently. Academicians and salons were still trained to promote physically enormous history paintings as the pinnacle of artistic prowess. If an artist chose a slightly less exalted format such as a portrait, and that portrait was a “baby painting,” then it should appease popular taste and be full of emotional tenderness. Scotsman William Quiller Orchardson’s *Master Baby* (1886, oil on canvas, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh), for instance, received negative criticism for two reasons. First, the subject has been depicted “undeservedly” on a very large canvas, usually the property of historical allegory. Secondly, this is not an image of elevated symbolism and sentimentality, but rather, a slice of an actual infant’s life. The baby is missing one sock, thrashing around with a real child’s indecorous glee, at a laughing mother.

**William Merritt Chase**

**Background**

The most outstanding painters of genteel children during this era were often doting parents. Of these the specimen par excellence was William Merritt
Chase, who ceaselessly painted his wife and six daughters. For some reason, while he had two sons, they rarely appear in his work—perhaps because of the premature death of his firstborn son, William Junior. Chase’s wife Alice gave birth to thirteen children, including two sets of twins; the eight who survived the all-too-high infant mortality rate were a central component in the artist’s life.  

Born in St. Louis, William Merritt Chase drew on the generosity of St. Louis relatives to study painting in Munich. There he developed a manner of painting with dashing brushstrokes that became the signature feature of his work throughout his long career, whether he was painting portraits, interiors or landscapes. A sociable figure, he formed alliances with other progressive American and European painters. In Munich he befriended other American artists of a progressive inclination, such as Frank Duveneck and Joseph Frank Currier, and during a visit to Venice in 1877, he befriended James McNeill Whistler, as well as John Henry Twachtman, one of the leading American impressionists. In 1876—the centennial year—Chase returned to the United States and immediately achieved considerable success with the exhibition of his Keying Up (The Court Jester, 1875, oil on canvas, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts), in the landmark Philadelphia Centennial Exposition; the painting then traveled to the Chicago Inter-State Industrial Exposition and finally the National Academy of Design annual exhibition (1878). While his reputation waned in the years after his death, his success in his lifetime enormous; he won medals in Munich repeatedly, at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition (1876), at the Paris Salon (1881), at the Cleveland Art Association (1894), at the Society of

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American Artists (numerous times), and at the St. Louis Exposition (1904).180

A master of artifice, Chase reigned for many years over New York City’s Tenth Street Studio, where he rented the largest studio in the building, which he filled with his painting and artistic bric-a-brac. He was a founding member, and later president, of the newly formed Society of American Artists, which was more progressive than the conservative National Academy of Design. In fact the Society of American Artists was formed in response to protests over giving younger artists, such as Chase, “too much wall space.” Chase also joined the Tiling Club, or “Tilers,” where he forged friendships with pivotal artists of the day, such as the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, and Winslow Homer. Chase’s greatest aspiration was to disseminate new European art among rising American artists. He was a teacher of countless subsequent American painters, most notably at the New York School of Art, which he founded; his teaching career also included the opening of his own summer art school in Shinnecock, Long Island (1891), and instruction at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Art Students League, and the Brooklyn Art Association. Chase’s students, destined for fame in their own right, included Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, Georgia O’Keeffe, and John Marin—notably, all future

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180 Chase’s decline in fame is usually credited as a clash of posh Eurocentric sensibility and “academism” with the populism of the American 1930’s, and his turnaround came with shows at the American British Art Center in New York and the John Herron Art Museum in Indianapolis. The critic who helped bolster Chase’s posthumous career most was Sam Hunter, who offered glowing praise of Chase’s “exquisite sensibility” in landscape. Possibly Chase’s most relentlessly disapproving critic was James Thomas Flexner, who accused Chase of an uncoordinated European-inspired eclecticism that “ignored the realities of [Chase’s] own experience and imperatives of [Chase’s] own environment.” For more, see William Merritt Chase: A Leading Spirit in American Art by Ronald G. Pisano, Seattle, University of Washington, 1983: p. 17. Flexner was a nationalist whose somewhat contemptuous views of American expatriate painters reflected those of Chase’s nemesis in art and art education, Robert Henri. The final roadblock that Chase scholarship encountered was a slew of forgeries after the mid-twentieth century. With the late-twentieth-century vogue for nineteenth-century Impressionism, Chase was at last restored to a place of serious art historical inquiry.
disciples of a photographer analogous to the genteel tradition, Alfred Stieglitz.

Yet for all these other accomplishments, arguably Chase’s most notable contribution to American art was the series of images he created of his adored and privileged sons and daughters. While Chase (like John Singer Sargent) also sometimes painted frothy, heraldic portraits of the children of others, he is best known for peppering his beautiful landscapes and studio or home interiors with appearances by his own boys and girls, especially his girls.

Karen Metcalf Roof’s early biography of Chase, which was written in 1917, roughly a year after his death, stresses that two interests dominated his life: art and family. Roof states with gushing earnestness, “No man ever lived more completely in the atmosphere and idea of art than Chase did. He had no other compelling interests except his family, and indeed, in his devotion to them art was inextricably intertwined.” What Roof meant by this was that Chase discussed art, and composed paintings, as often in his home as in his professional studio, and that the distinctness of the two realms blurred; he even named his youngest daughter, Mary Content, after two of his painting pupils. The nicknames of many of his other children betray his doting sentiment: “Rollie,” “Minnie,” “Jennie,” “Toady,” “Glad” “Pansy,” and “Cosy” among them. Home and studio, in fact, became a hybrid

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181 The first of these children was Alice Dieudonné Chase, born February 9 1887. The extent to which Alice was seen as a precious and vulnerable possession is betrayed by her middle name, which translates “gift from God.” Her nickname, “Cosy,” refers to her father’s fondness for her relaxed appearance while she often slept on their sofa. See Keith L. Bryant, William Merritt Chase: A Genteel Bohemian. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991. For the next 28 years, Cosy served as a model for her father.
183 Roof, 264.
184 Bryant, 205-207.
space for Chase, as Barbara Dayer Gallati has most recently examined. As devoted as he was to his paintings, he was still more devoted to his children:

“He was proud of them all, from the oldest son to the youngest girl... and always took them to walk, all eight, every Sunday afternoon. One daughter was the object of particular interest to him from her earliest childhood. Mrs. Chase tells of overhearing him tête-à-tête with the baby, a small dark object too young to voice articulate wants, inquiring with helpless but elaborate courtesy: ‘Is there anything I can do for you?’”185

Chase painted his children quickly, in his rapid and feathery stroke, doing so with such speed that Mrs. Chase insisted that neither she nor the children ever grew tired of posing.

**Chase and His Sheltered Children**

These eight “little red notes” that occupied key passages of his canvases were invariably untroubled and beautiful. They lived on Stuyvesant Square, attended the Friends’ Seminary, and every event, however trivial, in their little lives was greeted with generous fanfare.186 Two particular issues arise when we examine Chase’s interiors and landscapes featuring his girls. First, the pampered life they enjoyed, centered on play, was considered normal and well earned by the innocent perfection of the children featured. Secondly, their sheltered upbringing produced positive results—they were not “spoiled” or “ruined”—and justified a certain blindness to conditions suffered by children of less privileged social spheres.

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185 Roof, 265.
186 Notably Roof reports that the Chase children put on school plays at the seminary, which was a new and novel teaching method espoused by Friedrich Froebel, the kindergarteners, and the teachers at Felix Adler’s liberal Christian “Ethical Culture School” in New York City as of the 1870’s.
Starting in the late 1880’s, Chase completed a handful of oil paintings that portrayed his children engaged in the simple, contented act of play. These were composed during a time of transition for Chase, when harsh criticism of his Munich-inspired work led him to visit Holland and begin studying plein-air painting (though he never considered himself an Impressionist per se). While his landscapes opened up into glittering studies of natural light, “little jewels” in Kenyon Cox’s words, Chase’s interiors also changed. They began to reflect simpler, starker vignettes of self-satisfied children, directly due to the influence of Chase’s two artistic heroes, also recent masters of plein-air painting: Whistler and John Singer Sargent.187

Chase’s oil painting *Hide and Seek* (1888, oil on canvas, Private Collection), is one of the earlier works in this new line of interiors featuring children. Chase expends almost the entire canvas on a dark room glistening with nuances of wood polish. But there are five more developed points of interest in this image. The first is one of Chase’s golden-haired daughters, who peeks from the lower left against a well-lit doorway into the dark expanse. She wears a white dress. The back of her curled head is probably the most fastidiously rendered passage in the entire painting. The second point of interest is the empty blue and white chair, and the third, above it, a picture frame or gilt mirror that is cropped so that the implied reflection of the painting’s viewer remains unseen. The fourth and fifth points of

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187 Chase came to be familiar with Sargent, as well as Mary Cassatt, by attempting somewhat unsuccessfully to collect some of his works. See Pisano, 150. Ironically enough, though he found collecting Cassatt to be a challenge, one of Chase’s own works, *Flowers*, was acquired by her collector friend H.O. Havemeyer. The important point to glean here is that Chase moved intimately in these demi-Impressionist circles of American expatriates and often championed their work, their ideas, and surely their attitudes about genteel childhood.
interest are the hesitant little girl’s far bolder sister, also clad in white, tiptoeing to another doorway, which hangs barely ajar and is rimmed in almost heavenly light.

The image is simultaneously quaint and suspenseful. The tension the viewer feels is more like gleeful anticipation; the girls are eavesdropping through the glowing cracks in the door, and we the audience cannot help but wonder what they will find past their allotted play-sanctum. Therefore themes of harmless disobedience arise. The painting evokes the faintly surreal nostalgia of being a child curious about and encroaching on adult territory, something that has already been explored in a far more menacing and Darwinian manner by the genre painters.188

Chase’s paintings of his children are not typically suspenseful. This composition and subject pay obvious homage to a more overtly strange painting completed in 1882 by Chase’s hero Sargent, called The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit (oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Even the chair in Chase’s painting mimics the pair of vases that similarly segregate the children physically and psychologically in Sargent’s painting. Sargent’s painting will be discussed in detail shortly.

Chase’s oil sketch Children Playing Parlor Croquet (1888, oil on canvas, Private Collection), foreshadows a more developed image of his other daughters playing a ring-toss game a decade later. One white-clad brunette daughter delicately taps her croquet mallet against her ball, in a diagonal arc across the

188 The unusual composition, air of suspense, passages of clarity and blurriness, and use of one bright light source may also derive from Chase’s collection of pioneering motion photographs by Eadweard Muybridge. Muybridge’s photographs explored similar visual phenomena: compositional cropping, varied sharpness of detail, and experimental lighting. See commentary in the label at the Phillips Collection, where the image is held: 
brilliant orange-red floor, toward the next wicket, where two more balls await. Her blond sister leans back in a ballerina-like state of content repose. This is a far more tranquil, typical image of the Chase family’s home life. The relaxed state of the girls, and the seemingly haphazard place in the home where they have set up their game—where an arched niche holds a dresser covered in expensive, breakable bric-a-brac—are telling. These children are indulged and used to being so. This painting also demonstrates the frequency with which Chase portrayed his children in a studio setting. For instance, this scene of child’s play features a painting on an easel.

Keith Bryant’s biography of Chase (A Genteel Bohemian, 1991) reiterated that Chase tended to intentionally conflate artifice with domesticity. Barbara Dayer Gallati has made similar comments (in William Merritt Chase, 1995).189 By “artifice,” both Bryant and Gallati mean both the cosmopolitan lifestyle and the act of painting—deemed “a love of surface” by Charles Lang Freer—which for Chase and peers was largely an exercise in superficial tricks in lavish impasto paint. By “domesticity,” they meant Chase’s relationship with his wife and children. These art historians have concluded that Chase’s art depicting his children is part of a larger theme that asserts that an artist is also an actor who must don a persona to be successful, and that even the most intimate parts of an artist’s life are inherently a form of spectacle.

The roles that Chase and his children played were certainly played in contentment. Chase’s oil painting Ring Toss (1896, oil on canvas, Private Collection), also demonstrates the painter’s fondness for his children and his endorsement of indulgent childrearing. It is a striking image that formed the basis for

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contemporaneous art photographs. In the painting, three of his daughters, again in fashionable white dresses, toss cloth rings to amuse themselves. The floor is a glossy warm wood polished to perfection; the interior is again bare but refined.

Taken as a whole, *Hide and Seek, Parlor Croquet*, and *Ring Toss* reference Kindergarten’s counsel that children be given exercises in the manual mastery of concrete objects, disguised as play. Quite compatibly, genteel culture prescribed a sheltered existence for children in which play was the greatest daily concern. For these girls, play replaces the vocational and practical pursuits of earlier times. It exists for its own sake to teach them how to interact with the world.

When Chase painted his daughters in Brooklyn’s Prospect Park, New York’s Central Park, or Shinnecock, Long Island, where he held a summer art school, he consciously removed them from urban squalor and chose not to depict underprivileged youth. Like many Americans before the Progressive Era, Chase saw these slum kids—“the worst people,” as he once called the subjects of urban genre—as the root of the evils against which he sheltered his own daughters. For instance, *Lake for Miniature Yachts, Central Park* (1888-90, oil on canvas, Private Collection), a genteel recasting of Winslow Homer’s *Boat Builders*, shows a sunny paved path flanked by a lush field of trees and a peek of church steeples. The painting is populated entirely by white-clad youngsters. The prolific presence of toy sailboats in the park’s reflecting pond signifies an equal abundance of happy children. Nearest the viewer, a little boy demonstrates the sailing of a toy boat for a smaller, bonneted girl—completing a calculatedly idyllic picture of industrialized

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190 I refer to a photograph by the same title composed by Clarence White.
191 Bryant, 210.
New York and the children in it.

As a parent, Chase was an extreme devotee of the new ideas about permissive childrearing that were being promoted in socially privileged spheres. Roof approvingly declares that “Chase was a father more indulgent than disciplinary,” and recounts Chase’s delight in taking his girls and boys to Coney Island each summer and spoiling them with gifts and rides.\footnote{Roof, 264.} However, Chase’s biographer admits that his social investment in childhood ends with his own children.

Chase’s paintings of his wife and children at the Shinnecock Hills seaside began roughly the same time, and extended into the 1890’s. They are slices of life of the family’s exploits in the sand around the row of cottages where Chase taught his art students. These works are luminous, even pastoral, but they are also formulaic; seeing one is essentially seeing them all. They are wide and short rectangular compositions, with the horizon line around the center or slightly above it, and they take place near or on the water. They feature a cluster of people so compositionally small that they function in the same manner as clouds and shoreline. Mrs. Chase and the Chase children are endearing details in larger scenes that capture the warmth and quality of light at a particular time of day—for those who were privileged enough to enjoy such respite—in a tourist-fashionable locale, where they lived in a house designed by the celebrity-status architectural firm of McKim, Meade, & White. Interestingly, whether in art or in personal life, Chase was always fashionable, a trendsetter. Dressed in the latest clothing, constantly collecting the
highest-craved material possessions, Chase was among the vanguard of American cultural celebrities to invent a now widely emulated leisure lifestyle. Cleverly placing his most successful teaching endeavor in the same place where he vacationed, Chase spirited his nuclear family to that idyllic seaside locale specifically for the luxury of happy escapism. Indeed, tourism was, and is, a way to brag about social status. Chase’s wife and children lived in a cottage flanked by the ocean and Peconic Bay, adorned by sweet fern, bay, and butterfly weed, and surrounded by toys.193

*At the Seaside* (1892, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art) features women and children reposing in the sand under colorful yellow, white, and coral hued umbrellas. The hot reds featured in his compositions usually draw attention to Chase’s family members, and here is no exception. In the foreground, a mother recumbent on a red towel holds an involved conversation with her red-bonneted toddler, while her other toddler straddles the sand behind her, accompanied by a red bucket. *Shell Beach at Shinnecock* (1892, oil on canvas, Private Collection), and *A Sunny Day at Shinnecock* (1892, oil on canvas, Private Collection), are similar vignettes of Chase’s girls engrossed in discovering treasures along the shoreline, with the addition of a dog in the latter image. A slight variation on the theme is a series of images not on, but near, the beach, in a soft green grove of sea grass and flowers: *Near the Beach, Shinnecock* (1895, oil on canvas, Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio), in which one of the daughters, with her red bonnet and red stockings, strikes out intrepidly ahead of her mother and sister; *The Bayberry Bush* (1895, oil on

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193 Bryant, 160-161.
canvas, Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York), which was painted near the
vacation homestead (which appears in the upper left of the composition); and the
well-known *Idle Hours* (1894, oil on canvas, Amon Carter Museum of American Art,
Fort Worth, Texas), the title of which easily summarizes the painting.

Chase clearly, unapologetically perceived childhood as a state in which a
parent was permitted unchecked indulgence and tender comportment toward his
beloved children. Chase took for granted that this perception and treatment of the
young was privileged. He was not concerned with any potentially negative effects
on a spoiled child, or on society as a whole. He photographed and painted his
daughters as playing princesses, posing Infantas, even once photographing and
painting daughter Helen in a full Spanish princess costume.\(^{194}\) Chase’s children
were not connected to the “real,” outside world—nor, judging by their place in his
art, did they particularly have to be. Roof admits that Chase had little interest in the
“history” of sitters and places, that “he did not know such facts because he did not
care about them. His interest was supremely and simply the artist’s lust of the eye.
He cared how the thing *looked*, not a jot what its history was, however
interesting.”\(^{195}\) In short, the foundation of Chase’s art was to delight in immediate
sensual pleasure rather than to entertain social or political theory. Though
aesthetically compelling, Chase’s formally luscious paintings of his daughters in
their own drawing room or in Prospect Park were also markedly and willfully
disconnected from social reality.

\(^{194}\) Pisano, 127.
\(^{195}\) Root, 257.
Abbott Thayer’s paintings of children share certain similarities with William Merritt Chase’s, though they lack Chase’s technical and stylistic daring. Like Chase, Thayer portrayed his own children. Like Chase, in his canvases, Thayer granted his children reign over a happy haven that was as pure and perfect as they were. Unlike Chase’s, however, Thayer’s depiction of children as domestic angels was extreme: almost a form of fanatical psychological cleansing. He painted his offspring literally as flawless, breathtaking winged creatures, beings like wax statues, who dwelt with their mother in an emblematic paradise. In reality, their mother was absent, they were forever kept out of school and isolated from normal social interaction for fear of contracting “germs,” and their eccentric father could not give them anything akin to the perfect world prescribed by elite culture. The genteel tradition’s treatment of childhood as blameless, and children as deservedly pampered, was an ideological evasion, or perhaps an over-compensation, for the problems endured by those less fortunate than the elite. And Abbott Thayer’s paintings of children, exaggerated by personal loss, are perhaps the strongest example of this popular tendency to idyllically over-compensate.

Background

While Chase’s paintings provide an unfailingly cheerful, optimistic view of childhood with no clouds blocking the sky, those of his near-contemporary Abbott Handerson Thayer present a more troubled—and troubling—perspective. A profoundly eccentric man, mercurial and brooding, Thayer dabbled in Spiritualism,
adored the German Romantic composers such as Beethoven and Schubert, believed that extreme exposure to fresh air (in the form of vacationing in the winter wilderness in a tent) produced longevity, and kept prairie dogs, owls, porcupines, and a tame crow he called “Satan” as pets. His favorite authors were Robert Louis Stevenson, Mark Twain, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. He knew William Dean Howells through Twain, and he was also an ardent devotee of Thoreau and Longfellow. While most members of the white male intelligentsia avidly read these standard authorities in Transcendentalist/Romanticist literature, it can be safely said that Thayer took their worship of nature—nature as divinity—to an extreme. His abnormal lifelong obsession with documenting animal and plant camouflage patterns, often at the expense of emotionally and physically neglecting his “adored” children, amply proves this.

Like Chase, Thayer focused almost obsessively on making paintings of members of his own family—his daughters Gladys and Mary and his son Gerald. But the family he portrayed was not by conventional standards a happy one. Thayer’s emotionally unstable wife was eventually confined to a mental institution; his children had what might be termed “adjustment problems”; he himself suffered from some form of what modern-day psychotherapists call Bipolar Disorder.

Thayer—who was born in Boston in 1849 and died in 1921—was the son of a Harvard-trained medical doctor. At the age of seven, Abbott was already obsessed with taxidermy and John James Audubon’s *Birds of America*. He spent hours daily studying and drawing wildlife, but oddly, he also became an

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accomplished hunter of the same animals that he so loved. Exhibiting a need to immortalize objects of affection in conditions of perfection, Abbott elaborately posed his dead subjects before they decayed, captured them on paper, and arrested them forever in their warm state.

Thayer trained first in Dorchester under the jeweler and amateur painter of animals, Henry Morse. He then abandoned plans to attend a school for engineering to move to Brooklyn and study painting. He attended both the Brooklyn Art School and the National Academy of Design. Around this time, he met his first wife, Kate Bloede, an art school dropout who was in chronically poor health, and attended Spiritualist gatherings hosted by her politically extreme-liberal German father. Abbott and Kate were married in 1875 and spent four years abroad, where Abbott studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts under Jean-Leon Gerôme. Gerôme, highly popular among American art students, was one of the few official art instructors who tolerated Thayer, or l'homme sérieux ("the Serious Man"), as his fellow pupils dubbed him.197

Importantly, the arrival of children was exactly when the Thayers’ life began to grow permanently tragic. Kate bore two children in Paris—Mary and Harry. Upon the Thayers’ return to New York, in 1880, and Abbott’s submission of numerous illustrations to Scribner's, Harry died at the age of two. Almost immediately thereafter, their third child, Ralph Waldo, died at only three months old. Notably, Thayer expressed “grief and paradoxical exhilaration” at this event, scoffing at mortality itself with a kind of desperate, self-consoling mania, “To think

197 Anderson, 13.
that wherever this little son has gone, for I have long felt the absurdity of annihilation, there [his mother and I] are going too, and henceforth the horror of dying is changed forever, and an unspeakable delight of greeting shines back through the obscure future."198 Despite the eventual birth of two more children, Gladys and Gerald, and periodic retreats to peaceful locales such as Nantucket and Woodstock, the deaths of Harry and Ralph seem to have had a permanent effect on the Thayers’ psyches. About a decade later, Abbott would begin painting women and children at ritualistic intervals as winged beings untouchable by disease and death.

This tendency was only exacerbated by another form of emotional hardship. Kate suffered a nervous breakdown in 1888. Diagnosed in primitive psychiatric terms as “melancholia,” Kate’s condition rapidly worsened, and she was admitted to Bloomingdale Asylum in May of that year. Kate’s disability was permanent; she was transferred in 1891 to a sanitorium in Baldwinsville, Massachusetts, where she died of a “pulmonary complication” on May 3, 1891.199

Thayer’s three surviving children were abruptly bereft of a mother, and the artist hid behind a fanatically productive painting output while leaving the three youngsters in the care of a rapid succession of housekeepers.

Thayer was never entirely comfortable in the company of women, despite the fact that most of his own art students were genteel young ladies and most of his household staff, who cared for his children, were female. He either kept women at an intentional distance, elevated on a pedestal, or he became consumed with

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198 Anderson, 17.
199 Anderson, 20.
affection for them. Nonetheless, Thayer once again fell in love: the woman was named Emma Beach. In a letter to a friend, he nervously justified his new affection, “I believe in my heart I should never have succumbed to temptation of any woman again whose coming was not an obvious blessing to my children.”\textsuperscript{200} The widower married Emma on September 3, 1891 at a friend’s house in Nantucket.\textsuperscript{201} They returned to their family’s home in Dublin, and were greeted on a dramatically rainy afternoon in the foyer by his children “looking,” in Abbott’s words, “absolutely radiantly beautiful.”\textsuperscript{202} The painter was transfixed by, and never seemed to discard, comforting mental associations between children, virginal purity, and spiritual perfection. His many images of Madonnas, women-angels, and child-angels began at this juncture. These images received generous support during the early 1890’s because Thayer simultaneously gained a famous patron in the Detroit financier, Charles Lang Freer, who is best known as a collector of Oriental art objects and the patron of J.A.M. Whistler; Thayer also found Mary Cassatt and John Singer Sargent’s dealer, J. Montgomery Sears, to be ideally suited to promoting his own work.

\textbf{Thayer’s Child Angels}

Remarkably, though his first marriage took place in a Unitarian church, Thayer ascribed to no particular Christian beliefs, and he professed to paint themes that transcended specific symbolic or literary references in favor of a vague but effusive “spirituality.” Despite this, he is best known for portraying his children, and

\textsuperscript{200} Anderson, 22.
\textsuperscript{201} Anderson, 25.
\textsuperscript{202} Anderson, 25.
the children of his sitters, in quite a literal, straightforward manner: as winged, unblemished celestial beings. Peculiarly enough, though one would think pictures of winged little girls terribly trite, Thayer’s perfect images surmount this fate. They are, instead, a paradoxical mixture of melancholy and detached, trance-like exultation.

Thayer’s oil painting *Angel* (1887-8, oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.), is an image of his daughter Mary. He claimed that he began to paint angels because of his lifelong obsession with birds, but something more complicated transpires in paintings like this. Mary’s rosy ivory complexion, her overly large eyes and small lips recall the appearance and proportioning of Renaissance Virgin Mary, her costume is a classicizing, sleeveless snowy white, and her dove-like “wings” are enormously oversized. Art historian Ross Anderson comments skeptically about the scale of Mary’s wings, criticizing this and the wings’ placement as “not organically connected” to the girl’s shoulder blades and spine the way that a bird’s wings would be. In fact, these wings do seem almost unkindly large, as if they overwhelm the child’s back with their weight and will cause her to topple over. The strangeness of Mary’s wings derives from the fact that Thayer asked Mary to pose in front of a pair of feathered props that were taped to the wall with a piece of cardboard, something that he described in a letter to Emma mistakenly as “a promising plan.” Ultimately, then, though exquisite, Mary’s portrait as a celestial being is rather discomfiting.

Thayer’s oil painting *Virgin Enthroned* (1891, Smithsonian American Art

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203 Anderson, 60.
204 Ibid.
Museum, Washington, D.C.), is another oddly uncomfortable rendition of a spiritual, quasi-religious subject. The artist’s oldest daughter, Mary, is again the central subject in this icon-like frontal image of the Madonna surrounded by two dark-robed youngsters. Mary’s brother, Gerald, and sister, Gladys (who was added last) are the two children. Having just taken the part of the Virgin in a tableau vivant put on by the local public library, Mary was a natural choice for this painting; interestingly enough, however, she abruptly replaced a young female neighbor originally intended as the model for the titular figure. In fact, as Anderson has proposed, the addition may reflect a process of substitution and emotional compensation. Thayer’s first wife, Kate, died in 1891, when the painting was being executed; consequently, his daughter Mary becomes her surrogate in a rendition of family that is both idealized and filled with strange psychological undercurrents. Hands resting passively in her lap, Mary sports an expression that is trancelike, frozen with sadness and resignation. So does Gerald, while Gladys watches her older sister with what seems like puzzlement and slight disconcertment—none of which are conventional qualities prescribed for a triumphal moment in the Madonna’s narrative.

A similar oil painting, which is highly icon-like, is also titled The Virgin (oil on canvas, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). It was completed in 1893, featuring the same three children with the same expressions of determined longsuffering, holding hands and approaching the viewer through an earthy-hued haze that makes their pastoral setting oddly cold and somber. It has been convincingly suggested that Thayer intentionally chose to infuse these symmetrical,
monumental compositions (and many others) with tragic personal meaning: his children’s reaction to the loss of their mother, but, by the very subject matter that they act out, the simultaneous promise that she will be reunited with them in paradise. Overall, just as with Thayer’s other work, the viewer leaves this image of ostensible “perfection” feeling strangely melancholic.

**The Value of Thayer**

It would be perhaps an interpretive stretch to state that Thayer’s paintings of his children exemplify the Freudian coping mechanism called “denial.” However, what is inarguable is the fact that an entire program of images of women and children sprang up after Kate Bloede Thayer was institutionalized. Associations with guilty generosity and worrisome overprotection, both personal and cultural, are incontrovertible. Still, considering that he was a peripheral figure in nineteenth-century American art—indeed, only one exhibition catalog of his work exists in the past fifty years, and it was completed in 1982—why study Thayer? Furthermore, why study Thayer when Thayer is not the first nineteenth-century artist to portray children as winged angels? He is part of a highly popular larger trend in both painting and photography in both America and Europe: for instance, the British Pictorialist Julia Margaret Cameron created seemingly limitless soft-focus photographs of little girls in angel costumes complete with swan wings, such as *I Wait (Rachel Gurney)*, 1872 (albumen silver print, Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California).

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205 Anderson, 63.
It is important to examine Thayer’s images of children because Thayer placed an extreme twist on the trend of framing elite children as sinless denizens—specifically, angels—of a separate, Elysian realm. The discord between Thayer’s actual experience as a father of five and his images of children underscores, rather than diminishes, the forced nature of “happy purity” in his paintings. This quality is pervasive in genteel images of children. It is important to acknowledge, and Thayer makes its dissonance especially transparent. While the tool he used was popular during the nineteenth century, Thayer places a darker twist on his child-angels. For instance, Cameron’s aforementioned photograph of Rachel Gurney depicts a child whose boredom and annoyed resignation show through in her “saintly” countenance; these candid emotions add a humorous quality to the image that makes its staged elements somehow more permissible. Cameron’s child-angel is not truly melancholic. On the other hand, this cannot be said of Thayer’s paintings.

It was not uncommon for nineteenth-century families to find solace in perceiving the all-too common death of children as an immediate ascension to a heavenly paradise. Such a fate suited their “pure, innocent” souls—to the extent that a form of photography called the “post-mortem portrait” was invented at this time to commemorate death, particularly infant death. However, Abbott threw himself into paintings that increasingly treated human subjects—especially children—with a spiritual rapture that was extreme even by the Victorian era’s sentimental standards. It is as if his canvases became a form of self-affirming

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206 Further, Thayer’s “peripheral” status is arguable, in part because of his rich personal associations. Thayer was not among the central figures in American art at this time, but he was well acquainted with those painters who have become canonical masters of art history, as well as many writers of similar esteem, such as Mark Twain.
escapism for the losses that he and his wife suffered.\textsuperscript{207} Fascinatingly, such canvases were very popular in Thayer’s circle. The poignantly desperate artificiality in such works seems to have gone entirely unnoticed, or at least unacknowledged, in its time. This obvious omission is telling: Thayer was over-compensating for his sorrow, but doing so was in keeping with his social milieu and its preconceptions about children’s ideological role.

\textbf{John Singer Sargent}

America’s most prolific portraitist, John Singer Sargent, broke William Merritt Chase’s mold of painting only his own daughters in pleasant settings. Sargent’s work, overrun with childhood imagery, is vast and varied. He spent most of his life in Europe but retained his American citizenship, and Americans often patronized him. He was a contemporary of Chase, who revered his talent, but he began painting children regularly only after 1879. There are a few notable exceptions before this date, such as \textit{The Oyster Gatherers of Cancale} (1878, oil on canvas, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), an oil painting that features women and children collecting oysters companionably along a sunlit beach. Scholars of this painting often discuss Sargent’s affinities with the Barbizon School of French landscapists; they rarely comment upon the presence of children.\textsuperscript{208}

Both Chase and Thayer painted children from an emotionally consistent viewpoint, focusing on only a few recurrent modes of portrayal. By contrast, the

\textsuperscript{207} It should be noted that most of Thayer’s images of children featured young girls. This may be because Mary is the only one of the first three Thayer children, the others boys, who survived; it may also be because Thayer grappled visually for his entire life with internal schemas of women as either harmlessly perfect and virginal, or frightening and ambiguous, beings.

work of Sargent, one of the most prodigiously prolific portraitists of this period, is both vast and impressively varied in approach. No other painter of the period portrayed children with such an enormous range of poses and psychological perspectives or portrayed the personalities and activities of children with such variety. Notably, his perspective on children was one of greater emotional detachment. While he painted children frequently, with just a few notable exceptions, Sargent did so on commission rather than for pleasure.

While Thayer and Chase focused obsessively on their own children, Sargent was unmarried and childless, and seems to have never pursued a serious romantic attachment with a woman, though at one point as a young man he seems to have been pursued by one of his female models, Louise Burckhardt. In recent years, some Sargent scholars have suggested that he may have been homosexual, a conjecture that is supported by statements circulated in his lifetime, as well as through various forms of circumstantial evidence, including the seemingly homoerotic qualities of some of his drawings of the male nude.

To succeed commercially, a portraitist needs to know how to flatter his sitters. Sargent mastered this skill brilliantly. He worked in a period when the portrait was a badge of social position, and when the wealthy were not only extremely rich but unashamed to flaunt their status. It was a period when “virtuoso portraits of gracious ladies and gentlemen in sumptuous silks and brilliant jewels struck a responsive chord among the new plutocracy, not just for whom they

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209 See A Touch of Blossom: John Singer Sargent and the Queer Flora of Fin-de-Siecle Art by Alison Syme.
depicted but for what they cost.” Sargent obligingly made his sitters look elegant and glamorous—he was a master in the rendering of shiny satins and silks and glittering interiors. Yet in some fashion, he also almost brutally captured a quality of vulnerability in his sitters. His work often seems to hover on the edge of criticism or satire. He knew how to capture the complex interaction between a sitter’s public identity and his or her private personality. Over the course of his career he produced over 900 portraits, ranging in subject from languishing heiresses to the robust Teddy Roosevelt. Interestingly, while he also produced most of his portraits of children on commission, no other painter of the nineteenth century explored the lives of children with such sensitivity to their emotional undercurrents.

Background

Sargent was born in Florence, Italy on January 12, 1856, the son of Fitzwilliam Sargent, a New England aristocrat, eye surgeon, and medical illustrator originally from Gloucester, Massachusetts, and Mary Newbold Singer, an amateur painter and the daughter of a wealthy Philadelphia merchant. Mary enjoyed world travel and so the family became an itinerant band of well-to-do expatriates during John’s formative years. Worldly from a young age, John learned Italian, French, and German as a child, and took watercolor lessons from German painter Carl Welsch. Beginning at age 17, he studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence.

The family moved to Paris where John enrolled in the atelier of Charles-Emile-Auguste Duran, better known as Carolus-Duran, the French alla prima master

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who mentored many important American painters. At the time, Carolus-Duran’s approach incorporated new artistic fashion. He was not, however, considered to be as dangerously radical as the French Impressionists since he integrated Impressionist ideas into effects drawn from the work of the old masters. Carolus-Duran also painted loosely configured portraits of affluent children, the likes of which clearly influenced Sargent. One excellent example is Carolus-Duran’s oil painting of his American friend Alice’s daughter, *Natalie at Ten* (1887, oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington. D.C.), which features a straight-faced girl named Natalie Clifford Barney, blond, clad in green velvet and gold brocade, hands on her hips, piercing the viewer with her steady dark stare. The young lady that Carolus-Duran captured has been described as “confident and inquisitive,” as well as unorthodox, which demonstrates Carolus-Duran’s psychological acuity; Natalie grew up to be an expatriate Parisian, involved in a 50-year lesbian romance with artist Romaine Brooks. Sargent would inherit his mentor’s uncanny prescience with respect to his child sitters’ personalities.

Carolus-Duran also exposed his precocious pupil to the dark, tenebriastic work of the Baroque Old Masters; to the lush, airily decorous work of the eighteenth-century English portraitists; and to the work of the French Impressionists. Indeed, Sargent met Claude Monet, painted his portrait, and worked outdoors alongside him. He thus learned plein-air Impressionist painting from the very figure who created the movement during the 1870s. All three of these

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211 Unsurprisingly, taking into account the appearance and subject matter of Sargent’s mature career, Carolus-Duran revered the Spanish seventeenth-century court painter Diego Velázquez and the seventeenth-century Dutch painters Frans Hals and Rembrandt. But the French master also
dissonant artistic styles appear in Sargent’s images of children.

Sargent’s breakthrough work in America, *Neapolitan Children Bathing* (1879, oil on canvas, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts), is a seaside scene of children: here, lounging little boys in an innocent state of undress. But despite their depiction in a casual and immodest light, these little boys retain their innocence: they are still pure, untroubled beings. Unseemly juvenile behavior at a waterfront would become the distinct property of painters two decades after Sargent. And it would be on other canvases that Sargent himself would interrogate the carefree paradise of childhood.

In 1884, Sargent’s long residence in Paris, his haven, which he deemed “the one place,” came to an abrupt end, over an art world scandal.\(^2\) The precipitating event was the Salon showing of his portrait of Madam Virginie Gatreau, famously known as *Madam X*.\(^3\) Sargent was so profoundly humiliated by the scandal that he moved to London.

In London, Sargent began to paint British portrait subjects. Notably this encouraged his students to emulate the lordly English portraitists Sir Joshua Reynolds and Sir Thomas Lawrence, and at intervals in Sargent’s career, both types of work—the brooding and spiritual, or the lush and pastel, reign. Carolus-Duran was also a friend of rising French iconoclasts such as Edouard Manet. Thusly he instructed pupils such as Sargent in candid portraiture. Indeed, his preference of painting directly onto the canvas without a preliminary sketch was in the service of a “fresh impression.” As Barbara Weinberg, citing early works such as *El Jaleo* and *Madame X*, has put it, “Sargent was innovative, but was concurrently sustained by contact with tradition.” Weinberg, p. 3.

Sargent spent a summer in Spain and Venice, Italy, directly after completing his studies under Carolus-Duran and Leon Bonnat. He also allied himself with the French Impressionists Caillebotte, Degas, and Renoir, and, especially, with Monet, whom he visited and after whom he learned the plein-air method. Simultaneously he relied on such disparate influences as Japanese prints and the seventeenth-century Flemish master Van Dyck. His range of influences was truly heterogeneous.

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\(^3\) Ralph Curtis, quoted in Olsen, p. 103-104. On the morning of the opening, so many of Sargent’s friends and acolytes audibly exclaimed disgust at the plunging black neckline and “decomposed”-looking pallor of the portrait that he “dodged behind doors” to avoid their disappointed stares, and Gatreau herself came to his studio “bathed in tears” begging him to remove the piece.
career shift was accompanied by a focus on genteel children such as the Vickers and the Barnards. Around this time, the exiled Sargent met the genial host of American expatriate authors living in England, Henry James; this proved beneficial in Sargent’s meticulous quest to win allies in the British art world, and to continue the positive response he was receiving for his work such as his vibrant portrait of *Dr. Pozzi at Home* (1881, oil on canvas, Armand Hammer Museum and Cultural Center, UCLA, Los Angeles).

In 1887-1888, Sargent also visited his parents’ native country. Children were focal portrait figures at this point in his tenacious career-building; in fact this was the time during which some of Sargent’s oddest, most visually unconventional works of children were produced. Visiting the cities of Boston, Newport, and New York, Sargent busied himself completing twenty commissions for wealthy American patrons. He would return to the United States in 1889-1890 and, finding himself in high demand, complete over forty more works. He also formed a contract for the first of numerous mural paintings.

Sargent’s absorption with capturing the United States and its elite would become a tradition from that year until the 1920’s. Indeed, although his very first visit to the United States was not until 1876, Sargent was always fond of American life and culture, even to the point that he declined Edward VII’s offer of English knighthood in 1907 in order to retain his American citizenship. Sargent’s fealty to his home country, coupled with his artistic skill, also earned him a seat as juror in the Society of American Artists, as early as 1877. Like his surviving sister Emily, John
was an “accentless mongrel,” who “belonged nowhere,” and “could sail through the
problems of languages, customs, capital cities, with admirable ease.” But it was
precisely that assimilated “accentlessness” that made him such a phenomenal
portraitist of children and adults alike.

**Sargent: Painter of Unhappy Children**

Something that is often mentioned, but rarely given systematic analysis, is
the fact that Sargent quite frequently and probingly portrayed child sitters. Like
Chase, Sargent painted rich children in lush interiors, but what set Sargent apart
was his admission that the happiness of these children was questionable. Sulky,
scowling, even terrified children astonishingly populated commissioned portraits in
which, conventionally, flattery was key.

Sargent’s depiction of unpleasant, even strange, children began
immediately at the outset of his professional career, in 1881, with the commission to
capture his famously disagreeable French sitter, Marie-Louise Pailleron, and her
older brother. The painting, *The Pailleron Children* (1879, oil on canvas, Corcoran
Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), is a large canvas showcasing striking emotional
awkwardness and psychological distance. This image of sour-faced youth was a
favor granted to the children’s father, Edouard, a famed essayist and playwright, and
their mother, whose “Baudelarian” portrait, notably “rather strange in taste,”

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215 The one marvelous exception is Barbara Dayer Gallati’s recent art historical study *Great
Expectations*, which examines the reasons why Sargent so often painted children and some of the
ways that he was both conventional and unconventional in the process.
Sargent had painted and exhibited the previous year. The children were celebrities because of their powerful family, such as their grandfather, the editor of the influential periodical *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

Two children sit stiffly on a flat divan covered by a bluish-green Persian rug, and flanked by a satiny brownish-red backdrop. Their hands clasp at their shared seat. The boy, Edouard, sixteen, turns out his wrist awkwardly and self-consciously, and his askance stare somehow accentuates his fine features, high cheekbones, and pallor. The girl, Marie-Louise, sports a North African silver brooch given to her by Sargent. She clutches the hem of her luminous white dress, which, along with her sullen expression and confrontational frontality, steal the viewer’s attention.

Sargent was a patient man. After painting his sister Violet many times in youth, he was well accustomed to the “practical” issues of depicting child sitters, and he was an expert at simultaneously satisfying what Gallati has called the “three-pronged portrait politics” of the artist, parents, and child model. But despite his famous impassivity, which lulled many a sitter into a state of picturesque ease, that patience stretched thin during his work with Marie-Louise. A pampered miniature tyrant, she created so many difficulties that before the project was completed she had posed 83 times for the meticulous portraitist. This did not mean that she had to

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be pleasant about it. John and Marie-Louise quarreled over everything from the length of her sittings to the arrangement of her hair. They even squabbled over the choice of stockings the child should sport—“soft cotton [or] glossy silk.”219

Nevertheless, in 1881, the painting was successfully completed—a portrait of two pale, sulking, boredly squirming, well-dressed children, decked head to toe in meaningful worldly accoutrements and flanked by a garish crimson curtain. These children were two things. First, they were themselves luxuries, worldly possessions, fodder for their parents’ boastful pride. And secondly, they were immutably individual personalities: even unflattering ones. Indeed, the final double-portrait could almost function as two individual portraits, because of the psychological void between the siblings. Sargent fashions this alienation by severing links in the composition’s design, via the lack of physical touch and eye contact. Fascinatingly, the siblings suffered a well-documented emotional estrangement from each other throughout their lives.

While reviews were mixed, when the painting was shown at the Salon of 1881, critics agreed on two points. One point of agreement was Sargent’s undeniable debt to Carolus-Duran. The other was Sargent’s deftness in capturing Marie-Louise’s “vivid and serious,” face, her “childish defiance,” and the way in which Sargent somehow conveyed the agony of a “brave” child sitter having to endure long hours of posing.220 The painting has an uncanny self-consciousness of the passing of time, and the squirminess of a pampered child not used to obeying

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219 Kilmurray and Ormond, 91.
220 Gallati, Great Expectations, 76-77.
authority or having to exhibit any patience.

Interestingly, merely one glance at this portrait while visiting Sargent’s studio in 1881 prompted American patron Henry St. John Smith to claim that he “didn’t much like” Sargent’s work—yet simultaneously, he became suddenly eager for Sargent to paint him.\footnote{Carter Ratcliff, \textit{John Singer Sargent}, 1982: 61.} Clearly, there is something both disagreeable and compelling about the image, including, and perhaps specifically, to an American audience.

It is fascinating that Smith found the Pailleron portrait simultaneously distasteful and attractive. Beyond the undeniable push-and-pull of the image on an aesthetic level, perhaps this was a characteristically American reaction. The children are pasty-skinned, spoiled, and overly decorated with effeminate and aristocratic bows and laces. Yet also, in their own way, they are plucky and defiant, traits that American culture favored and clearly celebrated in its more “native” paintings of children.

Testimonies such as Smith’s add credence to the biographical documentation of personal strife, even bizarreness, in the subjects of still stranger child portraiture by Sargent. This visual strageness is due to Sargent’s unwillingness to embellish the personality of his child subjects on occasions when to do so would more appropriately flatter them. Though Sargent’s career abounds with frothy, heraldic images of wealthy parents and rosy-cheeked heirs (see, for instance, \textit{Mrs. Fiske Warren and her Daughter Rachel}, 1903), in exceptional...
instances, he made the psychological reality of unhappy and ill-tempered childhood an artistic priority.

The Pailleron case was by no means a singular event. Other examples of his child portraiture prove that a frustration with difficult juvenile subjects made him willing to record unflattering reality. Sargent painted other children who were, if not strange, at least frankly petulant: because of their young age, their pampered upbringing, and the fanatical perfectionism of parents in commissioning a boastful likeness of their progeny. One instance is Sargent’s painting of *Ruth Sears Bacon* (1887, oil on canvas, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut). Iconically symmetrical in a way that is grimly tongue-in-cheek, the painting displays a white-clad blond toddler on a throne of blankets clutching a doll in solidarity against the painter’s demand for stillness. Ruth indeed holds still, but as Gallati rightly indicates, her legs sport black stockings in harsh contrast with her pale and frothy setting; thusly highlighted, those legs twist tensely inward. Furthermore, her brow is furrowed and her eyes glisten, threatening that any minute, she will dissolve in tears. The painting is strangely upsetting to look at, because the viewer quickly empathizes with the emotionally fraught little girl. Ruth’s tearful reticence and physical intangibility—beyond her face and legs—also seem to equate her unsettlingly with her doll, who is merely a toy and prop, an object. Sargent reworked this subtly anxious canvas many times in a harried time frame, and he wrote letters to his friend, the painter Frank Millet, reporting “drama” and
exclaiming that “[Ruth’s] mother is in ecstasies or in despair after every sitting.”

Such accounts underscore both exasperation and sympathy with child sitters, and hint that, while the cultural concept of childhood involved ideas of angels and saints, creating a satisfactory image of an actual child could be exceptionally challenging. Sargent left clues about this more complicated reality in his canvases.

Perhaps the most intriguing of all Sargent’s portraits of children is the American commission that followed the Pailleron portrait, *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*, 1882. Edward Boit commissioned this painting because Sargent knew the family through Henry James and had made a good impression with previous watercolors of Edward and his wife. The large, roughly 87 X 87-inch painting was exhibited at George Petit’s gallery in the rue de Sèze and then in the Salon of 1883. It depicts four sisters—Florence, Jane, Louisa, and Julia—interacting uneasily in a dark and over-sized Parisian apartment. What fascinates the viewer is the painting’s psychological ambiguity. It has often been seen as an idyllic rendering of childhood and of the life of the wealthy families of this period. But it also contains darker emotional undercurrents—which in fact, find confirmation in the biographies of the sisters.

Four sisters stand or sit in the foyer of an upper-crust Parisian apartment, that belonged to their father, Edward, and his first wife, Mary Louisa Cushing. In the front, slightly right of center, the youngest sister, Julia or “Ya Ya,” is the most at ease. She has plopped down on the sage green rug to play with her favorite porcelain doll,

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“Popau.” She lifts her gaze from her toy to meet the viewer’s with muted but expectant amusement. Her feet are fidgety and pigeon-toed. On the far left, wavy golden-haired Mary Louisa or “Isa” stands, hands behind her back, in a red and white dress. She inches forward on her toes, tentatively, toward the viewer in the manner of a ballerina. She stares at the viewer pleasantly but meekly, uncertainly, and shadow notably obscures half her visage: that which is closest spatially to her two older sisters. These two girls, Florence and Jane, exhibit further emotional resignation. Florence, the eldest, stands in profile, so swallowed by shadow that her likeness in this “portrait” is nearly inscrutable. Hands folded in front of her, she leans back against one of a pair of vases made by the potter Hirayabashi in Arita, Japan: possessions that her father proudly displayed as sentinels into the dark parlor behind the girls. Jane, dressed exactly like her older sister in black and white, is Florence’s mirror-image, and she looks directly at the viewer in a way that also reflects Mary Louisa’s frontal stare. But Jane’s gaze is so heavy-lidded and unseeing, mouth slightly ajar, her entire person so physically removed into an a eerily unknowable dark space, that the image is inarticulably disturbing. It has been suggested many times that the physical space in this image also operates phenomenologically, symbolically, to represent the passage of time; the older the girl, the farther she recedes into darkness: the inscrutable and troubling future.

Such an observation opens the painting up to manifold deeper readings.

223 Ya Ya Boit’s doll was named “Popau” as a direct reference to the publicist and politician Paul de Cassagnac. This was a clever detail on Sargent’s part because it succinctly referenced the larger socio-political life of the Boit family, in which the four daughters were surely steeped. Kilmurray and Ormond, 66.
Edward Boit sentenced the Hirayabashi vases—which so decisively frame the images of his four daughters—to sixteen transatlantic crossings as a mark of the family’s “migratory” ways. Because of the way in which Sargent visually ties Florence to the vase that she leans against, and because the vases reflect the blues and whites in the girls’ attire, it is impossible not to equate the vases symbolically to the girls, fine objects owned by wealthy cosmopolitans, dragged across multiple continents and suffering “damage” in ways that one might suspect to be psychologically profound.

The format of the painting is dark and empty; it is large but not much transpires inside of it. In fact, its peculiarity possesses an obvious precedent in the Old Masters. In 1879, Sargent had visited the Museo del Prado to copy Diego Velazquez’s oil painting *Las Meninas*, 1656. To this iconic composition, Sargent owes many debts: the profundity of dark physical space engulfing relatively small human figures, the centrality of an amusedly self-confident little girl (the Spanish Infanta, who becomes Ya Ya Boit), the general air of courtly refinement, and, especially, the function of several props that simultaneously ground and disorient the audience. In general, Sargent horizontally flipped the composition of *Las Meninas* to paint the Boit portrait. Multiple details point to this fact. The rectangle formed on the bottom left of *Las Meninas* by the feet of the attendants, Infanta, and dog is inverted to the bottom right of the Boit portrait with the green rug. Velazquez himself appears on the left working on a vertically tilted canvas in *Las Meninas*; the Boit canvas echoes this shape using a piercing red folding screen on the right. In

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224 Kilmurray and Ormond, 66.
both paintings, the space in which most of the human action unfolds spills backward into a dark rectangular room. In the *Las Meninas* canvas, slightly left of center, a luminous “portrait” of the Spanish king and queen is now suspected to be a mirror reflecting the pair, placing them in the viewer’s spatial position. In the Boit canvas, slightly right of center, is the same ambiguous glowing rectangle, which is either a window or, again, a mirror. Digital reproductions that significantly increase the exposure of the Boit canvas show that the window/mirror is flanked by two smaller vases and on top of a fireplace mantle, which supports the notion that it is a reflective surface: it is unlikely that a window would be above a fireplace in a more internal room of the apartment. It is also probably a mirror because, from where it is positioned, it would logically reflect the doorway, given the documented fact that the girls are standing in the apartment foyer. This is important because of the other striking references to doubles, reflections, and mirrors in the image. It is also important because, if the mirror in the Boit portrait is “reflecting” the audience looking at the painting, this clever psychological effect ushers viewers of all ages into the separate and transient realm of four children. But whether or not this realm is a “sanctum” or “paradise” becomes quite ambiguous.

Sargent’s painting is clearly more complicated than it at first appears. It unfolds in two stages. It first confirms childhood’s separateness. Sargent renders the little girls fleeting and translucent like changelings in an otherwise identifiably real setting, complete with attributable vases that are still in the Boit family’s
possession today.\textsuperscript{225} But secondly, Sargent depicts the Boit sisters as anxious and frail, further obscured in shadow with greater age. In doing so, Sargent absorbs emerging ideas that challenge axioms about the childhood “haven.” The future of these girls, a focus of recent biographical study involving spinsterhood, illness, and insanity, bolsters such challenges.\textsuperscript{226}

The remarkably contradictory subsequent reception of the painting, ranging from perceptions of innocuous sweetness to forecasts of the children’s psychological disturbance, proves its ambivalence, as well as, perhaps, the artist’s. It is a tribute to the painting’s phenomenal visual and psychological power that the debate has continued well into the twenty-first century. I will list only a few instances.

The most unconcerned of the Boit portrait’s reviews was by Sargent’s novelist friend Henry James, who declared the work “a happy play-world of a family of charming children.”\textsuperscript{227} Somewhere in the middle, other contemporaneous critics complained that Sargent had executed a “portrait” in name only, as his canvas was too large for an “unimportant” subject—children—and moreover strangely empty, and the eerie use of shadows actively obscured the faces of three of the sitters.\textsuperscript{228} There are open acknowledgments of sinister undertones in twenty-first century interpretations such as that by a 2005 blogger who contacted art historian Erica Hirshler; the blogger saw the placement of the doll between Julia’s legs as a dark

\textsuperscript{225} Kilmurray and Ormond, 66.
\textsuperscript{226} The most recent of these analyses is Erica E. Hirshler, \textit{Sargent’s Daughters: The Biography of a Painting}. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Publications, 2009.
\textsuperscript{227} Henry James quoted in Hirshler, \textit{Sargent’s Daughters}, introduction.
\textsuperscript{228} Hirshler, \textit{Sargent’s Daughters}, introduction.
sexual innuendo. And the most extreme of fringe analyses is by David Lubin, who sees Sargent visually punning the name “Boit” as “boite” or box. Lubin rather unclearly associates this pun psychosexually with a violated womb and psychiatric disturbance.

The conflicted readings of the Boit portrait continue. Barbara Dayer Gallati attributes this to several factors. The first is Sargent's systematic use of childhood, a subject so innocuous that it had become stale, to disarm critics while performing subversive aesthetic experiments such as plein-air painting. Using children as subject matter was a way of avoiding further emotionally damaging scandal such as Madame X’s reception. Secondly, Gallati cites the deliberate qualities of visual emptiness and narrative enigma in Sargent's most important canvases, which lead modern audiences to project a number of readings, some barely based in actual visual evidence, onto the sitters. The third factor is latter-day biographical information about the sitters, a kind of dramatic irony, which exaggerates the children's bizarreness.

For instance, thanks to Erica Hirshler, we only learned in 2008 that at least one of the four Boit sisters was medically declared insane, and was emotionally abusive to her mother. Henry James declared that Mrs. Boit had as much ability to meet the challenge of raising her four troubled daughters as she had to “raise an

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229 Hirshler, Sargent’s Daughters, introduction.
230 Hirshler, Sargent’s Daughters, introduction.
With such compelling knowledge, it is easy to read too much pathology into “Jeanie” Boit’s blank stare and reticent regression into the shadows of her parents’ apartment. And yet, knowing what a keen and sympathetic portraitist Sargent was—one rarely willing to sacrifice a flattering and recognizable likeness for more abstract artistic ambitions—it is also difficult to dismiss this biographical detail, not to mention the obvious strangeness of the painting itself.

**Sargent: Painter of Placating Children**

Motivated to win over English critics, Sargent produced two paintings in a way that simultaneously shocked and placated a relatively conservative viewing audience. He did so through the device of childhood iconography. These paintings of children were almost antithetically opposite in mood to Sargent’s usual indoor portraits of strange, squirming youngsters.

The first of these, Sargent’s *Garden Study of the Vickers Children* (1884, oil on canvas, Flint Institute of Arts, Michigan), was the even more abstract predecessor to a larger, more famous canvas titled *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (1885-6, oil on canvas, Tate Britain, London). Sargent completed the *Garden Study* while visiting the parents of the two children depicted at their family estate in Bolsover Hill, Sheffield,

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232The quotes from Henry James are on page 136 of Hirshler, *Sargent’s Daughters: The Biography of a Painting*, MFA publications, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2009. The direct quotations are:

“Henry James implied in a letter to Etta Reubell: ‘Poor Mrs. Boit—she has as much business with daughters as she has with elephants.’ The struggle took its toll on Isa as the girls grew up, for as James related, ‘Her elephants grow bigger and bigger all the while and she doesn’t but only grows older and sadder and further away from her happy laughing irresponsible years.’”

Footnote is provided to Robert Apthorp Boit Diaries, vol, I, 170-71, March 11, 1888; Henry James to Henrietta Reubell, September 10 [1893]. *Correspondence and Journals of Henry James, Jr.* (MS AM 1094 [1119], Houghton Library.)
England. Sargent also painted Dorothy’s portrait in 1885—a lively image of a grey-eyed, long-faced smiling girl wearing white trimmed in red ribbons. And he painted portraits of another little boy, Ronald, also a member of the Vickers family. The oil study of the two children was exhibited in Paris in 1885 at the fourth Galerie Georges Petit exhibition alongside paintings by Claude Monet, which is significant because of the Garden Study’s obvious debt to Impressionist treatment of natural light. It was also shown at the New English Art Club in 1886.

Vincent “Billy” Vickers and his sister Dorothy are the children pictured in this oil sketch. Billy wears a white starched-collared shirt, black sweater, pants, and shoes. Dorothy sports a pale blue hair bow, a white dress, and black stockings. They stand together in a greenish-gold, flat and abstract color plane reminiscent of Manet. The palette is the first in Sargent’s mature oeuvre to reflect such lightened tones, loose handling of paint, and upward-tilting of the background toward the picture plane.233 Billy gazes up with his sharp black eyes at the viewer while Dorothy focuses all her energy on holding a blue-and-black watering can at the base of a thriving lily vine. So eager is Billy to help his sister complete this important task that he places his hand over hers and treads on one of her feet. Four more vines of lilies from seemingly nowhere frame the siblings, cocooning them in a hazy, dusk-lit garden paradise. We would well recall here that the educationally reformist school of thought called “Kindergarten” literally translates “child’s garden.” Lilies are a traditional symbol of purity (and sometimes a religious one, a Judeo-Christian reference to the Virgin Mary and Christ). This painting functions simultaneously as a

233 Kilmurray and Ormond, 129, 136.
highly literal slice-of-life document of children attending ceremoniously to childish
tasks, and also as a metaphor so frequent and dear to the genteel painters: for the
poignant brevity and sinlessness of youth.

The Vickers portrait catalyzed Sargent’s most daring artistic experiments. 
These were also experiments that he tempered with the safe subject of children.
Specifically, while there is a distinct sense of time and its exhaustive passage in the
Pailleron portrait, here, as with the Boit portrait, the key factor is timelessness. The
Vickers study portrays childhood as evanescent.

Other placating, conservative elements in the Vickers study include the fact 
that the viewpoint is from above. This is the view of an adult, and thus implicitly 
superior, just as “higher” genres such as history painting are ideologically superior 
to “baby paintings.” This implied adult gaze conveniently explains the otherwise 
radical lack of a compositional horizon.234

Sargent next spent two summers in the Cotswalds village of Broadway, 
Worcestershire, England. There he painting his next installment in this Elysian 
series of childhood. This is a “portrait” that art historians have described as so 
ethereal that it “floats”: Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose, 1885-1886. This painting is also a 
view of two black-and-white-clad children from above in an abstract garden setting.
Two small girls with short wavy hair stand in frothy white dresses with frilled 
collars in an entirely abstract green and white space, given hints of concrete depth 
by clusters of overrun tall grass and layers of illuminated orange Japanese lanterns.

234 Gallatti, Great Expectations, 91.
The four titular flowers float in space around the girls, who stand facing each other like mirror images while gazing down at the additional lanterns that they hang. The lanterns make their faces glow while we are aware, with some odd sense of urgency or melancholy, of darkness descending into the garden around them, with its overabundant wall of blossoms. Sargent himself was so exasperated with the unusual lighting situation that this image presented that he acerbically retitled it ‘Damnation, Silly, Silly Pose.’ But he persevered in capturing the sense of a day dying, and with it, symbolically, the uncomplicated joy of childhood.

Because the lily is a traditional floral symbol of purity, and Sargent aptly used flower symbolism in his paintings, the title and the imagery in Carnation, Lily is significant. It has conceptual links to an entire program of more visually conservative contemporaneous paintings such as John Everett Millais’s Peggy Primrose (1885, oil on canvas, Private Collection). It has been suggested that Sargent surreptitiously broached the topic of industrialized, urbanized England and its assault on childhood, particularly female, purity. English thinkers frequently discussed these anxieties, which centered on the “jeopardized” moral conduct of “blooming” young English girls. White carnations are symbols of innocence and pure love, and pink carnations, poignant in the context of childhood’s brevity, are symbols of enduring love. Similarly white roses symbolize purity and sanctity, and pink roses symbolize first love, innocence, and healing.

It is also intriguing that, unlike Millais, Sargent chose flowers taller than

the children depicted. Gallati notes that one of Sargent’s cleverer visual devices was to depict the Vickers study, on which this painting is based, from the viewpoint of an adult accidentally encroaching on the world of the Romantic Child: an inherently good being, a product of European philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who exists in intuitive communication with nature. By highlighting the adult perspective of a childhood moment, Sargent calls attention to these philosophical concepts. In sprouting high above the heads of the children, the flowers in the Vickers study and in *Carnation, Lily* cocoon them both physically and emotionally and visually emphasize Romantic connotations of transience: the time of the day is twilight, the time of life is childhood, and both are fleeting.

*Carnation, Lily* is probably conceptually based upon the Robert Louis Stevenson book of poetry *A Child’s Garden of Verses*, and it is titled directly after a verse in a popular song of the time, “The Wreath.” In 1887, the work was astonishingly accepted for display at the Royal Academy, a notoriously conservative establishment. With this event—the institutionalized acceptance of a simultaneously subversive and conformist image of childhood—Sargent regained the unanimous, international critical appeal that he had lost during the *Madame X* scandal. Sargent is of course not alone in his portrayal of garden children who analogize natural, quasi-religious innocence and transience (see Millais, for instance). What is unique is his pairing of transgressive style with conventional subject matter.

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236 Gallatti, *Great Expectations*, 94.
What is most striking about this painting is the way that the little girls “deny us entry” into their “little world,” by turning away from the audience, absorbed in their twilit task. In this way they preserve the removed, magical sensation of the childhood realm, but also its fleeting duration. The flowers will die in winter frost, and twilight is a brief and transitional period in the day. The image functions as rhetoric, as an adult’s wistful, rose-tinted memory of a better, bygone time—both culturally, and personally. Rendering an accurate portrait of the living subjects, the Millet children, is not a priority here.

In a very different way from the Boit portrait, this image has captivated audiences for well over a century. Whether Sargent painted evanescent changelings or startling and strange portraits, his conceptualization of youth was rare and incisive.

**Mary Cassatt**

Mary Cassatt’s paintings of children are noteworthy both for their sheer volume—an entire multi-media program of mother-and-child images simultaneously powerful and monolithically unvaried—and for their tendency to capture a subject that had become hopelessly trite in a way that seemed fresh and unmediated. There is a tinge of sadness to these images. For this is a privileged world—not merely the privilege of wealth, but also the privilege of being young and innocent without censure. It becomes clear that such a world is the exclusive luxury of affluent children, which sometimes renders the genteel schema of childhood—

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simple, innocent, and usually happy—completely artificial.

Cassatt contributed uniquely to the rhetoric of genteel childhood by combining intimacy and exclusivity. She capitalized upon the fact that only women could encroach on the child’s realm, but were a caring and earnest presence. Indeed, Cassatt’s distinct portrayal of children may derive from the fact that she remained childless, but, through family and friends, had close access to scenes of domesticity. Motherhood was not a part of her life, but she was a vigilant observer and participant in the motherhood of others.

Background

Mary Cassatt schooled at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and privately under Jean-Leon Gerome in Paris. Courageously, she joined the French Impressionists in the 1870s (though never self-identified as one, and preferred to call herself an “independent”), and adopted their new vision and techniques. Particularly close to Edgar Degas, she became proficient in oil, pastel, and print-making. She is often viewed as one of the first woman artists of significance—perhaps the first woman artist to achieve an international reputation. In order to do this, Cassatt obsessively painted, pasteled, and printed a considerable body of work—and it is something about her images of children, specifically, that has given her lasting posthumous fame.

Cassatt was born in Allegheny City (now a suburb of Pittsburgh) in 1844, an unwitting distant cousin of the painter Robert Henri, and died in 1926. Her
family moved to Philadelphia when she was a small child. She was the fourth surviving child of seven, born to Mr. and Mrs. Simpson Cassatt. Her father was a stockbroker, and her mother, Katherine, came from a family of bankers. Philadelphia, where her surviving brothers, Aleck and Gardner, permanently settled, quickly became Mary’s favorite American city and her “home base” during the numerous times that she went abroad. Mary’s family, much like John Sargent’s, emigrated to Europe and frequently moved from city to city, including Paris (where she saw work by Courbet, Corot, and Delacroix at the Universal Exposition of 1855), Heidelberg, and Darmstadt.

By 1861 the family returned to America and Cassatt enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Within four years she became impatient with the traditional restrictions upon the female artist. Among other gender-based institutional disadvantages, women worked solely from plaster casts and by copying paintings. Unsettled by such roadblocks, Cassatt traveled to Paris to study briefly under Charles Chaplin, Thomas Couture, and Jean-Leon Gerome—since the Ecole des Beaux-Arts did not yet accept female students. She copied paintings daily in the Louvre, determined to hone her professional abilities.

After her training, Cassatt independently continued studying and sketching in great museums in Europe, briefly retreated to Philadelphia during the Franco-Prussian War, later returning to Europe. She settled in Italy, where she studied Correggio and Parmagianino, early inspirations for her phenomenal output of “Madonna and Child” pastels and paintings. While in Parma, Italy, she completed a
commission for the Archbishop of Pittsburgh. By 1872 she visited to Spain (Madrid and Seville) and Belgium to absorb the Old Masterwork there. In Paris, which was to become her permanent residence, Cassatt persuaded a friend, Louisine Waldron Elder, to purchase an Edgar Degas pastel—the first Impressionist image to travel to America—which eventually was placed in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

The turning point in Cassatt's career came in 1877, when the French Salon jury rejected both of her entries. Degas approached her to join what are now known as the French Impressionists, alongside fellow female “independent,” Berthe Morisot. Cassatt had been an enthusiast of Degas's style since seeing his work in 1875, and readily agreed, beginning an artistic partnership of sorts with Degas that remained a mercurial power-play until the end. In the Impressionist show of 1879, Cassatt showed eleven works; shortly thereafter she contributed two pieces to Paul Durand-Rouel's first American show of French Impressionism.

While spending much of her life, including its end, in Paris, Cassatt, like Sargent and Chase, never ceased to love her country of origin. In fact, her father, mother, and sister Lydia all moved to Paris to live with her all her life. Sadly, at the end of her life, in 1926, she suffered from diabetes and partial blindness, and estranged from family and friends. However, Cassatt never married or had children of her own.

**Cassatt: Subversive or Conventional?**

It is important to address the notion of Cassatt as a “liberated” woman of
the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, because this concept is inextricable from her treatment of children: her chief mature and late subject matter.

Cassatt is often hailed as a key figure of early women's liberation, for several reasons. She defied her parents’ wishes by traveling to Paris to further her professional skills as a painter. She never married. She contributed frequently to the women’s suffrage movement. Furthermore, late in her life, she painted a mural for the Women’s Building at the Chicago Exposition in honor of the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America.

Finally, holding her own in a men’s club of aesthetic pioneers who often portrayed women demeaningly as objects, Cassatt sophisticated a previously “low” art subject that was uniquely accessible to women. This was the genre scene of the mother and child in a domestic space, which, in Cassatt’s hands, became an unsentimental series of candid moments portrayed with cutting-edge artistic techniques, featuring self-sufficient women of all ages with children.

That is, Cassatt’s women and children were content to live in their buffered world without a male presence or an implied male gaze. They even denied the implicitly male viewer access into their world. In fact, if a male is present in a painting by Cassatt, such as the painting The Boating Party (1893, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), the reaction of woman and child is one of frank tension, even resentment. Much like the changelings in Sargent’s painting of a twilight garden, Cassatt’s women and children are self-absorbed in their tasks, oblivious to the rest of us, relishing what is a very distinct and very fleeting part of
the human experience.

Peculiarly, it is Cassatt’s insistence upon restricting much of her imagery to traditionally feminine endeavors that makes her work so unusual. Feminist art historians such as Griselda Pollock see Cassatt as extensively undermining patriarchy. Men are absent. Women and children are exalted Madonna-and-child motifs. And Cassatt pictures little girls in self-absorbed intellectual endeavors such as reading.\(^{238}\) But it is actually Cassatt’s compliance with feminine subject matter—childrearing—that provided her the chance to subtly subvert.

To begin with, Cassatt’s art of children departs clearly from that of prior women artists such as Lily Martin Spencer, who still clung to the sentimental tropes of domestic painting.\(^{239}\) We recall that Spencer was an English emigrant, married and the mother of thirteen children, six of whom died young. Spencer indeed achieved a professional artistic career when the odds were unpromising. But, despite occasional subversion, Spencer still demurred to prevailing conventions. A genre painter roughly of the 1840’s-1860’s, she depicted mothers and children in quaint and recognizably American settings; in an academically polished and stiffly idealized style; posed as morally didactic tableaux; and often including a doting father. Characteristic of Spencer’s oeuvre are paintings such as *Domestic Happiness* (1849, oil on canvas, Detroit Institute of Arts), and *War Spirit at Home* (1866, oil on canvas, Newark Museum, New Jersey).


\(^{239}\) Although, it is interesting that some of Cassatt’s pre-Impressionist paintings, during the 1860’s and early 1870’s, share Spencer’s smooth, warm glow and solid, modeled features, and that some of her early child portraits, such as *Eddie Cassatt*, 1875, were quite formal and stiffly posed.
Instead, unmarried and childless Cassatt depicts the daily struggles and rewards of maternity and childhood with both obsession and candor.

**Cassatt and Candid Childhood**

It is important to note that, to some extent, Cassatt concerned herself more with the portrayal of women's lives than that of children's lives. But Cassatt remains a key figure in this dissertation because she had an unmatched capacity for depicting mothers and children interacting with an unsentimental, forthright tenderness. Ironically enough, sometimes it is the very redundancy of her work that makes it exceptional. Cassatt seems to have developed a highly successful visual formula that she limitlessly repeated and heavily relied upon: portraying the female care of children during unpretentious moments.

Cassatt’s oil painting *Girl in a Blue Armchair* (1878, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), for instance, features the endearingly human, petulant rudeness of a child in a lush domestic interior. Cassatt portrays a well-dressed child splaying her legs indecorously while languishing in the titular blue armchair. The girl stretches her arm above and behind her head. This gesture strongly resembles the pose of the highly erotic *Giorgione Venus* (1510, oil on canvas, Gemäldegalerie, Alte Meister, Dresden). There are many subsequent renditions of the Greek and Roman Goddess of Love featuring the same arm pose. Some of these were produced in Cassatt’s generation by (largely male) academic painters such as Charles Gleyre, Eugène Emmanuel Amaury Duval, Henri Pierre Picou, and William-Adolphe Bouguereau—the last of whom was training specifically
American students of Cassatt’s generation at this time. References to Venus continue: Cassatt’s little girl owns a fluffy compatriot, a small lapdog curled up in the opposite chair. This little girl, also a “pet” of the elite sphere, on one level is analogous to this lapdog. On another level, the dog, which may serve as an attribute of either fidelity or eroticism, is a further reference to Venus (indeed, in Titian’s oil painting *Venus of Urbino*, 1538, Uffizi, Florence, which directly quotes his master Giorgione’s work, a resting lapdog appears). Taking this into account, one may argue that Cassatt’s paintings of children, particularly little girls, empower women in the domestic sphere using tongue-in-cheek iconographical references to influential, sexually confident female deities: popular subjects to (largely male) painters of a well-established European artistic tradition. But Cassatt’s clever twist is that this girl is no goddess, but a real, almost humorously candid, child, and even the sleeping dog cannot divert her from her sulkiness. The girl exhibits impolite frankness and demonstrates what a mother or other female elder would witness: comfortable breaches in decorum.

This painting marked Cassatt’s debut with the Impressionists. The overbearing but talented Edgar Degas, who wooed Cassatt into the Impressionist circle, probably collaborated with Cassatt to complete the work. It is thought that Degas gave Cassatt particular assistance in constructing the sitting room’s compelling tilted perspective.

It may be difficult for the modern viewer to grasp the degree to which Cassatt’s painting was subversively candid. Another enlightening way to
underscore this is to compare *Girl in a Blue Armchair* to an earlier, more academic
rendering of the same child subject: for instance, British portrait painter Margaret
Sarah Carpenter’s painting of the late 1800’s titled *Portrait of a Young Girl Stroking a
Spaniel* (oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), also featuring a
young female child seated in a chair, wearing a frothy dress, and accompanied by a
dog. But this girl is painted in a tight and fastidious manner, with tidy brown curls.
She sits modestly, smiling impassively at the viewer, with her legs appropriately
closed and crossed at the ankle, and the chair that she sits in is a stiffed polished
wood, a decorative afterthought like the pink rose at her feet and the fountain
flanking her. The dog, nuzzling her cheek, is equally pleasant. If a child exhibited
churlishness, it was never depicted in the believable, relatable sense, but rather,
subordinated to an abundance of symbolism on the brevity of life and
precariousness of innocence. Such an instance is the brooding girl clutching a
handful of flowers in tenebristic darkness, in British painter John Davidson’s *Girl
with Flowers* (late nineteenth century, oil on canvas, Private Collection).

As Cassatt’s privileged glimpse into an equally privileged world suggests,
beginning with the Kindergarten movement, women were hailed as the superior
attendants of children, uniquely capable of understanding the challenges of
childrearing. Candid moments in which children are not necessarily gracious,
graceful, or polite are coupled ideologically with this notion of the exclusively
female caretaker.

Thanks to Cassatt’s tendency for repetition, there are numerous other
examples of candid childhood in her oeuvre. Cassatt’s painting *Little Girl in a Big Straw Hat and Pinafore* (1886, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), portrays a bonneted blond child who “holds her hands, slumps her shoulders, [and] stares glumly to the right, not meeting our eyes;” she is a “female Huckleberry Finn” caught in an act of disobedience, now on the verge of tears for being chastised.240

Cassatt’s print titled *The Bath* (drypoint, soft-ground etching, and aquatint, Metropolitan Museum of Art) is one of her tours-de-force in drypoint and aquatint printing, part of a series referred to as “The Ten.” She completed it in 1891. It is evidence that she attended an 1890 Japanese woodblock print exhibition. It also comically captures a child’s unwillingness to bathe, as the mother holds her, preventing an attempted escape, while testing the basin’s water temperature.

Cassatt’s print *Mother’s Kiss* (1891, drypoint and aquatint, Metropolitan Museum of Art), also a part of this series, is even more astonishing. In it, a dark-haired child wriggles, reluctant to receive the kiss from his doting caretaker, kicking his legs and pushing back against her shirt collar even as he clasps it.

Cassatt’s painting also titled *The Bath* (1893, oil on canvas, Art Institute of Chicago), likewise purports that women see children in the most genuine manner. The perspective of the painting is unusual for Cassatt: a forced view from above that underscores the intimacy of the mother and child’s interaction and the intrusiveness of outsiders. Cassatt has learned a great deal about perspective from her friend and

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tutor Degas, famous for his perspectively sharp pastel portraits of bathing
prostitutes, but Cassatt has applied these lessons to a subject matter closer to her
heart: the bathing of a child.

Cleansing a child carried an ideological charge in an era that was obsessed
with new notions of sanitation. Advertisers bombarded women of the middle and
upper classes with images of ladies’ soaps and likened good sanitation to ethical
purity ("cleanliness is next to godliness"). Thus bathing the baby carries obvious
symbolism in keeping those who are innately pure uncontaminated, innocent and
nurtured.

Cassatt sometimes used tender humor to pronounce the candor that is
unique between mother and child. Her painting Margot Embracing Her Mother
(1902, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), features Margot Lux, a girl who
lived in Cassatt’s neighborhood, hanging off her mother in doting and clownish play.
They gaze at each other tenderly, furthering the notion of maternal privilege and
superiority.241 And the little boy in The Caress (1902, oil on canvas, Smithsonian
American Art Museum), an otherwise Madonna-and-child-like image, luxuriously
arches his back and stretches when he should be complacently posing with his
affectionate sister and patient-faced mother.

In Cassatt’s work, it is unusual, but striking, when the mother or child
acknowledges the audience. One instance is Young Mother Sewing (1900, oil on
canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art). While the pinstripe-clad mother bends over

241 Frank Getlein, 128.
her embroidery, curls unloosing from her chignon, her white-clad daughter, her other prized creation, drapes across her lap, chews on her finger, and gazes boredly at the viewer. The dreamy silver-green view of the outdoors underscores that mother and child are caged in a tight interior space, a room in their home. Unlike a contemporaneous photograph by Clarence White featuring a nude mother and child gazing raptly through their window, neither this mother nor her daughter—painted by a woman and resigned to a well-understood fate—bothers to observe the “forbidden” world outside her domestic sanctum.

The orange-red flowers in the vase behind the mother’s right shoulder evoke the untouched outdoors poignantly, and may be poppies, popular nineteenth-century symbols of mortality.

Therefore, there are two obvious points of interest: first, women are ideologically and physically restrained; secondly, a female child yet finds diversion from her restrictions by languidly engaging the encroaching viewer. She realistically, relatably displays a child’s ennui on a quiet sunny afternoon.

There is another, even more clever, example of this. Mother Wearing Sunflower on Her Dress (1905, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), uses mirror reflections—a popular preoccupation of fin-de-siecle artists—to implicate the viewer’s involvement in the tender scene. A plump child sits on his mother’s lap, brandishing a hand mirror, while both are reflected a second time in a large standing mirror. The viewer meets the child’s reflected gaze and is drawn into this scene, in which childhood, like the mother’s already-wilting corsage, is precious
and fleeting.

Cassatt’s paintings sometimes possessed distinctly transgressive undertones. Consider Cassatt’s oil painting *Breakfast in Bed* (1897, oil on canvas, Huntington Library Art Collections, San Marino, California), on the surface an innocuous image of a sleepy mother and her golden-haired toddler son. The child is straight-backed and bouncy, his legs crossed, gazing alertly off-image. Feminist art historians have described this work as “the sexiest image in modern painting,” because actually, it is visual evidence of women’s sexual prowess. The little boy is proof not only of the fulfillment of domestic duty, but is also the fruit of the mother’s erotic satisfaction, amply suggested by the fact that she is in bed, and her gaze is sultry and hooded.242

It is interesting to think of Cassatt herself, her philosophy and her career, as a symbol, as well as a product, of contemporaneous advances in women’s rights that ran parallel to children’s pedagogy. Cassatt was a painter who achieved professional fame within the traditional parameters of her sex, just as female Kindergarten teachers obtained social authority by earning college degrees in childrearing. Cassatt’s art is sympathetic in this way with new pedagogies. Cassatt is careful not to break entirely from traditions of female domesticity, while also using those traditions, all child-centric, as a venue to be subversive.

**Conclusions**

242 Dr. Linnea Dietrich Hedrick, lecture, Miami University of Ohio, Oxford campus, January 2002.
Like the genre painters such as Eastman Johnson and Winslow Homer, the painters of the genteel tradition were influenced by notions of educational reform. But by the 1890s these ideas and attitudes were no longer controversial in specifically affluent circles. The belief that childhood was a developmentally distinct phase found common expression in children's books, novels for adults, and popular serials. Painters of wealthy children were a part of the same intellectual circles that read and digested these publications. The work of these painters explores the identities of children brought up in this new atmosphere of permissive childrearing. Paradoxically, the visual result often did not connote childhood bliss.

**Conclusions: Frances Hodgson Burnett and William Merritt Chase**

It is significant that the painters we have discussed all created works with close ties to the literature of childhood of the period—although choosing different literary models. William Merritt Chase's work, for example, which is extremely consistent in its representation of childhood, displays very striking affinities with the writings of Frances Hodgson Burnett. John Singer Sargent and Mary Cassatt, on the other hand, drew on a wider range of literary parallels. Their work at one moment connects with the writings of Kipling, yet at the next with Henry James.

As we have seen, Frances Hodgson Burnett's story *Little Lord Fauntleroy* reaffirmed that children were innocent and deserved to be pampered, in highly idealized terms. This is consistent with Chase's views of childrearing and his paintings of children. Cedric is gently raised by a forgiving mother in the
progressive childrearing tradition, as were Chase’s own children. Cedric is an American-born European aristocrat, a sometimes tense mixture of New and Old World. Places of tension, which often include gender codes related to virile, democratic, “masculine” America and fancy, socially stratified, “sissy” Europe, are the most important location at which Burnett’s fiction can be compared to contemporaneous painting.

Cedric is the ideal literary model for William Merritt Chase’s paintings of children. Chase was a cosmopolitan, but his continued investment in his own country’s cultural development is evident in his crusade to impart new European artistic styles to fellow Americans. In fact, Chase painted a child actress named Elsie Lyde as *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, in 1889. The artist was enchanted by Elsie after watching her perform a play adaptation of the novel on Broadway.

What message about American childhood would Chase have conveyed in emphasizing certain details from Burnett’s text, while omitting others?

Chase prefers to dwell on Cedric’s lush period attire and surroundings, rather than his sense of democracy: for instance the plush pillow and soft furry cream rug at Elsie’s buckled feet. The artist seems unfazed by the role’s seeming convolutions of gender.

Indeed, the details of Burnett’s novel to which Chase was most attentive were like his own artistic claim to fame: superficial splendor. But these details also betray deeper cultural considerations. Let us examine passages of the text
describing Cedric’s attire and appearance. It is important to note that Chase probably painted Elsie in the costume furnished by her Broadway play—which means that the arbiters of American entertainment chose to portray a Cedric of “girly” material excess, and that Chase obediently recorded such preferences.

The painted vision of Little Lord Fauntleroy derives, to minutiae, from a description in chapter five: His outfit, when he first meets his embittered grandsire, is “a black velvet suit with a lace collar and with love-locks waving about the handsome, manly little face, whose eyes met [his grandfather’s] with a look of innocent good fellowship.”243 But there are still more similarities.

To begin with, we have established that Chase has no qualms about portraying a female Cedric, but what kind of girl? Fascinatingly, Elsie’s self-confidence is not suppressed. She is not the canonical docile boy. Her face is not one of “innocent good fellowship,” but one of cold, composed impudence, as is the akimbo pose of her arms.

It is as if Chase recognized Burnett’s own confusion in assigning a clear gender identity to her protagonist. Or, more likely, Chase possessed a different or nonexistent sensibility of what was masculine. Chase linked himself unapologetically to a culture that was castigated as degenerately effete by the likes of Theodore Roosevelt. Perhaps if gender descriptors had become inconsequential, or at least fluid, then sex no longer mattered. Or perhaps Chase simply found that a

243 Frances Hodgson Burnett, Little Lord Fauntleroy, Boston: David R. Godine, 1993 (First edition Scribner’s, 1886).
dynamic portrait of a living person was more important than adherence to children's literary canon. Either way, Elsie's brattily haughty personal bearing does not much resemble Cedric's saintly sweetness. Indeed, though she is female, based upon her assertive professional image, Elsie may be considered more “traditionally masculine” than her literary prototype.

Interestingly, like Burnett, Chase chooses to dwell for an inordinate time on the character of Cedric's "lordly legs,” a slightly anachronistic point of visual interest tied to the character’s ambiguous masculinity. Cedric's legs are red-clad in the book and black-clad in the painting. While Chase applies his characteristic compositional spot of bright red to Miss Lyde's sash, and not her stockings, he uses other formal devices to highlight the attenuation of her body: her legs in particular. Chase was an ardent supporter of J.A.M. Whistler, who declared that black was a unifier of colors in a disciplined palette. In the entirety of Elsie Lyde as Little Lord Fauntleroy, the one spot of black, and the unifying compositional element of the greens, golds, creams, and reds, is Miss Lyde. Her hat, jacket, knee-length pants, and black stockings are all a deep flat black. Against the light background of the tan chair leg, red sash, and cream rug, Elsie’s legs especially draw and anchor the viewer. If that were not enough, the pale gold gleam of her shoe buckles further draw the eye to this portion of her anatomy.

Chase obviously adored the Little Lord Fauntleroy typology, and presented intentionally ambiguous signifiers of nationality, period, and gender in his visual renditions of Cedric. He also clearly adapted the character of Cedric to more vividly
portray a living child posing as the fictional child-earl.

Indeed, one may argue that Chase portrayed Cedric’s costume so accurately, but not Cedric’s attitude—choosing instead to highlight the girl Elsie’s imperious sass—in order to draw attention to the fact that another personality existed behind the role Elsie played: to draw attention to the playing of roles itself. Making such a point—that even a child can dawn a persona in an age of materialism and "love of surface" (Henry Clay Frick’s words)—certainly suits William Merritt Chase’s artistic philosophy. For Chase, Burnett’s little protagonist seems to have visually symbolized worldly elegance cultivated in youth.

Conclusions: Rudyard Kipling, John Singer Sargent, and Mary Cassatt

Rudyard Kipling’s Captains Courageous comments with almost preaching overtones on the merits of successfully rearing a boy through means of deprivation, the initiatory company of only men and other boys, and hard work.

While numerous portraits of genteel little boys resemble Harvey at the close of Captains Courageous—symbols both of luxury and admirable masculinity—perhaps the most direct study is John Singer Sargent’s Caspar Goodrich (1887, oil on canvas, Private Collection). Self-possessed, autonomous Caspar wears a sailor suit in tribute to the career of his father, a rear admiral. The sailor suit references the traits of fearless responsibility sought both in a maritime officer and in a young
American male of the period: even though, as some literary historians argue, those qualities lost their impetus by the 1890's. Caspar became a Naval Cadet who served in Maine, Cleveland, and Chicago.

Sargent’s painting derives from a nineteenth-century iconographic tradition of depicting sons of important of aristocrats and high society figures in sailor suits, which originated in Great Britain. This tradition arose out of a real-life policy change in the British Royal Navy after the Napoleonic Wars: an attempt to standardize the Naval uniform. Possibly the most iconic image of this sort depicts the future Edward VII of the United Kingdom in a full-body pose, hands in pockets, against a hazy seaside background; the work is *Prince Albert Edward*, by Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1846, oil on canvas, Royal Collection) commissioned by Queen Victoria. The suit in which composed, curly-haired Albert Edward appears is a child-sized version of the actual attire of a Royal Yacht sailor, and the painting was so popular that by the 1870s, popular engravings after the work had rendered the very concept of a sailor costume synonymous with childhood in the West.

It is worth noting the subtle differences between Sargent’s depiction of a sailor boy, and that by a woman artist, Mary Cassatt. The comparative work is of Jennie Cassatt’s son, *Sailor Boy Gardner Cassatt* (1892, pastel on paper, Philadelphia Museum of Art). Cassatt’s pastel of a young male relative softens his air of independent agency and permits the boy to seek the guidance of an elder, at the young age of five, without penalty. Indeed, Gardner is probably turning implicitly to Jennie or Mary for such guidance, relying on a maternal elder, or perhaps offering
her comfort, since this pastel was created while Gardner and Jennie were visiting the family just after the death of Jennie and Mary's father.\footnote{Nancy Mowll Matthews, \textit{Mary Cassatt}. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Publishers, 1987: 100.} Permitting Gardner to show a moment in which he is in the process of making a decision, rather than entirely self-assured, is unsurprising coming from a painter of children in symbiotic fellowship with mothers.\footnote{Other portraits of little boys by Cassatt, excluding the obvious nude and bathing images, share this sensibility: \textit{Master Robert K. Cassatt}, 1885, or \textit{Portrait of Alexander Cassatt and His Son Robert Kelso}, 1885, or even the pastel \textit{Mrs. Cassatt Reading To Her Grandchildren}, 1881, which also implicitly connotes the value of a child's education via an invested and nurturing female elder.}

Despite these interesting comparisons that arise between a male and female artist's portrayal, there is something ironic about the fact that even Caspar Goodrich's portrait carries an unmistakably endearing quality of "cuteness." This quality is perhaps inextricable from the fact that he is still a child taking his pretended duties so seriously, a small being inside such a stiffly formal costume connotative of meticulous, meritorious behavior. For all the affinities with Kipling's spoiled child hardened by experience in the "real" world, Sargent's painting of a little boy in a sailor suit may ultimately most resemble Burnett's adorable protagonist Cedric Errol. Perhaps the most notable element about these comparisons is how artists such as Sargent clearly acknowledged the iconic children's literature of their time, produced by quite disparate authors, and absorbed traits from many literary sources.

\textbf{Conclusions:} Robert Louis Stevenson, Frances Hodgson Burnett, and Abbott Handerson Thayer

Thayer read the writing of Robert Louis Stevenson so avidly that in 1903 he created a painting of a winged female figure, based on a model named “Bessie” and now located in the National Museum of American Art, as a memorial to the author. It is incontrovertible that Thayer deeply admired and emulated Stevenson, who in turn was an admirer of the writing of Thayer’s friend Mark Twain. It makes sense to compare Thayer’s paintings with Stevenson’s cloying yet brooding book of poems, *A Child’s Garden of Verses*, published just seven years after the death of two of Thayer’s sons and in the same year that his first wife had a nervous breakdown (1888).

We should recall three verses in particular from Stevenson’s poem “Good and Bad Children:”

> Children, you are very little,  
> And your bones are very brittle;  
> If you would grow great and stately,  
> You must try to walk sedately.

> You must still be bright and quiet,  
> And content with simple diet;  
> And remain, though all bewild’ring,  
> Innocent and honest children.

> Happy hearts and happy faces,  
> Happy play in grassy places—  
> That was how, in ancient ages,  
> Children grew to kings and sages.

In the context of Thayer’s paintings, these verses are telling for a number of reasons. First, since Thayer’s sons, Harry and Ralph Waldo, died as infants, the painter clearly considered the life of a human being, particularly a child, precarious at best. He was reputedly a hypochondriac who forced his family to live in extreme conditions for the full benefit of fresh air, and he had all of his children homeschooled for fear that they would catch diseases. The deaths of multiple
children as well as his first wife only exacerbated this tendency and so the cyclical references Stevenson made to the almost frightening fragility of children, such as in the first verse of the poem (“very little | and your bones are very brittle”), must have been poignant to the painter. Secondly, the prescription for a child’s prosperity and happiness that is located in Stevenson’s second verse, which ultimately dissolves into a tone of blatant foreboding, highly resembles the discomfiting somberness on the faces of Thayer’s children in his paintings. Their agreeable, polite resignation clashes strangely with a soaring, quasi-religious mood; just like Stevenson’s poems, Thayer’s paintings accidentally betray the artificiality of the childhood paradise and the lofty burden placed on children to be perfect, morally uplifting beings in times of personal and cultural turmoil. Thirdly, the setting of many of Thayer’s paintings of child-angels, such as Caritas, The Virgin Enthroned, and The Virgin, is a nondescript, pastoral, grassy hillside or field in muted green-gold hues, which is highly reminiscent of the staple Romantic setting that Stevenson employs for his poems: as the third verse, for instance describing “happy play in grassy places.”

It should also be noted that there are affinities between Thayer and Frances Hodgson Burnett, though slightly less direct. Like Thayer, Burnett suffered the loss of a child—her son Lionel, who died of incurable tuberculosis in 1890. And like Thayer, Burnett self-defensively over-compensated for her children’s profound sadness in the creative realm; “wanting her son to die happy, she created around him the fiction that he was not really very ill but rather a traveling ‘prince imperial’ whose every wish was to be granted,” and, ritualistically, she rescued her books’ child protagonists such as Cedric Errol from states of abject poverty and illness by
the almost miraculous interventions of rich adult benefactors.\textsuperscript{246} Whether Thayer directly read Burnett’s stories is not documented, but it is actually quite likely. Not only was Burnett’s \textit{Little Lord Fauntleroy} so popular that it was the third most printed publication during the 1880’s, it was also made into a play in 1888 that ran for four years on Broadway and toured the country. Some form of exposure to the basic premise of Cedric’s tale was inevitable. Further, Thayer is documented to have read Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Romantic poets as avidly as he did Stevenson, and Burnett met and adulated these individuals early in her career, ensuring that she belonged to their circle of readership.

\textbf{Conclusions: Louisa May Alcott and Mary Cassatt}

Mary Cassatt knew directly of Louisa May Alcott through Louisa’s sister, May, who was present at the rejection of Cassatt’s \textit{Girl in a Blue Armchair} by the French Salon Jury in 1879. May wrote scathingly of this rejection, “Perhaps it’s too original a style for these fogies to appreciate.”\textsuperscript{247} Beyond the direct personal tie between the writer and painter, there are other noteworthy similarities in this treatment of children, particularly little girls. The biggest question that seems to riddle both literary historians and art historians is whether these two nineteenth-century female figures liberated, or constricted, their mother and child subjects.

One visual instance of this debate is the Metropolitan Museum’s \textit{Young Mother Sewing} (1900, oil on canvas). As we have discussed, this painting portrays a

\textsuperscript{246} Bixler, 10.
\textsuperscript{247} Gallatti, 35.
mother absorbed in the titular task, wearing a striped dress and blue apron, while her young daughter leans on her lap with a tenderly observed, realistic expression of boredom. The conservative qualities that Cassatt has given this image include: the loose adaptation of a triangular Madonna and child format; the act of sewing, allotted to the domestic and feminine; and the fact that the mother and daughter are ensconced in a parlor with the outside world—the realm of men—within view, but not reach. Furthermore, this glimpse into the outdoors is a glimpse into nature (grass and trees), which has long been traditionally conflated with the feminine. However, the observer may just as convincingly argue that the mother’s choice to be absorbed in a task that gives her pleasure and alleviates her boredom is subversive. The view outdoors may be a suggestion that the mother and daughter should aspire to escape the confines of their homestead; or it may actually be a folding screen, like the vase, an equation to culture and the material, and the woman’s increasingly cosmopolitan dominion over these elements. Furthermore, the daughter’s ennui implicitly suggests that she is capable of desiring stimulation of a more rigorously intellectual nature than the “menial” task of watching her mother embroider. And finally, we are experiencing two forms of “gaze” that may be read as empowering. The mother’s downward gaze suggests that her task is more important to her than the viewer’s gaze. And the daughter meets the viewer’s eye not with the shyness or cloying of an objectified female, but with boldness and lack of pretense.

Both Alcott and Cassatt attempted to realistically complicate and empower the psyche of women—particularly female caretakers and teachers—and children. At the same time, both did so in a way that commentators then and now
interrogated: was their work truly “feminist subversion,” or was it instead a
complacent upholder of domestic femininity, or was it both simultaneously? We
have repeatedly seen heated exchanges of letters detailing Alcott’s fierce rebuttals
against woman’s suffrage agencies that dared question her devotion to the cause
simply because chose to spend much of her time maintaining her household. Alcott
has been hailed as an early pioneer of feminist literature, and she brought her father
A. Bronson Alcott’s progressive pedagogical practices into the pages of her work.
Yet Alcott’s most famous protagonist, Josephine Bhaer (nee March), almost never
left the house where she educated young orphans, and she strove to tame the
outspoken ways of her protégée Nan Harding: essentially upholding the traditional
dichotomy of the masculine workplace and the feminine homestead. Likewise, we
have seen Mary Cassatt’s prints, pastels, and paintings subverting or fully
shouldering out the privileged male gaze, and presenting mothers as the wisest and
best caretakers of candid and emotionally complex children—mothers who
sometimes even demonstrate intellectual and erotic needs of their own. Yet for all
the psychological tweaks and visual variations, Cassatt never fully broke from the
highly accepted formula of the Madonna and child. Cassatt did produce earlier
works depicting young women absorbedly reading or becoming (while defying)
public spectacle; aside these, however, she never visually liberated women from the
confines of domestic duty. Despite the gamut of interpretation, Cassatt’s
contribution to the American repository of child imagery is indisputably massive.
She remains one of the first exceptionally famous artists of the genteel tradition that
comes to mind upon even a cursory discussion of childhood in American art. Her
insight into the maternal perspective is unparalleled and in many ways strikingly unconventional.

**Conclusions: Henry James and John Singer Sargent**

The works of Henry James and John Singer Sargent exhibit striking affinities with each other. Although written sixteen years after Sargent’s controversial painting, *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (1882, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) bears an eerie resemblance to the James “ghost story.” Or, we should say, more precisely, that the disturbing “Turn of the Screw” invokes memories of Sargent’s disturbing painting. Clearly James’s “Turn of the Screw,” due to the obvious chronology, did not influence Sargent’s *Daughters*. But could the painting, in this instance, have influenced the writing? Was the brooding painting so embedded in James’s memory that he consciously, or perhaps subconsciously, included elements of his friend’s painting in “Turn of the Screw”? Their friendship and mutual respect is well documented as is James’s favorable review of Sargent’s *Daughters*.

Or, could the eerie resemblance simply be due to very similar beliefs regarding the fragile state of childhood, with its complex and sometimes dark psychological nuances, shared by these two creative minds?

Or, finally, could the painting and the writing have both been similarly influenced by the prevalent views of late nineteenth-century psychologists such as Henry’s older brother, and John’s friend, psychologist William James? Yes—as it
turns out, Sargent’s painting and James’s story are separate but similar cries for help formulated by late nineteenth-century psychology: a “science” that was rife with Spiritualism and forecasted adult psychiatric illness by identifying the paranormal.

One cannot help but draw comparisons between the Boit portrait and James’s child characters Miles and Flora. Both painting and novel feature beautiful children whose demeanor increasingly strikes the audience as unbalanced. And in both, absence and ambiguity are central motifs of a childhood world that should be luminous and whimsical. The “nameless evils” committed on the children in the novel are never explicitly articulated; instead, in an increasingly speculative frenzy, the protagonist—the governess—alludes only indirectly to the children’s vices. Neither are the nervous, overly vigilant sisters in Sargent’s painting ever fully material, but rather, the darkness of the large, void interior swallows them.

Literary theorist Karen Halttunen has written an essay that historically itinerates nineteenth-century neuroses that were popular enough to be commonplace conversational topics. The essay concerns Henry James’s brother William, a noted psychologist, and his impactful role in conceiving the unstable female protagonist of “The Turn of the Screw.” Halttunen argues that James’s writing creatively reiterated his brother William’s expansive psychological research. Though Sargent cannot have read a story written after the completion of the Boit portrait, he could have been influenced by fashionable beliefs about abnormal psychology that James’s research epitomized.

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William James wrote extensively about the “hypnogagic,” or “twilight sedation.” The hypnogagic is a point during the natural sleep-cycle at which the mind dwells in a highly suggestible, transitional state between the conscious and the “subliminal.” In “The Turn of the Screw,” the governess sees the ghosts at transitional times of day, such as dawn or twilight. She also sees them in transitional places, like stairwells. Furthermore, her sensory perception of her environment dulls, while her ability to recount fine details of the ghosts’ appearance alone is uncanny. In the culminating scene at the end of the story, which results in Miles’s death, the governess faces off with Quint’s ghost through a rainy window, and may very well be confronting her own reflection. She could be—in fact, quite literally is—Miles’s killer. Hardly a coincidence, all this suggests that Henry borrowed the notion of the twilight state from William and intended for the governess to be both insane—vulnerable to hypnogagic trance—and truly haunted. As William himself stated, “If there are devils, if there are supernatural powers, it is through the cracked and fragmented self that they enter.”

Were, then, the Boit girls whom Sargent painted with such psychological acuity both haunted and insane? Were they, in a similar pool of cultural beliefs, the forerunners of Miles, Flora, and the governess? With these questions, the viewer may turn to Sargent’s Boit portrait. What visual indices may one find—of insanity as defined by late nineteenth century psychologists such as William James in the four young, disturbed females, and their environment? Psychology in Sargent’s era

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249 What James refers to so poetically in Victorian terms is today a form of mental disorder called Multiple Personality Disorder, or Dissociative Identity Disorder.
prescribes that the insane and haunted woman experiences her trauma in a liminal interior such as a stairwell or foyer; at a transitional time of day such as twilight; facing her reflection; and in a state of trance or anxiety. In some manner, all of these characteristics are present in The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit, whose four sitters suffered in various degrees from a future spinsterhood and/or insanity highly compatible with the governess later imaged by Henry James. This suggests that, when portraying female children with an abnormal psyche, Sargent ascribed to popular nineteenth-century notions of female insanity. 

The Boit portrait has a liminal setting, the same sort of space that Henry James would later use to represent the neurotic meeting of the natural and paranormal. As James himself stated in reviewing the painting, it is an “ordinary Parisian apartment” and the children are standing in the front room, which served as a foyer between public hallway and apartment. The deeper heart of the space is veiled completely in shadow. The Boit portrait also features twilight and reflective surfaces. In the back right of the painting is a mirror. Also, even though we know

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250 Thus the pedophilic spirits of Quint and Miss Jessel may be legitimate wicked specters—or they may be the governess’s own alternate personalities rising to confront her.

251 Considering Sargent’s documented appropriation of Diego Velázquez’s Las Meninas, in which a mirror placed at approximately the same compositional spot reflects the entry of the king and queen, the paned spot of light in the Boit portrait is most likely to be a mirror reflecting a window. This is supported by the direction of light and shadows. The light seems to be coming from an opposite diagonal across the third dimension, that is, over the viewer’s left shoulder if the viewer is entering the Boit apartment. The girls are bathed in dim bluish light from that direction. For our purposes, this is important for two reasons. First, the quality of light through the reflected window is a dim periwinkle, and evokes twilight. Sargent was partial to using the twilight period in portraying other children, such as in the Vickers portrait and Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose. Interestingly, Carnation was a hybrid of the plein-air technique and a Robert Louis Stevenson poem about the haunting transience of childhood innocence, aptly symbolized by gardens and dusk. The second important factor in the mirrored window is the notion of reflection itself: the idea that the troubled mind suffering from Multiple Personality Disorder may face itself, discover unsavory facets, and mislabel them as malevolent alien forces.
the two girls, Florence (against the vase) and Jane (in the center), are separate siblings, they look like twins. The obscuring of Florence’s face and hairstyle in shadow, and the fact that they wear identical black dresses with white frocks and shiny soles, creates a peculiar sensation that one is the doppelgänger of the other.

Finally, the oddest visage in the Boit portrait is its compositional anchor, Jeanie: trance-like, with chalk-white skin, interrupted in her state of play to stare nervously at the viewer. What is interesting about Sargent’s fixation on Jeanie is that the portraitist was famously able to read the personalities of his portrait subjects, and Jeanie grew up to have the most adulthood adjustment problems.²⁵²

Sargent was trying to suggest that these little girls lived in a fleeting and whimsical world, but that some innate proclivity in their collective psyche made that world highly precarious. It is a stretch to state that Sargent clairvoyantly predicted Jeanie’s insanity, or that he read William James avidly and sought to illustrate his list of psychiatric disorders in commissioned paintings. But it is reasonable to suggest that he was aware of the wildly popular theories propagated by William James and his psychologist colleagues and was influenced by them, as, years later, was Henry James.

Perhaps Sargent was exorcising his own disconcertment over the

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²⁵² A diary entry by Jeanie’s father Ned dated 1888 describes her as “fading rapidly away...she is 18...pretty strong until about two or three years ago, when everything seemed to go wrong + now she looks like a skeleton + is in a nervous state bordering on insanity.” In another entry he lamented, “quite violent + has struck her mother + has frequently threatened to kill herself.” Ultimately, as Erica Hirshler’s Sargent’s Daughters documents, Jeanie was institutionalized in Paris.
possibility of tainted childhood, in his portrait of psychologically abnormal little girls. It may be that Sargent was keenly and personally aware of the perils that could befall the young because of his own sister, Emily. As a child, Emily had been the victim of a debilitating spinal disease that left her wracked with pain for many years. Perhaps witnessing a young female family member suffering the challenges of chronic disability created in Sargent an especial attunement to little girls who were in some way deeply troubled.

Sargent was not the only one who found such possibilities haunting. William James’s son Hermie died of Whooping Cough before he was a year old. This mark of death on young age profoundly affected him, driving him to research the abnormal human psyche in hopes of better controlling his own ghosts. Perhaps such shared tragedies involving young family members and the psychological repercussions were the source of the vastly similar haunted qualities of both Sargent’s and James’s portrayals of children.

**Final Conclusions: Children in Genteel Painting**

Ironically, taken as a comprehensive unit, the painters and writers of “the Genteel Tradition” produced what seem today to be the nineteenth century’s most troubling images of childhood.

According to Patricia Hills, Eastman Johnson, Winslow Homer, and John George Brown felt threatened by the work of younger, genteel painters and
consciously differed from them in approach. Since the genteel painters provided a different aesthetic tradition, they also provided a different perspective of American childhood from that of their contemporaries, the genre painters.

Both groups of painters gained their ideological slant from the liberal, middle-class Christian belief in the inherent purity of the child. Such a belief included poetic notions of childhood’s closeness to unspoiled nature, and pedagogical notions of learning through free play. And yet, genteel art featuring children was, in many ways, diametrically opposed to other forms of art depicting children.

And the differences are sometimes striking. Most markedly, genre and genteel painters completely deviated on the novelty of celebrating juvenile misbehavior. Genteel paintings of children showcase the sons and daughters of the rich, educated and socially elite: children almost completely sheltered from adult concerns, who get whatever they want, and do not need to be unruly.

But despite, or perhaps because of, such pampering, genteel painters convey that these young boys and girls are neurotic and frail—even “spoiled.” In this way they are a striking contrast to the “bad boys” of the early genre painters such as Johnson and Homer.

It is important to closely examine the genteel painters and the literary and social traditions that influenced their work. In doing so we discover that, despite

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efforts to boast angelic children surrounded by abundant care and comfort, portrayals of the posh and elite actually betray the artificiality and psychological strain of the nursery “paradise.”

We discover that images of children in the genteel tradition are far from the antidote to images of unruly or neglected children. Rather, they are the idyllic dream of artists and intellectuals steeped in the same rhetoric as those who portray deprived child-rebels: a dream with visible self-contradictions that may or may not be artistically intentional.
CHAPTER IV

THE ART PHOTOGRAPHERS (ca. 1890-1910)

Pictorialism and Precedents

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, painters of the genteel tradition represented children receiving all of the privileges—the unconditional love and pampering—that elite culture prescribed as the appropriate treatment of the young. They schematized this developmentally distinct age as a fleeting and blissful period of freedom and moral purity. Those who created more original contributions within this formula seemed to follow one of two methods.

Some artists produced disturbing episodes in literature and painting that challenged this quaint perception of childhood. These artists reflected their own personal ties to vanguard literary figures and pioneers of the budding field of modern psychology. They suggested that childhood was more emotionally and psychologically complex than Victorian standards allotted. In particularly striking cases, they even implied that the problems of maturity—psychological, emotional, even sexual—percolated the “inviolable” realm of the young. I have explored how genteel painters such as John Singer Sargent operated in this manner.

On the other hand, other genteel artists worked within elite schemas of childhood in ways that were sanitized and visually extreme. Though their private thoughts might be grimmer, these artists whimsically maintained that childhood was an insulated and carefree stage of human life. Most of the time they took pains
to conceal visual clues as to anything more ambiguous in a child’s daily routines.\footnote{If these artists did admit underlying tumult in the life of a child, they did so in a visual language that was personal and psychological, resulting in something like a dark inside joke or private lamentation about the child being pictured. In other words, to these artists, childhood, either paradise or nightmare, had no context outside the world of the artist’s personal rumination.}

They took advantage, instead, of the emblematic power children had to represent Romanticist tropes such as purity, innocence, nature, and spiritual acuity. I have explained instances in which William Merritt Chase, Kate Greenaway, and, especially, Abbott Handerson Thayer, operated in this manner. But so did many representatives of a photographic movement, who captured images that are crucial to a full discussion of children and social reform—if only for their completely insular quality.

The individuals who produced such images were photographers contemporaneous to the painters of the genteel tradition. They belonged to a broad movement, formed in the mid-nineteenth-century, called Pictorialism.

Pictorialism was an international artistic philosophy that began in Great Britain and Europe. The key belief of Pictorialists was that the hand of the photographer, like the hand of the painter, should be visible in the finished work of photography. To render creative decision-making noticeable was to elevate photography to the status of art. For this reason, amateur photographers, untethered to the restraints of doing business, were thought better equipped to achieve this artistic goal. In Pictorialist circles, to be an amateur became a badge of honor and artistic earnestness.\footnote{As is often the case in the art world, this was a troubled and paradoxical relationship with making money through art, which Alfred Stieglitz’s circle would inherit and adapt. For instance, Stieglitz scorned professional photography and tried to liberate peers by funding their art himself. But his best friend Eduard Steichen, and his close friend Gertrude Kasebier, were both professional portrait}
Both in shooting and in the darkroom, Pictorialists invented seemingly limitless ways to subjectively alter what the lens recorded. They had many methods of approach. These included placing gauze in front of the lens, rendering the shutter speed sluggish or altering the aperture to shorten the depth of field, “dodging” and “burning,” and scratching the negative or rubbing it with chemicals that blurred or erased compositional elements. Heatedly divisive camps arose over: whether it was permissible to alter the negative after the image had been recorded; whether the “blurriness” of a Pictorialist image was sufficient to justify its elevation to art; and to what extent photographers should rely on extant tropes and pastiches of allegory, genre, and history painting. The most famous debates were those that ensued between Henry Peach Robinson (1830-1901) and Peter Henry Emerson (1856-1936), both British amateur photographers who became lifetime adversaries.

Regardless of their many ideological divisions, all Pictorialists shared a desire to render photography as a fine art. More often than not, children were their chosen subject.

The Photo-Secesssion

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photographers and Pictorialists simultaneously. And somewhere in the middle, Clarence White supplemented his Pictorialist experiments through teaching.

256 The following are Alfred Stieglitz’s words on the subject: “Artists who saw my earlier photographs began to tell me that they envied me: that they felt my photographs were superior to their paintings, but that, unfortunately, photography was not an art. I could not understand why the artists should envy me for my work, yet, in the same breath, decry it because it was machine-made—their ‘art’ painting, because hand-made, being considered necessarily superior. Then and there I started my fight—or rather my conscious struggle for the recognition of photography as a new medium of expression, to be respected in its own right, on the same basis as any other art form.” Dorothy Norman, Alfred Stieglitz, Aperture, 1976: 6.
The Photo-Secession was the most important American Pictorialist movement at the turn of the twentieth century. The man who is widely accepted as its founder was Alfred Stieglitz, an American-born photographer of German-Jewish descent. The Photo-Secession is often considered the American counterpart to the Linked Ring in Great Britain. Like the Linked Ring, which split from the Royal Photographic Society, the Photo-Secession diverged from a more conservative photographic establishment. It was formed in a café in 1902 as the result of Steiglitz’s complaints about the inadequacy of the New York Camera Club, and his anger over an overseas show, “New School of American Photography,” organized in 1901 by F. Holland Day.

Stieglitz had been editor of a semi-regular photography periodical, Camera Notes. The magazine soon evolved into a powerful disseminator of European and American modern art, be it photography, painting, drawing, sculpture, or nontraditional media. This later evolution became a far more famous publication titled Camera Work. One year after the Photo-Secession was formed, another amateur group beat the Photo-Secessionists to a formal show of American Pictorialist photographs—and Steiglitz was again chagrined. As a result, Eduard Steichen offered a studio space on 291 Fifth Avenue to Steiglitz and peers to present

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257 The Linked Ring was a British photographic society formed in May 1892 to contend that photography was as capable of being a photographic form as it was a form of data or science. Henry Peach Robinson was its founder.
258 See Sarah Greenough, Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries, Washington. D.C: The National Gallery of Art; Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2000: 26, and Katherine Hoffman, Stieglitz: A Beginning Light, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2004. The photographic salon that preceded any endeavor by Stieglitz was organized by Curtis Bell, a professional photographer and president of the American Federation of Photographic Societies, and was held in Clausen Galleries, New York, December 1904. The jurors included William Merritt Chase, Kenyon Cox, and Robert Henri. It was titled “the First American Photographic Salon.” This was “perceived by many as a direct challenge to Stieglitz’s supremacy” (Greenough).
their own show. Thus the “Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession,” better known as “291,” were formed.

As with the work of the painters of the Genteel Tradition, photographers such as Stieglitz, and his colleagues, Clarence White and Gertrude Käsebier, were surely influenced by new ideas about the schooling of children. But what distinguishes these photographers is the way that their work moves away from making a direct social statement to pursue formal issues of composition and the patterning of light and dark. Even the soft-focus of their work seems to suggest something that evades social realities and removes the image to a willfully whimsical, detached artistic realm. This tendency began with Stieglitz.

Alfred Stieglitz

Background

Alfred Stieglitz, the tireless founder of the Photo-Secession, was an aesthetic zealot. He was also the consummate modern art collector, dealer, critic, and photographer. He was born in New York in 1864 to an affluent German-Jewish family. After completing high school, he attended school in Germany. He was educated at the Königliche Technische Hochschule in Berlin, in mechanical engineering. Stieglitz began photographing at age nineteen. He became a stellar photographer for amateur magazines in Germany, England, and the United States.259

259 Steiglitz’s many acolytes and disciples in the realm of photography alone included: Clarence White, Gertrude Kasebier, F. Holland Day, Frank Eugene, Joseph T. Keiley, Alvin Langdon Coburn, D.O. Hill, Julia Margaret Cameron, Craig Annan, Baron Adolf de Meyer, Robert Demachy, Hans Watzek, Heinrich Kuhn, Hugo Henneberg, Paul Strand, and his closest friend Eduard Steichen.
As an art photographer, Stieglitz was a pioneer in a number of respects. He examined painting, sculpture, and visual objects never before considered in an art context from new angles. The galleries at 291 housed all of these avant-garde experiments, which broadened the parameters of the traditional art salon. There Stieglitz exhibited: the European painters Cezanne, Picasso, Braque, Severini, Rousseau, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Matisse, among others; art by women; African “tribal” sculpture; and budding American painters such as Alfred Maurer, Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, John Marin, Arthur Dove, Max Weber, and Georgia O’Keeffe.

Stieglitz’s influence over the art world began to decline with the Armory Show, 1913, which stole his thunder as a modernist visionary. However, with his conversion to “Straight” photography (thanks to conversations with Paul Strand during 1915), and his body of “Equivalent” photographs (1922), and his management of The Intimate Gallery (1925) and An American Place (1929), Stieglitz managed to sustain influence over the American art community.

This tenacious photographic innovator often depicted children. Stieglitz’s oeuvre of children ranges from pastiching nineteenth-century genre paintings to a more modernist documentary of his own daughter, Kitty, after 1900.260

Stieglitz Before 1900: in the Manner of Paintings

260 The painterly resources for Stieglitz’s early works are highly identifiable. While training and establishing his reputation in Munich, Stieglitz became a close friend of German artist Wilhelm Hasemann. The images the two produced between 1884 and 1894 are symbiotic and probably established Stieglitz’s habit of appropriating the images of colleagues in media already established as fine art.
Stieglitz’s photographs of children before 1900 include portraits, pastoral scenes, and genre scenes that borrow from or appropriate contemporaneous painting and printmaking. Many are frankly derivative. Some seem to reflect the new documentary photographic tradition. All subordinate specificity to transcendence, social message to allegory, and are insistently aesthetically appealing.

At times Stieglitz’s photographs touched on real and contemporary crises of childrearing and childhood, but curiously, Stieglitz sidestepped immediate social connotation. In fact, his images of children convey a quality of timelessness and psychological intensity. As Sarah Greenough puts it, Stieglitz “[strove] to [create]...picture[s] with more universal appeal, depicting the same subject matter, sentiments, and concerns of a popular painting,”261 probably for two reasons. First, Stieglitz was raised in a household that was invested and active in all forms of creative art. His businessman father, Edward, was an amateur painter, and he collected art that exposed the young Alfred to the Old Masters. Secondly, Stieglitz’s photographic mentor, Hermann Wilhelm Vogel, a professor at the Berlin Hochscule, believed in “suppressing the accessories and revealing the characteristic.”262 The student, Stieglitz, decided that he would also omit clutter and idiosyncracy in order to create an eloquent visual summary. Combined with his mental repertoire of traditional painting tricks, this led the photographer to portray human scenarios that were thusly “universal in appeal.”


Works Based on Paintings

For art photographers, directly imitating literary, visual, musical, or architectural work was a useful means of permitting a new, and sometimes suspect, mode of visual media to break into the “fine” art realm. Stieglitz’s early photographs of children were often blatant, but beautiful, imitations of long-established European paintings.

Stieglitz’s photograph The Truant (1886, platinum print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), is a “posed, anecdotal work” of a grouchy boy standing next to his scornful mother. The mother leans across the doorway to behold her son, who slouches back against the frame. The child wears a cock-eyed hat, his bare feet are dirty, and he drags a limp satchel. The image illustrates Stieglitz’s tendency to seek underlying “typologies” in child subjects.263 It is significant that Stieglitz, a master of self-promotion, recognized the universal charm of a big-spirited child, and realized that the subject was a powerful and sympathetic one upon which he could repeatedly rely. Stieglitz was wired to have a mental card catalogue of stock poses derived from Old Master paintings.

Many of Stieglitz’s best early photographs of children were taken during an 1887 trip to Italy. Stieglitz visited Venice, Chioggia, Pallanza on Lake Maggiore, Bellagio on Lake Como, and Riva de Garda on Lake Garda, armed with a Steinheil

263 This is stated outright in Greenough, Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set, Vol. 1, and in Hoffman, Stieglitz: A Beginning Light.
Aplanat 19-inch lens camera. When Stieglitz pictured washer-children on Lake Como, Italy, he did so in the manner of Millet, Daumier, and Degas.264

In one instance, The Unwilling Bath (1887, platinum print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), a small boy attempts to drag a massive cow into the water. The setting is stark: a shoreline, the small leaning boy, and the livestock that dwarves him. The print won a Frank Leslie contest.265 Its subject matter surprisingly echoes that of The Unruly Calf (1875, Brooklyn Museum), a graphite drawing and painting by Winslow Homer. Homer’s image similarly depicts the two unspoiled, “primitive” beings, child and animal, combating while the immensity of nature impassively contains them. Most likely both Homer and Stieglitz took their cue from French landscapists whom they both adulated—specifically the avant-garde Barbizon School, in which painter Jean Francois Millet prominently figured.

Stieglitz’s photograph The Last Joke, Bellagio (1887, platinum print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), is another example of this earlier photographic style. This was a favorite image of Peter Henry Emerson. In the photograph, a group of little boys and girls stand around a woman at a fountain laughing exuberantly and gesturing at the camera. There are nine children and three adult women, but the star of the show is, indubitably, the tiny boy in dead-center wearing a hat that is

264 For examples, see Daumier’s The Washerwoman, 1860; Boudin’s Washerwomen at the Edge of the Pond, 1880-85.
265 English-born Frank Leslie was an American engraver, illustrator, and publisher of family portraits who built his career on woodcut engravings for American celebrities such as P.T. Barnum, and is best known for Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, begun 1855. Leslie was a pivotal figure in American arts and culture, who won an award at the Paris Exhibition of 1867 for his outstanding artistic service to the show. Leslie was already well-loved by the American populace for his documentation of Civil War soldiers that decade. Leslie was dead by the time that Stieglitz won a contest and thus a name in American popular art circles, but his wife continued his famous business, with its numerous publications, in his place.
slightly too large and shields his eyes. His forward squat and the impish grin on his face make him a captivating pictorial lynchpin. The composition appears spontaneous but is cleverly laid out: the children on the left stand in a stacked order of descending height, creating a subtle diagonal that echoes the architectural descent of the left pillar, archway, and fountain. Another, more psychological, diagonal is created by the gaze of the centermost woman, who folds her arms and smiles to the lower right at a little girl who mimics her arm gesture, and another little girl who sports bare feet and a topknot, leaning against the fountain. The work—the bare-footedness, the setting with its reference to ancient architecture, and the shared moment of mirth in the middle of tedious chores—conveys that these children are resilient fixtures of a culture older than Stieglitz’s America. However it is not mere pastiche; it carries an immediacy that Peter Henry Emerson appreciated. It demonstrates that Stieglitz was breaking from his more contrived early methods because of the spontaneity of its mood. The fact that such a visceral emotion as a child’s laugh could be snatched by the camera lens and reproduced on a platinum plate is remarkable. The work indeed won first prize in an 1887 competition held by Emerson, in *The Amateur Photographer*, a publication for which Stieglitz would briefly become editor (1893-6).

**Softened Documentary?**

Stieglitz’s images of street children began to resemble a new and undefinable visual tradition uncomfortably outside the bounds of sentimental painting. Perhaps this is the reason why the photographer often explored more than one image of the
same child subject. For instance, to complete Leone, Bellagio (1887, platinum print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) Stieglitz shot the same child model twice. In one portrait, Leone is a “cocky” guttersnipe, selfpossessed but gaunt, neither maudlin nor unrealistically well-fed and worry-free. But in the other, Leone was asked to remove his shoes, unbutton and untuck his shirt, and strike a more longsuffering pose, like so many Dickensian paintings of city bootblacks and ragamuffins. Greenough has suggested that Stieglitz created multiple compositions of the same child model when he felt his work was becoming subversive, too unpretentious, and too contrary to literary and artistic tropes.266 The argument is convincing here.

Stieglitz clearly explored a softened documentary mode. But he was careful to qualify these images as mere “experiments in light and shadow,” and he perennially retreated to the topical realm of “peasant folk” to renew his credentials as a practitioner of traditional fine art. For instance an evocative image of a barefoot peasant girl in a headscarf, weaving a crown of flowers and seated in overgrown grass, submitted to the Fourth Annual Exhibition of Photographs by the Photographic Salon of Philadelphia, is merely titled Sunlight Effect (1890, platinum print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). It has no outward context whatsoever. It is merely a girl on a hillside, as Stieglitz himself identified it.

Other photographs produced that same year, such as Weary (1890, platinum print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), similarly mute social context. This is a hazy, warm image of another barefoot peasant girl. This time the girl sleeps

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against the pile of wood that she has gathered and will need to carry. The print was featured in *Amateur Photographer*. It was also a key image in the Photo-Secession exhibition held March 5-24, 1902, at the National Arts Club in New York City.\(^{267}\)

Stieglitz reprinted *Weary* again in 1895/1896, and during the 1920s and 1930s, each time in higher contrast. He was clearly trying to re-envision an aesthetically successful negative. The negative shows a working-class child so exhausted by her daily toil that she could drift off to sleep even in an open field.\(^{268}\) The work must have had at least vague socially conscious resonance; the writer Theodore Dreiser, a friend of the rabble-rousing Ashcan School painters (who frequently depicted the problems inherent to America’s lurid urban scene), hailed Stieglitz as a "master of photography" in *Success Magazine* 2, 1899, citing this image.\(^{269}\) Importantly, though, even despite markers of the girl’s toils, Stieglitz eradicates *immediate* social context. He captures a well-nourished child model *costumed* as a poor worker—in a bucolic landscape of undefinable location. Her indices of poverty are mostly stock markers of peasantry (apron, scarf, bare feet).

She sleeps in a traditional recumbent pose. As such, she is elevated to allegory: the


\(^{268}\) Greenough, *The Key Set*, Plate 62.

\(^{269}\) This is an interesting critical reaction considering that Stieglitz famously professed to have relatively little interest in explicitly championing social reform. Stieglitz’s attitude made aesthetic and social concern in art seem mutually exclusive (though they are not). But when Dreiser called a photographer a “master” and cited an image that specifically chronicled the hardship of a working child, it signaled that an image could be both “beautiful” and possess reformist undercurrents.
hardship of earnest labor, perhaps, or the promise of escaping the banal in the world of dreams. There is not a trace of commentary on actual children at the end of the nineteenth century in this image.

Stieglitz similarly photographed Venetian peasant boys as haunting, but ultimately universalizing, emblems of youthful hardship and spiritual tenacity. For instance, Stieglitz's photograph *A Venetian Gamin* (1894, platinum print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), is a more sober portrayal of a child than his *The Last Joke*, 1887, yet it still exists within the framework of established art. *Venetian Gamin* is a portrait of a bedraggled little boy standing against a sparse background, a worn wooden door. Here Stieglitz gives evidence of the violation of innocent childhood, a picturesque tragedy that also operates on a metaphorical level. The gamin is somber but has an inner value, just like his backdrop, which is tattered but well crafted. Stieglitz both references existing genre painting iconography, and anticipates a social documentary mode. The photographer did not always mask the sorrow of underprivileged childhood, but when he portrayed it, it had to be a pretty picture. *Venetian Gamin* aches with urgency and poignancy that only the best documentary photographs may capture; indeed, in such photographs, it is impossible to disregard a certain affinity with reform photography, which was rapidly becoming popular both in Europe and in America.

In 1894 Stieglitz depicted his last significant early body of child photographs. They are images of dreamy peasant girls in Gutach, Germany, in the style of the Karlsruhe School painters. Stieglitz’s Karlsruhe-influenced photographs were soft and tonal in a manner analogous to the semi-Impressionistic painting style. An
example is *The Letterbox* (1894, platinum print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), which hazily pictures two barefoot, pigtailed girls dutifully and serenely delivering mail. Doris Bry has described these images as “[Stieglitz’s] first European work, with an integration of intention and achievement, a certainty of line, form, and print caliber that give them, taken as a whole, the *timeless quality* characteristic of his best work.”\(^{270}\)

It is relevant to wonder: did the father of the Photo-Secession care very little for children’s social reform even during an era when the issue was so hotly debated? This is a difficult question to definitively answer. We know that Stieglitz had strong opinions about the evolving state of society and about the impact of modernism. His long diatribe on the beauty of the Flat Iron Building on a snowy day—“to America what the Parthenon was to Greece,” “the new America that was still in the making”—shows this.\(^ {271}\) But note that in that same philosophical monologue, Stieglitz is still preoccupied with the manner in which aesthetic concerns emblematize social change or even eclipse it. He speaks of being “spellbound” by the “fresh snow” and how its lightness underscored the “seeming simplicity” of the dark structure, the “lightness combined with solidity,” with transforming “ugliness into beauty.”\(^ {272}\)

Similarly, Stieglitz’s *Steerage*, 1907, taken with his Graflex camera when he, his wife, Emmeline, and his daughter Kitty were sailing for Paris, depicts the segregation of the rich and poor into different ship compartments. But Stieglitz

\(^{271}\) Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 6-7.
\(^{272}\) Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 7.
professed to love the image because, while implicitly illustrating unjust conditions, it also strikingly linked the shape and brightness of a man’s straw hat with a bridge and stairway, making an outstanding composition.

Thus, it is not that Stieglitz did not care to show social reality, including the social role of children. It is more that Stieglitz wished to show what really existed—and then to transform it into something aesthetically compelling, thinking himself an artistic magician, or god.

**Stieglitz After 1900: Psychological Portraits**

Greenough argues that “in later years,” Stieglitz “no longer felt compelled to validate photography by comparing it to anything else;” this was a trait common to many art photographers, including the proponents of “straight photography,” as their work reached the twentieth century. This is apparent in Stieglitz's later works of children, which become intimate in scale, personal, and brooding. During the 1890's Stieglitz also switched to working with the recently developed hand camera, featuring 4” X 5” negatives.

When Stieglitz's first and only daughter, Katherine or “Kitty,” was born, her father manically shot negative after negative of her every move. Kitty’s mother, Emmeline, even became severely unnerved by Alfred’s overbearing, exhibitionistic intrusion into family events and intimate moments. His *Photographic Journal of a Baby* (1900), is a compendium of these images. The album is innovative in that Stieglitz often shot Kitty’s world from her point-of-view and perspective, rather than

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from an adult’s. His was a tender yet intense acknowledgment of how it must feel to be so reliant upon entities that are vastly bigger and older, in a world full of both awe and frustration. Usually with aplomb, Kitty bends to pick a flower; she leans over in her mother’s arms; she encounters sheep through a fence, strolls down dirt paths, and reaches up to take an adult’s hand. Significantly, Greenough has noted that during Kitty’s childhood and adolescence, her father created almost no new negatives—other than images of her. While Steiglitz is often thought the father of modern photography, this endeavor to capture Kitty’s life from her point of view, with the mundaneness of everyday delights exalted, is little different than Kate Greenaway’s quintessentially nostalgic, nineteenth-century illustrations for Myles E. Foster’s book of children’s music, *A Day in a Child’s Life*.

Interestingly, as Kitty ages, Stieglitz’s depictions of his daughter grow less wholesome. In *Kitty* (1905, platinum print processed with mercury, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), her flowing dark hair let down, she poses next to an image of a particularly violent nursery rhyme, that of the “Three Blind Mice.” Gone is her wide-eyed wonder. Now her expression is cold and haughty, flanked by a mural of a maid dashing across the wall toward Kitty’s form with a butcher’s knife. Here Stieglitz demonstrates the more modern tendency to question the inviolable happiness of childhood. Indeed, the photograph is equal parts doting and disturbing. The knowledge that Kitty as an adult became bipolar, and spent most

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274 Greenough, *The Key Set*, Volume One, XX
275 See Katharine Hoffman, *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light*. Hoffman notes that the mural “could also be read as part of a child’s integrating fairy-tale and nursery-rhyme violence into an interior mindscape to be dealt with like many childhood fears.”
of her life in an asylum, adds a grim footnote to what by itself would be a subtly unnerving image.

The unsettling qualities of this series lingered when Stieglitz’s friends chose to picture father and daughter together. For instance, Eduard Steichen’s *Stieglitz and Kitty* (1905, gum bichromate over platinum print, Metropolitan Museum of Art), poses the photographer near an ovular mirror that reflects only blackness. Stieglitz insistently clings to his daughter’s uncomfortably raised arm and dangling wrist. Kitty is swathed in white, with a large bonnet; in fact, aside Stieglitz’s face and a glint on the mirror, Kitty is the only light point in the gloomy composition. This seems to harness her very existence to her father’s potent psyche. She looks trapped, yet simultaneously, poised. Perhaps Steichen, who in youth favored Symbolism and enjoyed tampering with negatives to create mystical effects, was merely placing his stylistic signature on his friend’s visage. Or maybe he foresaw dysfunction in Alfred and Kitty’s enmeshed relationship. Either way, the image is haunting.

Few other photographs of Kitty by her father are as peculiarly dark as the *Three Blind Mice* image. But they all portray a sourly haughty Kitty. There is a disconnection between her young age and her comportment. We know from, for instance, Stieglitz’s photographs of Georgia O’Keefe, that he was a domineering photographer ever cognizant of audience reception, who framed his subjects as he wished. We know that, both as a pioneer of modernism and as a father, he was alternately dismissive and coddling. Thus, it is probably not only Kitty’s personality, but also her father’s, emanating from these images.
Examples are many. Stieglitz’s photograph *Kitty and Emmeline* (1905, platinum print, Private Collection), features the mother and daughter seated at a window, a point of physical access, but gazing with such unsmiling fervor at the camera that psychological access is denied. *Kitty Holding a Plant* (n.d.), displays the bonneted child with her sad little face and a sad little wisp of green. Stieglitz took several autochromes of his daughter, seeing her, like his avocation itself, as excellent experimental material: *Kitty Stieglitz* (1907, autochrome, Private Collection), holding flowers and a butterfly net, but far too sullen to appear interested in engaging in such a childish activity; an image (1907, autochrome, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), of Kitty and her father in Tutzing, Austria, seated in a formal garden with both their hands on his camera bellows (Kitty gazes, with her usual coolness, hair bow, and stack of flowers, at the viewer); and another come-hither-faced *Kitty* clutching a fistful of plants (1908). The child is, to employ modern lingo, “posed;” we sense her desire, above all, to please her father. There is also the markedly seductive *Kitty* (with braids), 1908 (lantern slide, Art Institute of Chicago).

Stieglitz clearly had a fascination with the juxtaposition between childhood and adulthood and the effects this change had on someone’s personality. He took numerous photographs of Kitty as a languid, lost looking adult woman. The only tie to her arrogant, assured childhood self was her streaming dark hair. It is as if without her father’s controlling presence, or perhaps exhausted by it, Kitty became lost in her polarized moods.

Stieglitz also took photographs of other children as adolescents and adults, and the vast changes that took place. Georgia Englehard made one of the most
striking transformations. Englehard was Stieglitz’s niece, the daughter of his sister, Agnes, and her husband, George. Georgia was close to her uncle Alfred, with whom she corresponded regularly via letters between the ages of 12 and 22. She was an offbeat personality who enthusiastically climbed the French Alps numerous times, and a professional writer, a photographer, and a painter who trained under Georgia O’Keeffe. Stieglitz granted his niece a show at 291.

Stieglitz’s 1918 platinum print of Georgia, *Georgia Engelhard* (palladium print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) shows a scowling, beady-eyed child in white lace, picking nervously at a sharp knitting needle between her fingers. By 1922, Stieglitz was shooting photographs of Georgia in a state of adolescent exuberance, grinning and even laughing, self-satisfied. In one image, she is even cupping one of her own bare, developed breasts in her hands and curiously, immodestly examining her nipple, entranced by the bodily changes of her own coming-of-age (gelatin silver print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.).

It should finally be noted that Stieglitz must have found a child’s world perennially fascinating. Rhetorically, childhood was unspoiled and pure, and suited to a Modernist bias of creative introspection. And so, at the urging of Abraham Walkowitz, Stieglitz organized three separate shows of children’s art at 291: in April 1912, February 1914, and April 1915. Through these shows, Stieglitz hoped to uncover “natural” differences between male and female artistic abilities, seeking inconclusively to verify the superior mechanical, mimetic capabilities of males.276

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His goal is significant considering that, simultaneously, the psychologist Helen Bradford Thompson Wooley was conducting research to disprove this same assumption.277

Stieglitz also wished to establish ties between children’s art and “primitive” art. He intended to demonstrate that while the two shared an intuitive style based on lack of learned conventions, primitive art, unlike children’s art, was aesthetically sophisticated. But in the meantime, Stieglitz’s acolytes were coming into their own, and also portraying childhood in compelling ways.

Clarence White

Background

The small-town Ohioan, Clarence White, was one of the founders of the Photo-Secession, and Alfred Stieglitz’s disciple—until monetary disputes ended their friendship.278 He overcame his provincial roots by poring over avant-garde magazines of art and photography, both American and European, such as Magazine of Art, Jugend, and Arts et Decoration. By the early 1900’s, friendships with important artistic and literary figures catapulted White into international fame: he formed productive partnerships with Stieglitz (who reproduced White’s finest illustrations for Irving Bacheller, Ira Billman, and Clara Moris); with the critic


278 The dispute was over works sold in 1911 at an Albright Art Gallery show.
Sadakichi Hartmann; with photographer F. Holland Day; and the French pictorialist Robert Demachy, who invented the gum bichromate process.

Regrettably little else is known about this photographer, excepting documentation of the ways in which, as a pedagogue, he paved the way for many younger, more famous photographers.

White’s work provided a place for two themes to merge: One was a more transcendent art form, a loosely, poetically Socialist world in which the masses paradoxically gained access to beauty and luxury.\(^{279}\) The other was the exultation of domesticity and of women and children who increasingly ruled the domestic realm. And so White’s art, and the women and children who populate it, are part of an aesthetic movement intended to rectify the cheap, impersonal mechanism that was American society and taste. We can consider these images to be a more specified variant of genteel ideas about children’s “innate” purity and unique capacity to “save” adults and society as a whole. In this way, White strongly reflects the work of painter analogues such as Chase and Thayer. At the same time, because White also directly imitated painters such as Sargent, whose view of childhood was more complex, White’s work occasionally bears unmistakable tones of tension and sadness.

\textbf{White, Aesthetics, and Domesticity: Framing His Images of Children}

\(^{279}\) It should be noted that White’s brand of Socialism was not strictly Marxian, but more in the vein of William Morris and Edward Carpenter, a disciple of Walt Whitman, and White’s favorite author.
One of White’s earliest supporters was Ohioan artist O. Walter Beck, a Munich-trained painter who articulately defended White’s experimentations in photography. Beck was a friend of Japanese art expert Ernest Fenollosa, and a disciple of the Arts and Crafts movement. As such, he appreciated any aesthetic that shed the excessively “literal” tone plaguing most American art. He envisioned White’s dreamy tonalist photography as fitting that alternate mold. Beck orchestrated gallery exhibitions featuring White’s work. It should be noted that White’s own affinity with Japanese art is unmistakable, showing his reliance upon Beck and colleagues. For instance, the platinum print Boy with Wagon, 1898, depicts a child in a pleated frock pausing to glance left in puzzlement while fingerling the handle of his toy. The sharp diagonal of the wagon handle and the black form of the door in the center of the composition, echoing the larger square of the print, both deliberately limit depth of space, just as in a Japanese print.

As an Arts and Crafts enthusiast, Beck also provided an organized framework for the disparate elements in White’s oeuvre. Indeed, as Bonnie Yochelson puts it, “Pictorial photography, which sought to elevate a mechanized and commercialized craft to the status of art, shared many of the principles and practices of the arts and crafts movement.”280 The Arts and Crafts movement turned away from industrialist mass manufacturing. It supported instead ideas that correlated closely with White’s political platform. We rarely see White’s social and political views in his actual imagery. But White was an avowed and active Socialist. Like the Socialist Party, the

Arts and Crafts movement championed the dignity of human labor, and asserted that the common man could produce things of great beauty. Arts and Crafts disciples insisted that aesthetic skills could be taught to anyone who was spiritually conditioned. They claimed that objects of quality and value originated in the domestic sphere, defended by women and inhabited by children—who are highly focal subjects in White’s career. It should be noted that White was always sympathetic to women and children, and invited many women to join the Newark Camera Club in 1891.

**Nudity and Soft-Focus**

White’s belief that childhood is a pure and unadulterated state of being was also not new, but inherited by the white male intelligentsia from the same romanticist, transcendentalist ideology that spawned new theories of childrearing and child education, such as Kindergarten. White principally used two aesthetic tools to evoke this belief: soft-focus and nudity, which together evoke gentleness and innocence.

**The Precedent: Lewis Carroll**

When White used these Pictorialist devices, he placed himself within a tradition of numerous earlier influences. Perhaps the most famous and controversial was Charles Dodgson, alias Lewis Carroll.

Lewis Carroll’s socially allegorical fairy tales about his child model Alice Liddell—*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass*
(1871)—are seemingly immortal contributions to the Western canon of children’s literature. They were as influential to the discourse of childhood in Britain as Mark Twain’s characters Tom and Huck were in the United States. Carroll was also a highly accomplished amateur photographer, and children were his primary subject.

Contemporary viewers of photographed children squirm at the tactic of child nudity. This tactic began with Classical and religious allegories in Old Master painting and was adopted by British art photographers such as Carroll—though in Carroll’s case, children are only partially undressed—and Julia Margaret Cameron. It is tempting to perceive the use of child nudity—as have many Post-Modern feminist scholars—as a visual and perhaps even literal, pedophilic, violation of child models.\textsuperscript{281} The argument risks presuming an ahistorical twentieth-century bias.\textsuperscript{282} But the peculiarity of some of Carroll’s photographs of children cannot be wholly dismissed. Many of his images seem innocuous. Most are dreamy allegories of recumbent, costumed, sleeping children under stage lighting. Examples are Agnes Weld as Little Red Riding Hood (1857, albumen silver print, Private Collection), or St. George and the Dragon (1875, albumen silver print, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

\textsuperscript{281} One author, Lindsay Smith, in her book The Politics of Focus, even alleged that Carroll betrayed his own darker motives in how he posed his female prepubescent subjects, such as Liddell. Forcing the girls up against walls, at the endpoint of looming camera angles, often in fanciful attire chosen as though for a mindless doll, or instructing the girls to bare a shoulder or chest coquettishly—was figurative rape by the lens, which presumed a dominant male perspective.

\textsuperscript{282} Indeed, with exceptional vehemence, Douglas Nickel disclaims this argument, and many like it, as “postmodern distortions...a postmortem diagnosis that reduces [Carroll’s] biography to deviancy and his creative works to symptoms.” Nickel, Dreaming in Pictures: The Photography of Lewis Carroll: New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2002: 11. To be fair, the allegation of pedophilia is not entirely unconvincing given Carroll’s documented voyeurism of young female neighbors, the fact that his family had parts of his diary censored and destroyed after his death, and the fact that Carroll’s relationship with Alice’s family suffered a sudden unexplained falling-out around the time she turned eleven. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1087447/Was-Lewis-Carroll-paedophile-Discovery-cryptic-letter-raises-questions-authors-relationship-real-life-Alice.html As of 2008, a strange letter from Carroll to Liddell was auctioned off and seemed to directly address questions arising even in his time about his sexual preferences.
But even in these cases, Carroll’s children are strangely reticent and melancholic. Few meet the viewer’s gaze. Many show thinly-clothed or undressing children literally backed into a corner against a blank sackcloth setting, in costumes that they do not seem to enjoy wearing, such as Penitence (1874, albumen silver print, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles), and Xie Kitchin (1873, albumen silver print, Private Collection). Compared to the soft, sheltered works of Carroll’s colleague, Julia Margaret Cameron, these pictures do seem stark and menacing.

But it is not our purpose to speculate on the sexual deviancy of famous photographers. There is a more significant lesson in examining child nudity in art: why the device was so prevalent, and so accepted.

An argued reason is that during the nineteenth century, the notion of children as sex objects—indeed, as anything but innocent angels without adult complexities—was unfathomable. One should recall how this very assumption drove Henry James’s protagonist insane in The Turn of the Screw. Yet one wonders how unfathomable the concept of children being victimized as sex objects truly was. It is, obviously, known and documented that sexual child abuse did not originate during the twentieth century, but has tragically occurred throughout time. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was a common vice, so common that, despite the arguments of many academicians, this violation of childhood welfare could not truly be unfathomable to society as a whole. What was unfathomable was acknowledging that it happened. Denial was rampant in genteel discourse. Certainly, a number of adults possessed a guarded naivety regarding the sexual sanctity of children, but others possessed a highly developed skill of “looking
the other way.” Regardless, the outcome was the same: the inability to acknowledge children being objectified sexually.

In fact, the more naked a child was, paradoxically, the more innocent she was accepted to be by a nineteenth-century audience. It was as if her nudity boasted a transparent purity, a sinlessness; she had nothing shameful to hide. The infamous *Alice Liddell as the “Beggar Maid”* (1858, albumen silver print, Metropolitan Museum of Art), was and is so questionable because Alice is *not* fully nude. Instead she is clothed scantily, baring her shoulder, legs, and chest and boldly inviting the onlooker with a direct but hooded gaze. It is because she is in the act of concealing and revealing, and drawing attention to what is forbidden. Child nudity, on the other hand, was an unquestioned allowance.

Carroll’s successors would also continue to produce images of nude children uncontested. Indeed, American photographers who were disciples of Alfred Stieglitz believed in transforming all visual art into a personal, quasi-religious inner language. Childhood was no exception. The Pictorialists’ agenda therefore meshed perfectly with nineteenth-century accepted notions of children as emblems of immutable innocence.

**White and Child Nudity**

White’s use of nudity asserts that children in modern society are, and ought to be, safely cocooned. Two characteristic examples of White’s method are *The Bashful Child* (1899, platinum print, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), and *Nude with Baby* (1912, gum bichromate print, Library of Congress, Washington,
D.C.). In both cases a mother oversees a young child in a domestic interior in soft focus. In the former, a woman in a soft, inviting velvet gown beckons her shy white-clad child through a doorway; the image is poignant and surprisingly unpretentious, showing the familiar squirmings of youth before the scrutiny of unfamiliar adults.

*Nude with Baby* is especially evocative and demonstrates the emblematic qualities of undressed bodies. In it, a beautiful nude woman helps a naked child to stand gazing at the scenery outside their window, bathed in its glowing light.\(^{283}\) In this case, White uses child nudity, with very different connotations than during the twenty-first century, to delight in childhood’s purity.\(^{284}\) He also places the woman and child in nature. Nature represents the antithesis to culture, or civilization, which, in the belief of art photographers, obscures artistic vision. Thus White connects purity, children, artistic genius, and nature in one image.

**Child Nudity as a Subversive Device?**

Sometimes White’s photographs of naked children also illustrate mythological and historical subjects common to paintings. In order to do so, White seems to take advantage of the built-in connotation of children’s purity. In 1905, for instance, while vacationing in Maine with the family of American photographer and


\(^{284}\) Child nudity was an unquestioned photographic device of mid-century art photographers, such as Julia Margaret Cameron and Oscar Rejlander, in the depiction of religious and sentimental tableaux; White and colleagues continued this tradition. Many modern visual scholars have squeamishly grappled with this historical standard.
publisher F. Holland Day, White photographed *Pipes of Pan* (platinum print, waxed, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). It features two androgynous, naked child figures. On the left, an older child with longer bodily proportions perches on a rocky crag in a warm brownish haze, short hair tousled, gazing at the viewer with hand to cheek. In the lower right, a much smaller child, seemingly incandescent, perches on a smaller, lighter garden ornament under the bluff, crowned in leaves and playing a penny whistle meant to pass as the Greek deity’s pipes. Once again the alleged innocence of children permits White to photograph the human figure unclothed without moral penalty. Indeed, to photograph a Greek god explicitly associated with music, mischief, and promiscuity using an adult nude might have raised protest. After all the fact that such an image was a photograph, with its built-in “evidentiary” force, already had the potential to render its ideologically sensitive material too “real,” as did Day’s photographs of *Christ’s Seven Last Words*. Using a small child to pose as Pan with his flute bypassed such drawbacks with its equally implicit rhetoric of innocence.

**In the Tradition of Child Postmortem Portraits?**

White had three sons of his own but did not often photograph his own family. Perhaps this was due to the strain put on his marriage from moving so often to pursue his photographic career. However, he did often photograph the children of close friends.

Two years after he left the grocery business, which had been his mode of employment before he became a full-time photographer, White became friends with
Steven and Jean Reynolds. The friendship was a long-standing one that significantly swayed White’s social and political views (through the Reynolds, for instance, he became a Socialist), and White amassed abundant albums of the family engaged in numerous domestic activities.²⁸⁵

It was also through the Reynolds that White made some of the strangest, even haunting, images to modern eyes.²⁸⁶ The source of these images is both commonplace and tragic: post-mortem photography. The study of post-mortem imagery is ultimately different in thematic scope than the study of child imagery, but deserves momentary consideration.²⁸⁷

During the nineteenth century, the high infant mortality rate, coupled with innovations in mass media forms, prodded grieving parents to cope with the death of children in new ways. The death of young offspring was sadly commonplace; for instance, one recalls the numerous deaths of children in the families of painters William Merritt Chase and Abbott Handerson Thayer. The tradition of commemorating the deceased at the moment of death started with colonialist paintings of the 1770’s but reached its peak with the advent of photography.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ Steven Reynolds was a lawyer and campaign manager for Eugene Debs, a three-time candidate for the American Socialist Party race for United States president.
²⁸⁶ For instance, White’s misty brown print The Kiss (The Reynolds Sisters), 1904, depicts two slender teenage girls in a sedated haze, kissing in a tender and lingering manner. Despite the Victorian convention of kissing freely on the mouth, this image reads either as incestuous or as an extreme form of narcissism in which the women are meant to be doppelgangers.
²⁸⁸ For instance the work of Charles Willson Peale suggested that their intrinsic value was steadily increasing in the American colonies. Rachel Weeping, 1772-1776, is a painting of the artist’s wife mourning their daughter, a toddler dead of Scarlet Fever. Rachel hovers over the disturbingly tiny, pale, bedridden body, quietly crying. The child’s skin has a stomach-turning, corpseslike gray-yellow tinge—a truth to experience that is rare in this era. At the same time, the bereaved gazes at the ceiling—at the heavens. This comfortingly connotes that her daughter has found solace in a paradisiacal afterlife. Peale’s image of personal loss indicates a change in popular opinion with
Rhetoric of the time compared death explicitly to “merely sleeping,” as a form of both comfort and denial. Indeed, coffins or other indices of death rarely appeared in these images. Instead, flowers, drapery, and favorite playthings were depicted alongside the child. The normative, even beautiful, qualities of these photographs are what gave them their value in the eyes of nineteenth-century parents, and are what, simultaneously, disturb contemporary viewers.

White’s photograph Jean Reynolds with Her Daughter is part of a comprehensive album of the Reynolds family; it seems, whether consciously or otherwise, to evoke the child death portrait. In this image, as in many post-mortem photographs, the mother is lovingly present. The photograph is extremely blurry and seems to glow ethereally. Jean and her daughter Sarah both repose on a bed. Jean leans over Sarah tenderly caressing her while the child sleeps with what seems to be an unnatural stillness. Sarah is not dead, but White has clearly examined popular forms of media that tie death and childhood together with a common sense of sentimental preciosity.

**Peers Who Painted Children**

White was also a contemporary of many influential painters of the period, such as William Merritt Chase and John Singer Sargent. It is debatable to what extent he was a personal friend of such artists. In fact work that shows their strong regard to children; while fretting for the soul of a child, and mourning the loss of the young, originated in the Puritanical seventeenth century, even a baptized child who died among Puritans might be suspected of damnation, as an inheritor of original sin. But here, where a mother and father’s grief is unashamed, Peale proffers a gentler view of parental loss, one more in accord with budding notions of children’s inherent innocence.
influence demonstrates White’s early reliance upon magazine reproductions of famous art. However, it is significant that White chose contemporaneous painters as departure points for his own compositions involving children.

For instance, Chase’s ode to sheltered and pampered childhood, *Ring Toss*, has an almost exact mirror image in White’s photograph by the same title (gum bichromate print, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art). According to a letter of January 1907 from White to F. Holland Day, White appropriated Chase’s composition after seeing the painting reproduced in “a magazine.”

Less literal translations of Sargent and Chase also appear. There are two prominent episodes. The first is White’s photograph *Miss Grace* (1898, Museum of Modern Art, New York), a platinum print of an elegant fair-haired girl, dressed in white, reading. Grace, whose name is an apt title for the image, is seated on a beautiful wood-carved sofa. Like the Oriental rug beneath her long, limber legs, the sofa enlivens the composition with organic curves. Grace looks much like Sargent’s, Chase’s, and even Edgar Degas’s innumerable portraits of girls—young or grown—surrounded by and equated with cosmopolitan luxury. But, placidly absorbed in her book, she is far less strange and disagreeable than many of Sargent’s children. Therefore, though her plush environment recalls that of Sargent’s child sitter Marie-Louise Pailleron (1881), her attitude is closer to that of the sweetly intent, white-frocked pair in *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (1885-6) or even one of William Merrit Chase’s numerous portraits of his daughters. If White was looking actively at these
painters for compositional cues, his own work shined with the skills of selectivity and creative recombination.

A more direct echo of Sargent, and the unsettling mood that pervades his most famous works (“damned queer” paintings, as Robert Louis Stevenson put it) exists in White’s Untitled (Child Against a Wall), 1905. The work reads as if it is a small excerpt of Sargent’s Daughters of Edward Darley Boit, 1882. This child is closer in age and hairstyle to the youngest girl in the Sargent painting, Julia. But she is more the twin of the painting’s leftmost child, Mary Louisa, or “Isa.” This little girl shares Isa’s clasped hands and uncomfortable air of captivity, as well as her placement against a wall and near a lively patterned object (in the painting, a vase, and in the photograph, the wallpaper). The air of eerie obfuscation also permeates the photograph, in which darkness hides half the face and body of the little girl (who is indeed, today, recalled as “anonymous”). Just as in Sargent’s painting, the work is apparently a portrait, but defies portraiture’s conventions of flattery and recognition. Once again, White shows his facility in not directly transcribing Sargent’s work, but, rather, borrowing and rearranging particularly evocative elements of the Boit portrait.

The Visual Legacy: White as a Teacher

White was indeed an unsung pioneer of his craft, an advocate of American Pictorialism even before Stieglitz. For instance, in 1899, White organized an exhibition of major photographers in his hometown of Newark: this was acknowledged broadly by the photographic community, especially as he had already
obtained critical acclaim at the First Philadelphia Photographic Salon, 1898. He was also the founding president of the Pictorial Photographers of America, established 1917, and the Art Center that opened in 1921, in the Studio Building of the National Arts Club at 119 East 19th Street, New York, and became an indispensable artists’ network.

In 1907 White was invited by Arthur Wesley Dow, the mentor of Gertrude Käsebier, to join the faculty of the Teachers College, Columbia University. Like Beck, Dow popularized Orientalist aesthetics, championed the primacy of design over traditional plasticity and Renaissance perspective, and hoped for an overhaul in American art taste, which he perceived White could help provide.

White, described as “a gentle soul,” served the role of a pivotal teacher of the next generation of art and experimental photographers. At Columbia University and his own home-run school, White taught important twentieth-century documentarians such as Dorothea Lange and Margaret Bourke-White, and experimental modernists such as Alvin Langdon Coburn. The Clarence White School of Photography, which these future masters attended, opened in New York City in 1914. Notably, White has been characterized as a “bridge” between nineteenth-century Pictorialism—with its many affinities to arts and crafts and genteel painting—and the “younger generation of professionally oriented photographers” who arose in the twentieth.290

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What White’s Students Show Us

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It is important to acknowledge the extent of White’s impact on his pupils—because it is only through their often-famous work that White’s own social engagement is visible. Though these students worked in a later period, the lingering impact of White’s approach seems worth noting, including where children are concerned.291 These are important observations to make, because they remind us that images of children’s reform—indeed, images of any social issue—are not easily segregated into the categories of “social engagement” and “aesthetics.” There is often overlap; in fact the notion of child preciosity is precisely the driving factor

291 Judith Keller, *Dorothea Lange, Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum*, 2002: 10. Possibly the most critically acclaimed of White’s students who specifically went on to become social documentarians was Dorothea Lange. Art and photographic historians often call Lange one of the quintessential—if not the single-most iconic—photographers of American Depression-Era human hardship. Lange, a native of Hoboken, New Jersey, attended a Manhattan public school after her father abandoned her family. She later attended the New York Training School for Teachers. She encountered White while taking a photography course at Columbia University in 1917, moved to San Francisco, and married the artist Maynard Dixon, with whom she had two sons. She began a portrait photographer supporting the family, then followed her struggling husband’s illustration business to Chicago. By the 1930’s she gave up her portrait studio to freelance for photographic salons, submitting images of poor Americans living in the Western states of Arizona, California, and Utah. Most importantly, she joined the California State Emergency Relief Administration, where her work for the Farm Security Administration became famous in magazines such as *Survey Graphic* and as covers of books such as John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. By 1940 her PSA contract was terminated, but almost immediately Lange shot government photographs of Japanese-American women and children being relocated to American internment camps. Lange also photographed struggling children and families in Ireland, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Pakistan well into the 1950’s. A consistent trend in her work was a still, stoic empathy for the young and the disempowered. Her work has been called “compassionate documentary.” Lange’s single best-known work, *Migrant Mother/Human Erosion, Nipomo, California*, is a gelatin silver print completed March 1936. It is in fact an image of a young woman with an alarmingly weathered visage, flanked by two tired and despairing children who turn their faces away from the lens. The picture represents “truthful” stoicism and grit, while it simultaneously monumentalizes a real and ordinary woman named Florence Owens, 32, a pea-picker who led an itinerant lifestyle with her five hungry children. But while there are five other negatives of the Owens family, this particular single image was enough to jettison Florence into a decades-long celebrity status, rendering her an icon of the masses of suffering rural Americans, and indeed, an epochal metonym of poverty itself. This was accomplished by Lange’s capacity to be emotionally persuasive using women and children. Lange’s other shots of Owens and her children featured less selective and dramatic cropping, and permitted the faces of the children to be visible, reducing the dramatic and emblematic quality of the best-known negative. Lange’s most famous rendition of Owens and her children, which has been compared to the proletariat-heroizing of Millet, Daumier, and Kollowitz, seems to quote the tableau-like sentimentality in child imagery by Pictorialist photographers from the nineteenth-century. For instance, the child in Oscar Rejlander’s *Night in Town*, 1860 who squats bedraggled and barefoot over a doorstep, shielding his face from the viewer, could be a direct precedent to the poses of Owens’s two little boys. Lange’s mingling of startling reality and picturesque beauty is no accident.
behind both beautified images of pampered children, and heartrending images of children in need of social intervention. Indeed, that is what makes it so crucial to study both types of child imagery side by side. We study both White’s personal background and the work of his artistic descendants when we study his images of children; we learn that the lack of obvious socio-political statements does not suggest a lack of strong views about children’s rights and societal roles. This exercise should also make us mindful that White’s body of work was not an isolated incident.

**Gertrude Käsebier**

**Women and Art Photography**

Certainly, much has been made of the quandary of a “female perspective” in the work of artists whom Stieglitz endorsed. And the very notion of “The Feminine” has striking ties with an equally symbolic “Child.” Kathleen Pyne, for instance, has written that art by the Photo-Secessionists internalizes the “presence” of children as a Romantic schema. Stieglitz and colleagues are the symbolic children of a psychic “Maternal Origin,” or a “Woman-Child,” a muse who exists in primitive nature without societal pretensions; Stieglitz and colleagues seek to reunite with their “Mother” by making art, a creative act which bridges the gap between them.\(^{292}\) Pyne even sees an obfuscated female presence in the darker-toned photographs of the Photo-Secessionists and in the twilit landscapes of their favorite painters, such as Whistler. Certainly photographs, such as White’s nude mother and child gazing

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through a luminescent window into unadulterated nature, supports that the Photo-
Secessionists espoused such notions.

Pyne’s somewhat mystical interpretation is nonetheless further evidence
that art photographers unabashedly emblematized and aestheticized women and
children. They chose to overlook obvious social messages provided by individual,
living-and-breathing children, subjects who were too banal. However, individual
female artists under Stieglitz’s mentorship, such as Gertrude Käsebier, provide a
rich and slightly less abstract example of the “woman’s view” of childhood.

Art historians recount a troubled relationship between Alfred Stieglitz, the
Photo-Secession, and women within its circle, such as Käsebier. And more often
than not, the Photo-Secessionists rendered women and children two parts of the
same being; Stieglitz called his own most significant lover, Georgia O’Keeffe, “a
Great Child, a child of nature.”293 Stieglitz did, at times, make clear his support of
women artists; for instance, one-fourth of all Photo-Secessionists were women. At
the same time, it was important both to the movement and to its founder, that a
male/female dichotomy be upheld. Within such a duality, “‘woman is the more
primitive, the more intuitive, the more emotional’...women, like children and other
so-called primitive peoples, were fundamentally different from Western men: that
is, less rational, analytical, and objective...less cerebral, more intuitive.”294 As a
result, their work, both in style and subject matter, should be forever oppositional
to, and distinct from, that of male counterparts. It is obvious that Käsebier bore this
in mind, but in doing so, she put her own unique signature on the imagery of

293 Greenough, Modern Art and America, 51.
294 Greenough, Modern Art and America, 51.
childhood. Not only did she choose to frequently photograph children, the property, increasingly, of female caretakers—she also did so in a way that was emotionally insulated, both concealing and revealing her own ambivalence toward motherhood. Yet at other times, as would any real caretaker of the young, Käsebier portrayed children in a way that was sensitive to the psychological nuances of individual girls and boys.

**Background**

Whatever his stance on women in art, Alfred Stieglitz always supported the talented Gertrude Käsebier. As he recalled of the opening exhibit of 291, “When Gertrude Käsebier appeared, she said to me, ‘What is this Photo-Secession? Am I a Photo-Secessionist?’ My answer was, ‘Do you feel that you are?’ She said, ‘I do.’ ‘Well,’ I replied, ‘that is all there is to it.”’

Gertrude Käsebier studied painting at the Pratt Institute from 1889-1893, and 1894-1896, closely following the vanguard teachings of Arthur Wesley Dow. She then apprenticed under a German chemist as well as someone whom she called “Father Wenzel” who lived in her neighborhood. She visited the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago during her early career, where she saw the *Modern Woman* mural that had been painted by Mary Cassatt, which may explain why Käsebier’s photographs of children so often seem to be highly influenced by Cassatt’s paintings of the same subject. So determined was Käsebier to become a photographer that she constructed her own postgraduate courses at Pratt, which did not yet provide

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295 Norman, 8.
classes in the subject. Käsebier’s first photographs predate the invention of the Kodak hand camera. She was fond of using glass-plate negatives, a staple of art photographers in the decades preceding her active career. She broke officially into the world of art photography when two of her photographs were published in *The Quarterly Illustrator*, from whom she also earned a fifty-dollar prize. This achievement was significant because the objective was to capture “a figure in a Greek costume that combined artistic pose and accessories with excellent composition;” Käsebier did so specifically by appealing to the late nineteenth century photographic community’s preference for “mood over historicism,” as noted by Napoleon Sarony.296 This suggests that Käsebier was a vital part of the “fine art” photographic community, and that she was conscious of changing tastes.

Käsebier spent a year studying and traveling in Europe, beginning in Wiesbaden, Germany, and concluding in Crécy-en-Brie, a small village outside of Paris, France. She went to compose photographs in this region with a preconception that the natives would be “noble peasants” of the variety that she had seen in the Barbizon School paintings so popular among American artists abroad, particularly the paintings of Millet, at the end of the nineteenth century.297 She visited Paris to study briefly at the Académie Julian, and then returned to Germany to improve her photographic technique. Her grandmother, and her mother Gertrude Stanton, both strong and determined women who excelled at craftwork, inspired her to continue

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297 Later in life Käsebier was also to visit the studio of the French Photographer Robert Demachy, inventor of the gum bichromate process, a subtractive and painterly method of manipulating prints from which many of the dreamiest, haziest, and grainiest art photographs have been produced.
to improve when mentors of the type that Stieglitz and her other male peers took for

Indeed, Käsebier became a successful commercial portraitist of “the wives

and daughters of the East Coast elite” in an era in which women were forced to work

in darkrooms separate from men. Famous colleagues, such as F. Holland Day,

complained bitterly that women like Käsebier preyed deliberately on an amateur

profession because higher education was largely forbidden to their sex, and other

professions were inaccessible. These opportunists in skirts would surely “overly

feminize” and ruin amateur photography. These opinions did little to detract

Käsebier, who ended up winning Day’s favor. She opened her first studio on East

Thirtieth Street off Fifth Avenue in 1897, having already won the acclaim of the

Boston Camera Club, Philadelphia Photographic Society, and Boston Arts and Crafts

Society. She enjoyed the distinction—indeed, the highest Pictorialist goal—of a

work being called “high art” when the American art historian and author, Charles

Caffin, featured her photograph in his textbook Photography as a Fine Art. The work

shown was Head of a Boy (1897, photogravure, Museum of Modern Art, New York).

Time and time again, Käsebier is presented as merely a female analogue to Clarence

White, but she did not visit his studio until 1902, and although he told Alfred

Stieglitz that he and Käsebier collaborated on a famous photograph of a nude

woman spreading arms raveled in a black veil, titled The Bat (1902-04, platinum

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298 Michaels, 24-25.
300 Pyne, Modernism and the Feminine Voice, 20.
print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), Käsebier insisted on signing the work strictly as her own. She was an artist in her own right.

Käsebier’s major breakout shows were the Philadelphia Salons of 1899 and 1900. Serving as a juror in both shows, Käsebier wisely took advantage of the Salon’s rule that jurors could show ten works without going through any hurdles. In both of these shows, the star piece was a photograph by Käsebier—in 1899, it was The Manger, and in 1900, it was Blessed Art Thou Among Women, completed one year prior. What is remarkable about this is that both pieces were, yet again, sanctified images of women and children—one an overtly religious tableau of the birth of Christ, and the other a secular apotheosis of modern Madonnas, ordinary human mothers, such as Käsebier’s friend Agnes, who become saints simply by virtue of their maternal duties.

Like White, Käsebier was a prominent member of the Photo-Secession, but also defected when Stieglitz refused to pay for works of hers that were sold at a Photo-Secession exhibition. Most of her images used White’s work as a departure point, but with a distinctly female perspective. Käsebier’s children and grandchildren frequently modeled for her photographs.301 Perhaps because of both her more authentic vantage point, and superior photographic skills, Käsebier better caught something “straightforward” about her child models, “for example, the way a wide-eyed boy bites his lip and a girl in her velvet costume playacts as a serious adult.”302 In this way, she renders sanctity of motherhood timeless, but also exposes

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301 Her models were daughters Gertrude and Hermine, and her grandchildren, especially her grandson Charles.
302 Pyne, 21.
traits relevant to childhood in her era. In fact, with the exception of a brief photographic exploration of Buffalo Bill’s Sioux friends (including a little boy named Wild Spotted Horse) in 1901, images of her Pictorialist friends, and celebrity portraits taken in her commercial studio in New York, Käsebier’s oeuvre was almost exclusively comprised of women and children.

Images That Conceal Childhood Suffering

In the brown platinum print Adoration/The Vision (1897, gum bichromate print, Museum of Modern Art, New York), a mother in flowing attire supports her nude child, who stands and gazes upward. The entire composition is fuzzy, velvety, employing the tactics of nudity and soft-focus that Clarence White explored so thoroughly. The child’s features are perfectly regular, cheeks round and rosy. The crossing of the pale laces and even paler gown worn by the mother visually emphasizes her exultant gesture of raising the infant to a standing position. However, a closer look reveals something less than the paradisiacal, but unintentionally: the “Christ child” bursting nakedly out of the satins and crinolines pushes emphatically against the mother’s arm, trying to get away. The child’s upward-gaze, obviously intended to recall a rather standard rhapsodic episode commonly seen in religious paintings, is actually the wriggling of a real-life child who has come to the brink of exasperated fussiness. His frustration seems invisible to Käsebier as she tries to assert that motherhood and childhood are secularly sacred states of human existence—that a happy child is evidence of crucial domestic duties fulfilled; at the end of the nineteenth century, the amusing disjunctions that a
modern viewer perceives were basically invisible next to the rhetorical power of the “pure and innocent child” trope. Indeed, while Käsebier was miserable in her marriage and believed that childrearing often carried hefty emotional strain, no such tension is visible in this highly idealized portrait of a real woman and child posing as the Virgin and Christ. This is significant because it suggests that even Käsebier sometimes suppressed select details in order to support her artistic movement’s sanitized view of childhood.

Indeed, Käsebier’s photographs of living mothers and children often mask motherhood’s strains. Her award-winning Blessed Art Thou Among Women (1899-1900, platinum print, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art), depicts a mother, Agnes Rand Lee, bending over her well dressed, rigidly posed young daughter, Peggy, and presenting her tenderly to the camera. Agnes looks like an attenuated, elegant beauty straight out of a Pre-Raphaelite painting; dressed in a fluid white gown, she drapes her arm across Peggy’s shoulders. Peggy stands squarely at the center of the vertical composition. With her crisply cropped hair, bows and buckles, and the stiff curling of her fingers at her sides, she resembles a devout little pilgrim; her frontality and symmetry also recall an untouchable Renaissance icon. The religious connotation is reinforced by a print on the wall behind mother and daughter that depicts the Annunciation: the Biblical event in which an angel graces the Virgin Mary with the news of her immaculate conception. Interestingly, according to Barbara Michaels, Käsebier professed that her greatest

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interest in photographing Peggy and Agnes was to successfully capture the formal appearance of “white on white,” and for no other reason.304

Despite her seeming imperviousness, Peggy suffered from diabetes and died a year after the photograph was taken. The image, therefore, successfully obscures the reality that childhood is susceptible to suffering and tragedy. Furthermore, its companion, The Heritage of Motherhood (gum bichromate print, George Eastman House, New York) printed 1916 but photographed 1904, portrays the quietly agonized, bereaved Agnes, suggesting that her only treasure in life has been lost—indeed, that a childless mother leads an empty existence. However, this portrayal is done carefully, under an allegorizing title, and without signifiers of Agnes’s individual identity. Also like an icon, Agnes is an enigmatic, removed figure, further distanced from the viewer by her fuzzy image. She is anonymous and transcendental; so, too, are the concepts of childhood and motherhood. Significantly, it was this work, Adoration, and The Manger, all images of “the feminine as whiteness, the selfless maternal figure whose physical body is ambivalently rendered,” which attracted Stieglitz’s accolades and earned Käsebier exposure in his publications, Camera Notes and Camera Work.305 This suggests that, if Käsebier had to repress the grisly truths of childhood, it was because she had to appeal to her most powerful ally’s outlook, which, in keeping with art photography and the broader genteel tradition, tended to subordinate a more complex portrayal of childhood in favor of something that was ornately idealized.

304 Michaels, 61.
305 Pyne, Modernism and the Feminine Voice, 23.
Images of Ordinary Child Activities

Tellingly, Käsebier is less well known for images that depict ordinary children engaged in ordinary activities. But she did make numerous images of this sort. The fact that her professed studio technique included hiding her camera behind a screen until her subject behaved in a more natural and relaxed manner suggests that it was important to Käsebier to capture something candid in child sitters whenever able. Even in these cases, however, there is a positive reference to motherhood, in the present or the future, and its import to children. And though the children depicted behave casually and comfortably, the formal mode with which Käsebier presents them remains soft and dreamy.

Käsebier’s platinum print *Dorothy Trimble Tiffany (Burlingham)*, 1899 (Private Collection), quite simply portrays a little girl in a frilled white gown perched sideways on a white chair, holding a small infant in her arms in a way that makes it easy to mistake the baby as a favorite doll. Her hair is tidily cropped and dark, her eyes bright and alert, her smile plucky, as she clearly relishes pretending to be a mother. The image is especially poignant considering that directly outside Käsebier’s studio, in the streets of New York and other large cities—not to mention in rural regions—little girls in poor families often actually had to play the role of a “little mother,” minding their younger siblings, while their parents worked long hours to support them in the growing number of factories and sweatshops. Interestingly, it is not implausible that Käsebier would know about this sort of social ill befalling less fortunate children. In March 1901, she was connected enough to socially activist circles to photograph the pioneer of all American social
documentary, a police photographer and close friend of activist politician Theodore Roosevelt: Jacob Riis. Riis wrote many essays during the 1880’s indicting wealthy Americans for, among other offenses, permitting “Little Mothers” to bear the burden of adult childrearing. However, Käsebier’s contribution to this discourse, at least initially, was characteristic of an art photographer. It was a celebration of the happy situation enjoyed by well-loved, pampered youngsters: a positive and glossy statement about the way children should be treated, rather than an exposee of how underprivileged children were abused.

In 1903, Käsebier photographed the gum bichromate print Happy Days (gum bichromate print, Museum of Modern Art, New York). This image, rich in gray tonalities and speckled with just enough film grain to give it an otherworldly haze, depicts Käsebier’s grandson, in overalls, handing a bonneted girl standing in shadow a flower. He scowls, intent on his “courtship,” while they are flanked by another girl and a woman in white, both also holding wildflowers. Despite the title, ironically, no one in the composition is smiling, and the girl in the upper right even cringes at the brightness of the sun in her face. But the image still conveys a sweetness that evades the trap of looking posed and sentimental. In fact, the most compelling quality is the seeming spontaneity of the little boy’s giving gesture.

Perhaps the most intriguing of these images is Käsebier’s platinum print Lolly Pops (1910, gelatin silver print, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York). The two little girls in the image are Käsebier’s granddaughters. She has just bestowed the titular sweets on the children. Their mother watches them from a partially shaded doorway, holding a food dish. The white of the doorway leads the eye to the
stairwell and the light that tumbles down on the two youngsters. One wearing a
hair bow, the other sporting bangs, they both captivate the viewer because of the
enchanted, engrossed expressions on their faces. Their believable delight in simple
pleasures, a trait thought universal to children in this era, is the focus of the image.
It is a remarkable contrast to the emblematizing stoicism of *Blessed Art Thou Among
Women*, photographed almost exactly a decade earlier.

**Peers Who Painted Children**

Like the other Pictorialists, Käsebier is often credited with taking inspiration
from contemporaneous painters; indeed, William Merritt Chase praised Käsebier’s
works: “[they are] as fine as anything that VanDyck has ever done.”306 The typical,
and most obvious, comparison is to Mary Cassatt. The comparison is almost
uncontestable, as Käsebier would have seen an exhibition of Cassatt’s etchings of
mothers and children at the Durand-Rouel Gallery in New York in 1895, and
“internalized” Cassatt’s array of poses, in addition to later seeing Cassatt’s *Modern
Woman* mural. Kathleen Pyne suggests that Cassatt is responsible for Käsebier’s
outstanding focus on faces and hands as keys to emotional expression, a device later
adopted by Stieglitz in photographing his daughter Kitty, as well as “portraits” of
Georgia O’Keeffe’s hands. Stieglitz, White, and Käsebier seem to have absorbed the
“whiteness” of childhood (both in literal terms, clothing children in white, and in
figurative terms of moral purity) from Cassatt—though one might argue that J.A.M.

306 Michaels, 49.
Whistler's *Girl in White*, 1861, a portrait of “whiteness” awakening to womanhood, also had some influence upon the photographers.

There are other possible ties to contemporaneous painters. For instance, an early Käsebier silver print of the photographer’s daughter bears striking visual ties to a series of Winslow Homer watercolors produced in upstate New York in the early 1870’s; it is titled *In Grandpa’s Orchard (Hermine on a Rail Fence)*, 1893 (platinum print, Private Collection). In this image, long haired, blonde Hermine wears a plaid dress and gazes at the ground while perching on the highest rungs of a fence roughly fashioned from raw tree branches. She sits in bright sunlight, her gaze fixed on a straw hat that has fallen among rocks on the ground, out of which a bundle of apples tumbles. Dense, low-hanging trees dappled in strong contrasts of dark and light flank Hermine, and in the far distance a sunny open field appears. The horizon line provided by the field, the presence of a pensive-faced child in the middle of an agricultural activity, the crisp details mostly carved out of light and shadow, and the girl’s dress are all reminiscent of Homer’s watercolors such as *Feeding Time*, 1878. The common tie may be to the painter Robert Henri, who avowedly idolized Winslow Homer and often spoke of his influence on his work.

Käsebier knew and photographed Henri for the purpose of Henri’s artistic publicity. Or, as with Stieglitz, the common tie may be to Käsebier and Homer’s mutual love of the French Barbizon School and its lionizing Realist portrayal of “noble peasants” in vague, loosely rendered, and pastoral rural landscapes.

Finally, Barbara Michaels compares Käsebier’s work to that of French Symbolist painter Eugene Carrière. She states that the two artists shared “concerns”
such as “a tonal description of the world” and the experiences of motherhood, but she quickly qualifies that Käsebier portrayed the awakened autonomy of children—their ability and desire to strike out and know the world better on their own—more emphatically. This segues into our final observation about Käsebier’s images of children.

**Käsebier and Vanguard Child Reform**

Upon first glance, Gertrude Käsebier’s foggy dreamscapes of secular Madonnas and little girls enjoying lollipops certainly does not seem like terribly ardent social commentary. But her work deserves a closer inspection. Käsebier not only photographed the social activist photographer Jacob Riis, she also photographed the painter Robert Henri. Both men were passionate advocates of the Progressive Party, which was the root of almost all social reform measures at the turn of the twentieth century. Henri’s ties to Progressive thinkers, political figures, and authors was extensive. Most notably, he was a friend of the anarchist Emma Goldman, whose Modern School of New York (also called the Ferrer School) offered children some of the first free primary education classes in the country; Henri was an instructor at this school for several years. He also voraciously read *The School and Society*, written by the Progressive philosopher, pedagogue, and Kindergarten advocate John Dewey. That Käsebier moved in such social and artistic circles is important and revelatory.

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307 Michaels, 76.
Still more significantly, Käsebier’s ties to the Pratt Institute and Arthur Wesley Dow were strong and lifelong influences. Dow supported Clarence White’s attempts to marry the Arts and Crafts Movement to Socialism—whose measures on behalf of child laborers (such as in the fiery diatribes of John Spargo) were legendary. Dow was a forward-thinker who enjoyed marrying modernist personal aesthetics to progressive public welfare. His attitude was one commonly shared by Pratt Institute instructors—as the Pratt hosted an extensive Kindergarten program. Käsebier knew of the classes aimed at teaching young women to obtain degrees as Kindergarten instructors. These many intersecting influences clearly do appear in her photographs.

For instance, *The Picture-Book (Beatrice Baxter Ruyl and Charles O’Malley)*, a gum bichromate print completed in 1903 (Museum of Modern Art, New York), depicts a famous children’s book illustrator seated under a tree with Käsebier’s grandson (the same boy central to the *Happy Days* composition). Beatrice leans gently over Charles’s lap and places her hand on the page of a book that he is trying to read. At the same time, Charles points a long thin object, either a twig or a pencil, at the same place as Beatrice’s index finger. Together in the shade in front of a glimmering lawn, the woman and child employ teamwork to help the child master a new cognitive skill. A core tenet of Kindergarten was a child’s road to self-mastery. One will recall that it was insufficient to force a child to memorize dissociated facts from a textbook, particularly during an age that was pre-linguistic. Learning had to be “hands-on,” with an adult’s hand. That adult should facilitate, not instruct, and the child should believe that he had arrived at what he had learned on his own. This
was precisely why most educators of the time believed that women, “gentle” and “caring” by nature, should be Kindergarten instructors. This photograph is almost an advertisement of the free, unthreatening, and nurturing reward that enlightened, and sometimes elite, circles prescribed for children.

In 1912, Käsebier photographed the platinum print *Wharf Rats* (gelatin on glass negative, George Eastman House, New York), which depicts her grandchildren in a Newfoundland harbor, their backs to the viewer as they discuss something animatedly. The scenery before the children is a cluster of seaside shanties. But the image addresses a topic that had become both popular and controversial artistically and socially by the 1900’s. It is startling to see a Pictorialist attempting to portray this particular topic. Wharf, dock, or river rats, were impoverished children, almost always of ethnic minorities or immigrant populations, who publicly bathed in the filthy harbors of major Western cities. What is significant about Käsebier photographing a softer version of this subject is that Robert Henri’s close friend, the younger painter George Bellows, infamously painted the subject in a New York setting on three separate occasion. Like Henri, Bellows was a Progressive.

Like the Impressionist Mary Cassatt before her, Käsebier seemed able to break into a cutting-edge, male-dominated artistic society, that of the Pictorialists, by being formally transgressive, but conceptually conventional. Her style was in the fore of psychologically brooding imagery that subordinated historical quotation to personal rumination, a quality that Alfred Stieglitz and other leading art photographers fanatically praised. But everything that she made that won the most critical acclaim featured the domestic, traditionally feminine subject of women and
children. Interestingly, it is not only women of the genteel tradition who employed this method; we will recall that John Singer Sargent first toyed with plein-air painting in the artistically conservative environment of the British Royal Academy by using the “safe” subject of children playing in gardens. With this compelling mixture of mundanity and the divine, subversion and conformism, Käsebier poignantly portrayed an array of mothers and children. She paid homage to both with the reverence typical of nineteenth-century gentility, demonstrating a keen affinity with progressive childrearing and child education.

**Conclusions**

There are limitless philosophical commonalities between those who epitomized “art for art’s sake” and those whose art made a social stir. Such commonalities are often under-represented, possibly by art historians hoping to reinforce the vigorous binary between the two groups. But in the end, the views that these makers of childhood imagery shared are extremely illuminating. Far from antithetical, they shared a belief of what childhood ideally should be—the sanctified, white cocoon of innocence and social privilege, the chosen subject of the art photographers—and what it often, jarringly, was—the dirty, sometimes humorous, sometimes tragic, sometimes shockingly indecorous childhood of all classes, as portrayed by documentary photographers (soberly) and the Ashcan School (as reportorial observation or farce). It makes sense to next turn to this body of artists and photographers, and to the dawning twentieth-century rhetoric of secular, government-institutionalized social activism that shaped them.
UNIT THREE: SOCIAL REFORM
CHAPTER V

TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHILDREN’S SOCIAL REFORM

“Confronting so many difficulties in changing adult behavior and transforming established social groups, reformers naturally found childhood an inviting target. Certainly young people should be more malleable than their elders... Reformers saw danger as well as opportunity in the young; they were disturbed by just how far childhood in America diverged from the middle-class ideal... particularly... rural and working-class children taken prematurely out of school and put to work.” ~from A Fierce Discontent by Michael McGerr, p. 107.

As the twentieth century arrived, pedagogical reform for children continued to make strides and to influence visual culture, just as it had for genre and genteel painters and photographers. However, for the first time, the correlation between child advocacy and child imagery was explicit and political in charge—to the point of propagandizing the issue.

For instance, the emergence of the twentieth-century pedagogical reform movement, and of its inextricable partner, child labor reform, is closely associated with the rise of the new visual tradition of documentary photography. Both of these reform movements for children were part of a still larger social movement that dominated the early twentieth century: the Progressive Movement. The “Progressive Era” which furbished this movement is conventionally dated 1890-1913. Some historians alternately date the “death” of the Progressive Movement to 1920, and to World War One in general. Progressives exacted a decisive shift on the American cultural climate. It is important to understand their motives and methods before we analyze the images of children that began to reflect this shift.

Demographics
The Progressive Movement was a response to two major social changes that arose in the mid-nineteenth-century. One was the influx of foreign-born Americans. Not only did immigrants arrive in unprecedented numbers, they also arrived from different locations than during the early nineteenth century, bringing with them customs that raised Anglo-middle-class eyebrows. Once German and Irish, and relatively easy to assimilate, immigrants were now Eastern Europeans (often Jewish), and Southern Europeans (usually Italian Catholics). For instance, compared to the immigrants who arrived in America 1851-1860, total populations from Germany dropped from 951,667 to 505,152, and Irish populations dropped from 914,119 to 399,179, during 1891-1900. Conversely, Italian populations rose from 9,231 to 651,899, and Russian and Polish populations skyrocketed from 1,621 to 602,101.

Immigrants coped with their exodus from their homelands by re-establishing miniature versions of their original cultures. They buffered themselves against the alien customs of Americans by forming severely pigeonholed neighborhoods ("ghettos" and "Little Italys") which did not overlap with each other, or, if they did, overlapped with violent consequences. The manner in which these new sorts of immigrants clung to Old-World ways and refused to participate in American mainstream culture bewildered and frightened Progressives, particularly with respect to the children of immigrants. These children, usually poor slum-dwellers, represented a future generation of American citizens that might supplant the

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309 U.S. Census, 1900.
current status quo. This was especially true considering the children of the poor were forced to neglect their schooling in favor of work and wages, not bothering to learn English, perpetuating foreign customs and remaining gridlocked in low-end jobs.

The other change that precipitated Progressive social reform was the rapid population boom, particularly in cities. For instance, in New York State, whose total population as of 1900 was slightly over seven million people, five million of these people lived in urban centers. This becomes especially staggering comparing New York City’s total population in 1900, almost 3.5 million, to its population a mere decade earlier: 1.5 million—with little over 500,000 in 1850, and not even 100,00 in 1800.\(^{310}\)

The population boom was largely caused by the upsurge in immigrants. In 1890 to 1900 alone, the 1900 Census reports an increase of 1,151,981 immigrants, a 12.4% total increase. 329,375 of these were in New York, 189,187 in Massachusetts, 124,408 in Illinois, and 139,530 in Pennsylvania—all states with major cities as of 1900. This is compared to Midwestern states such as Wisconsin, with 3,228 immigrants, and states in the Deep South such as Alabama, with only 185 immigrants, Mississippi, with 29, and Arkansas, with a mere 25. \(^{311}\)

In fact, while, for instance, the Mississippi ratio of native and foreign-born populations in 1900 was 99.5% to a mere 0.5%, in New York this ratio was a considerable 73.9 % to 26.1%.\(^{312}\) These trends marked the late nineteenth and

\(^{310}\) U.S. Census, 1900.  
\(^{311}\) U.S. Census, 1900.  
\(^{312}\) U.S. Census, 1900.
early twentieth centuries as the first major American urban age. Progressives took serious note of urban centers and the problems that were unique to urban growth, particularly since cities were the greatest concentration point of the foreign-born.

**Forerunners: “Deserving Poor” and the Mystique of Capitalist Self-Reliance**

There were many nineteenth-century precedents to the Progressive Movement. The first institution formed on behalf of children in the United States was Protestant minister Charles Loring Brace’s Children’s Aid Society, founded 1851. Children under Brace’s auspices were removed from the city to live and work at farms in upstate New York, the Midwest, or the West. Agricultural labor was rarely viewed with the same moral condemnation as urban labor, despite both being potentially exploitive.

But Brace’s attitude toward those whom he afforded salvation was mixed. He was a man of the mid-nineteenth-century and its tendency to still fix blame for wretched circumstances upon the victim’s own failure to comply to a Protestant Christian moral code. He habitually derided street kids, “ready for any offense or crime, however degraded,” as “youthful ruffians...ignorant, untrained, passionate, irreligious boys.” His picture of underprivileged youth has been rightly described as “judgmental,” and even Brace anxiously defended his reformatory methods in a tone that was “defensive.”

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One who believed in pitying the poor, but also in setting them apart as an entire “class” of ethnic criminals, Brace was an early prototype for Progressive reformers, who made many strides in his wake. Brace’s half-reluctant type of children’s social reformers clearly represents middle and late nineteenth century values. It was inextricably bound up in the problem of the unequal distribution of wealth, and the ideas that arose to explain and rationalize it.

In Mark Twain’s “Gilded Age,” during which slums and the mansions of the “Upper Ten” dwelt side by side, never was society more polarized, and in need of unification through reform. Leading intellectuals of economic history, such as Yale professor William Graham Sumner, decried social reform efforts to rectify this issue. In a voice of ruthless pragmatism, Sumner argued that to rob wealth from one sect of American society was to only redistribute that wealth unequally to another. Furthermore, he claimed that greed was an inherent human survivalist impulse, and the Socialist and anarchist dream of proletarian equality, rising in influence in the late nineteenth century, was a sham.314

Though Sumner and colleagues bemoaned the state of American society, they also acknowledged it to be a natural development in the social narrative. In fact, the level of social inequality in this period was staggering. For instance, because he owned 58% of the stock in his own company, Andrew Carnegie’s income in the year 1900 was over 23 million dollars, and he had to pay no income taxes—while in the

314 Sumner’s actual words were, “The yearning after equality is the offspring of envy and covetousness, and there is no possible plan for satisfying the yearning which can do aught else than rob A to give to B; consequently all such plans nourish some of the meanest vices of human nature, waste capital, and overthrow civilization.” Sumner quoted in Frederick Lewis Allen, The Big Change. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1952: 67, originally from Sumner’s What Social Classes Owe to Each Other, 1883.
major cities, the slums continued to crowd with immigrants and the jobless.\textsuperscript{315} But it would be the early twentieth century—roughly 1901, when Progressive Party former Theodore Roosevelt entered the White House—before any significant organized movement would address this problem.

The author and social critic on whom all other writers of underprivileged child protagonists based their work was Charles Dickens. An Englishman who was popular in American circles and visited the United States twice, Dickens wrote actively between the years 1836 and his death in 1870. His weekly journals and his books began to complicate the idea of rich and poor relations, and the fate of underprivileged children. His novels critiqued social institutions and insisted that the status quo was not only insufficient, but criminal, in both the legal and “moral” (Christian) sense. His gothic stories of the organized underworld are often rampant with child lawbreakers, and every page asserts that ignorance and poverty—or, sometimes, greed—give rise to the most deplorable of human behaviors, regardless of the person or his level of wealth. The rich and poor often find that they bear uncomfortable connections to one another, and are not so very different. It is also frequently implied that so-called “charities” are as perverse and cruel as the forces from which they seemingly protect children.

Want of money drives it all. For money, Pip in \textit{Great Expectations} (1861) subjects himself as psychological toy and suitor to the lovelorn aristocrat Miss Havisham and her protégé Estella. He seeks to deserve Estella as an upwardly-

\textsuperscript{315} Allen, 27. For a contemporary idea of this vast wealth gap, I have consulted the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. The inflation calculator computes that $23,000,000 in 1913 would, in 2013, roughly equal $533,400,000. See http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation-calculator.htm.
mobile entrepreneur, but learns that he had the means to do so only because his anonymous benefactor was Estella’s father, a poor murder convict whom, as a child, Pip helped escape prison. In another instance, Oliver Twist (1838), Oliver finds the harsh severity of an orphanage less tolerable than a gang of guttersnipes and pickpockets headed by an impoverished youth, the “Artful Dodger” and his patriarch, the tramp Fagin. In Nicholas Nickleby (1838-9), Nicholas orchestrates a rebellion at a so-called Christian reformatory for orphans that is operated with staggering cruelty by its greedy headmasters. There are many other examples. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” indeed.

To Dickens, the poor may be lazy and wicked, or they may be honest and hard-working, but the victims of indolence and deceit by others. This latter type, the “Deserving Poor,” was a stock fixture of late nineteenth century culture. The notion of the “Deserving Poor,” a cultural schema of which Dickens’s work is evidence, fueled social reform efforts at the close of the century, and was the closest prototype to Progressive reformism at the dawn of the next. Still, Progressive reformism was very much its own entity, and in many ways unprecedented.

Another representative figure of this milieu is Horatio Alger, an author of trite but phenomenally popular “success stories for boys.” Alger had been an orphan in New York City himself at age fifteen and lived in a Newsboys Lodging House. But despite his youthful poverty and his later success, he was never as poor nor as rich as were his fictional protagonists, appearing in Tom the Bootblack, Bound to Rise, and Luck and Pluck.
The unremitting message of Alger’s stories steadfastly echoes founding father Benjamin Franklin’s credo “God helps them that help themselves.” Laissez-faire Capitalists and real-life rags-to-riches entrepreneurs such as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, William Rockefeller, James Stillman, and H.H. Rogers, as well as more blue-blooded titans such as J.P. Morgan, revived the defense laid down by Franklin in order to justify the rampant class gap that heightened tensions between the rich and poor—including exploited children.

Essentially, to Brace, Alger, and the men whom Alger depicted in juvenile form, poverty comes about by foolishness and lack of initiative. Any man who works hard and saves his profits (through “happiness, diligence, perseverance, and thrift”) can become fantastically wealthy. It does not matter to these “self-made” men that the indifference and excess of the rich have trapped these boys in their state of destitution. It also does not matter that, more often than not, none of these storybook boys could have realistically achieved such phenomenal fortunes without the extensive counsel and support of educated, well-to-do adults: a resource not often available to real-life impoverished children.

Readers rarely looked closely at the logical fallacies and logistical caveats of these children’s success stories. For instance Alger’s contemporary, writer Frances Hodgson Burnett, an English immigrant, probably read his Ragged Dick stories (in Little Lord Fauntleroy, Cedric’s best friend is a bootblack named Dick). Burnett usually created child protagonists possessing all the honesty, kindness, and industriousness that Alger lauded. However, Burnett’s characters such as Cedric of

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316 In 1952, Frederick Lewis Allen pointed out this fact, in his classic text of social and economic history, The Big Change.
Little Lord Fauntleroy and Sarah of A Little Princess, victims of unexpected poverty who are abruptly robbed of their sole living parent, must always rely on salvation afforded by a rich male benefactor.317

These children are already aristocrats, so their recovered wealth is only a restoration to the status quo. Further, when their servants are also given sudden sums of money for being “good children”—such as Cedric’s friends Dick, the bootblack, and Tom, the grocer, and Sarah’s friend Becky, the maid—they put their money away and are content to remain servants. For anyone who was poor and subservient, no real positive change has taken place, or if it has, it was due to the friendship of someone who was already in a position of power and wealth. It goes without saying that, no matter how kind and friendly the child, this was rarely the auspicious end for genuine American street kids.

Alger died in 1899, which was rather poetic timing considering that his view of poverty became passé in moderate and liberal circles by the twentieth century. What is fascinating, however, is the fact that in the early twenty-first century, which evinces the widest class gap since the Gilded Age, the Algerian street boy’s rose-tinted defense of the ultra-rich is again in fashion for certain segments of American society. So is the associated implication that government aid only enables the poor, who are “lazy and parasitic.” The argument is as strained as it was in the nineteenth century, but still, paradoxically, just as appealing, just as “magnificently valid,” to those who stand on the advantageous side of what it asserts.318

317 This observation arose from my email correspondence with Dr. Mark Bernheim, a Professor of Literature at Miami University of Ohio, Oxford Campus, in the summer of 2011.
318 Allen, 64.
Defining Progressives

“Progressivism,” Michael McGerr writes,

“the creed of a crusading middle-class, offered the promise of utopianism—and
generated the inevitable letdown of unrealistic expectations....the control of big
business, the amelioration of poverty...the transformation of gender relations, the
regeneration of the home, the disciplining of leisure and pleasure...to use the
state...to transform other Americans, to remake the nation’s feuding, polygot
population into their own middle-class image.”319

The Progressive Movement’s roots lay in European, particularly German,
social reform. The Progressives were middle-class Anglo-Saxon Protestant men and
women often educated in the nation’s new universities. Their elite backgrounds
brought a faith in the rational—for instance, as of 1893, the Child Study Association
began to apply social scientific research methods to the study of child development.
Progressives placed their faith in the capacity of the social sciences to systematically
predict and prevent social ill at its source.

Yet these same Progressives were often also disconnected from the lives of
those whom they chose to help. Their paradoxical combination of middle-class
culture and vanguard ideals has earned them the title “the Radical Center.” 320

The Radical Center responded anxiously to the urbanization and
industrialization that changed the character of the United States permanently after

320 McGerr, 40.
1865. Two new social problems resulted. The first was the proliferation of overcrowded and unsanitary tenements. The second was a dangerous and unregulated factory system with no compensation for injury or death on the job and no limitation on work hours. Ethnic and racial tensions escalated in an already strained atmosphere. The middle class strove with especial vigor to solve these crises.

This is not to characterize every wealthy individual in the early twentieth century as a greedy industrialist who shirked social obligation. For instance, the art patron and railroad magnate Henry Clay Frick marched alongside suffragettes, when feminism and children’s rights were closely intertwined. Furthermore, Frick’s associate, the steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, often urged upper-class “plutocrats” to donate money to philanthropic causes. By and large, however, Progressive social crusaders belonged to the class so often scorned by more radical sects.

Progressives achieved victories of mixed implications: the outlawing of alcohol, the closing of vice districts, the policing of cruelty to animals, the woman’s right to vote, expanding income tax, and ending railroad monopolies. They also persistently waged social war on behalf of exploited children. For instance, as of 1904, the United States Census Report of Benevolent Institutions cites 60 public and 88 private day nurseries—separate from the traditional ecclesiastical institutions—in New York alone, as well as 18,171 children admitted to orphanages and children’s homes.321 The Progressives’ driving motivation, in a time of unprecedented city

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321 United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, S.N.D. North, Director: *Benevolent Institutions, 1904*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1905. It should be noted that it is difficult to compare this number to statistics drawn only a few years later. For instance, the 1910
growth, was a fearful vision of a future America controlled by unreformed—that is, unschooled and foreign-born—juveniles. Their anxieties over the urban poor perpetuated the traditional social reform focus on urban crises, whereas abuse of children in rural regions continued largely unchallenged.

As middle-classers, Progressives sought to bring the poor up, and the rich down, to their level. Progressives established the foundations for social segregation. Their quest to homogenize society correlates strongly with the two predominant views of childrearing that surfaced in nineteenth-century children’s literature: the need to coddle and the need to discipline. The dichotomy constructed by Progressive reformers is clear and in both cases, as Patten’s quote indicates, the source of concern is that children cease to be children prematurely. As the economist and business professor Simon Patten put it, Progressives believed that children needed “the enormous advantage of a prolonged childhood.”

Firstly, Progressives felt that poor children lost their innocence when robbed of schooling—also the key to upward-mobility— and enslaved to an abusive adult labor system. Thusly neglected, they prematurely grew up ill, ignorant, wed to Old-World customs often perceived as lazy and salacious, and even criminal: like many of Riis, Hine, and the Ash Can School’s dirty, rowdy, delinquent child subjects.

Benevolent Institutions report no longer divides benevolent institutions for the care of children by day centers and orphanages, but has added the category of “placing children in foster families,” and has otherwise only tallied total numbers of children admitted to benevolent institutions. The report states that this is because of changing standards of practice and changing ideas about jurisdiction held by children’s aid societies with respect to the juvenile court and the rights of parents: “This development in the general purpose of child care has resulted in the development of different types of institutions and of different methods of management. There are still many orphan asylums of the old type, but there is an increasing number of state detention homes where dependent and delinquent children are cared for pending final disposition by the juvenile courts; of receiving homes under the conduct of home-finding organizations; of state public schools, intermediary between the orphanage and the reformatory; and of training homes and schools of many kinds which frequently are practically educational institutions.”
On the other hand, Progressives asserted that rich children were spoiled, rid of the chance at economic independence, “educated...to folly and superciliousness...[possessing] vanities, affections and poses in place of a brain.” Thusly over-indulged, they prematurely grew up pretentious, frail and neurotic, often sexually deviant: like Kitty Stieglitz, James’s Miles and Flora, Kipling’s Harvey Cheyne, and Sargent’s Boit girls. The jingoism of American culture at this time only strengthened this form of social anxiety: Personified by Teddy Roosevelt, patriotic Americans perceived a lack of strapping virility as a form of European dandification.

Another agitating factor was G. Stanley Hall’s new concept of adolescence as a mirroring of the stages of evolution. Hall spoke of a “savage” stage of maturation that implied teenage sexuality and sexual experimentation would become a source of social unrest.

While little could be done for children of the wealthy, there was yet hope that Progressives could “control” children of the poor. And so, out of this atmosphere of social reform, child labor became a central issue. An estimated 4 million children aged 10-15 comprised a significant part of the nation’s workforce; children were cheap and easily dominated. Progressive lobbyists and muckraking journalists aggressively voiced concern in state legislatures.

For better or worse, documentary photographers and realist painters gained their convictions from the Progressive Movement. The Progressives cast American government as a “superparent” overseeing the wellbeing of child citizens. This

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super-parent could usurp the traditional authority of parents and the authority of bosses should they abuse their authority.\textsuperscript{323}

Numerous trade unions, local labor reform committees, consumer leagues, and religious activists, each with vested interests, joined with Progressives in attacking child labor throughout the nineteenth century. Hallmark institutions were founded in the decades just preceding the twentieth century, such as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in 1874 (based on the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, formed in 1866 in New York City), the American Pediatric Association in 1888, and the first juvenile court, in Chicago, 1899.

\textbf{Who Were the Reformers?}

The most significant political proponents of child labor and children’s educational reform were easily identifiable. They were labor unions concerned about the fact that child laborers drove down the minimum wage and were dangerous competition for needed jobs. They were middle-class, politically moderate, Christian charities waging the battle on an ideological and ethical level. They were women’s rights groups and consumer leagues that held common minority interests with child laborers. On many occasions they were Socialist and anarchist organizations. In almost every case they were industrialized northerners. They almost always had the sponsorship, counsel, or outright support of educators, whose classrooms could potentially rehabilitate these problematic children.

The most significant political adversaries of both child labor reform and children’s educational reform were also part of a consistent historical pattern. They were political conservatives who were more concerned with condemning federal-level legislation over any social practice than with actual children’s issues. These men saw such legislation as evidence that the government excessively controlled what should be relegated to individual states. Just as they do during the twenty-first-century, these individuals accused moderate and liberal social reform on a federal level of a dangerous “Socialist” bias. This rhetoric was particularly useful when Woodrow Wilson succeeded Theodore Roosevelt in control of the Progressive Party, during the first World War’s “Red Scares.”

Other adversaries to children’s social reform included labor bosses who sought cheap labor and children’s small bodies, which were necessary to operate certain factory machinery. In the socio-religious realm, Catholics were especially opposed to children’s social reform legislation, calling it “hostile state intrusion into family life.”324 Finally, the parents of working immigrant children opposed children’s social reform; they were from the pre-industrialized Old World, and accustomed to a “pooled” family economy to which children contributed.

**Child Labor Reform**

The child’s “right to dependency” was the pivotal cultural construct with which Progressive American social reformers armed themselves when they chose to target child labor. Lewis Hine’s colleague in the NCLC, Alexander J. McKelway,

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succinctly argued on behalf of the “right to dependency.” McKelway wrote the 1913 NCLC-published proclamation, “Declaration of Dependence.” Like many social reformers, McKelway was in some ways a reactionary, and in some ways a progressive. Regardless, what McKelway wrote to advocate the nation’s young laborers functions as a thesis statement of children’s social reform.

Some interesting interpretive disjunctions arise from the fact that this was the view of Progressive adults imposed upon child subjects. It is important to note that McKelway wrote this document as an adult man posing as the children he defended. McKelway’s declaration reads:

“Declaration of Dependence
By the Children of America
In Mines and Factories and Workshops Assembled

Whereas, We, Children of America, are declared to have been born free and equal, and

Whereas, We are yet in bondage in this land of the free; are forced to toil the long day or the long night, with no control over the conditions of labor, as to health or safety or hours or wages, and with no right to the rewards of our service, therefore [sic] be it

Resolved, I -- That childhood is endowed with certain inherent and inalienable rights, among which are freedom from toil for daily bread; the right to play and to dream; the right to the normal sleep of the night season; the right to an education, that we may have equality of opportunity for developing all that there is in us of mind and heart.

Resolved, II -- That we declare ourselves to be helpless and dependent; that we are and of right ought to be dependent, and that we hereby present the appeal of our helplessness that we may be protected in the enjoyment of the rights of childhood.

Resolved, III -- That we demand the restoration of our rights by the abolition of child labor in America.” [Emphasis mine].

McKelway was a white supremacist who galvanized Southern NCLC reformers by showcasing well-nourished, well-educated African-American children and the comparable gauntness and ignorance of white children, warning his brethren that an “inferior” race would soon oust Caucasians because of neglect. Such charged juxtapositions forecast “the inevitable degeneration of the once proud white race” because of their refusal to unchain youngsters from occupations necessary to a pre-industrial economy.
Of particular elucidation is the paragraph which proceeds “Resolved, I.” The rights to freedom from toil, to play and dream, to education, often resurface in the discourse of the Progressive Party and the artists who were active during its reign. These concepts closely interweave child labor with its antithesis, the classroom.

As Walter Trattner has observed, “Children have always worked,” only invisibly.\(^{326}\) Indeed, the U.S. Census did not even record child labor, an active practice, until 1870. But now this social commonplace became a social menace. The work of children was separated for the first time from the domestic sphere by the industrial revolution; now “helping out on the farm,” “doing some extra chores,” and other euphemisms for child labor could not be concealed by the convention that the household was also the business.

The rise of leisure as a distinct pastime contributed to the concept that home and the workplace were physically, socially, and psychologically distinct spheres. Leisure was now thought to be a right earned by all social classes through hard work. Distinct public spaces, organizations, and pastimes were allocated for the practice of this earned right (Central Park in New York City, the YMCA, and baseball, all founded in the mid to late nineteenth century, are good examples). When children worked outside the home for wages—which implied that juveniles had to earn money to also earn basic human needs—the Progressives were outraged. Echoing so many nineteenth-century pedagogical reformers, they argued that

children had intrinsic worth. Children had a right to be childlike until a certain age. Children had a right to total dependency.

However, this theory was not as straightforward in practice. To begin with, the very parameters of childhood were constantly questioned. If children were exempt from labor and other forms of abuse or neglect, what constituted a child? A variety of practical questions in the popular, legislative, and educational realms followed. Such questions included: At what age did children become adults? The nascent field of adolescent psychology complicated this question significantly; indeed, Hall’s Adolescence was published in 1904, the same year that the National Child Labor Committee was founded. And who held sovereignty over children’s fate—parents or government legislators? What accommodations should be made regarding cultural differences in childrearing between different immigrant groups, and what, in the face of such diversity, was the standard? The debate only escalated when these decisions, traditionally the problem of municipal and state courts, became the quandary of a federal movement.

It did not help that even within the Progressive Party, who sought to improve the lives of underprivileged children, there were sharp philosophical divisions. These divisions were crippling and often drastically retarded the process of positive change. In the Kindergarten movement alone, “conservatives” such as Susan Blow believed that even urban immigrant children should follow a school curriculum written in Germany in the 1840’s. Conservatives gave no credence to new theories or to learning exercises that incorporated the practical daily tasks of the working poor. Conservatives also refused to open free Kindergartens attached to
conventional public schools for poor children, wishing to keep Kindergartens a specialized, private school function. On the other hand, “moderates” such as Florence Kelley and “liberals” such as Anna Bryan and their influential supporters, such as John Dewey, believed the exact opposite and strove to affiliate Kindergartens with public schools and universities.

Finally, opposition to any type of children’s social reform remained fierce. Southerners, bosses, and many working-class parents instead asserted that working “for their own wages” and obtaining economic “independence” was good for children’s character.

**Theodore Roosevelt**

“One is tempted to say that if [Theodore Roosevelt], in all his distinctive glory, had not come along, American culture would have had to invent him. Presidents were boring before Theodore Roosevelt, and boring after him....” Rick Marschall, Bully! The Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt, p. 4.

The quintessential Progressive leader—the founder of the Progressive “Bull-Moose” Party—was Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt was born on October 27, 1858, with an acute form of asthma. Alongside “recurring headaches, stomach pains...severe insomnia,” and poor eyesight, this hardship paradoxically made him determined to “not grow up a shrinking violet. He was going to make some noise. His childhood lungs might not have been healthy, but they could produce wallpaper-peeling yowls.”

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Roosevelt, one of four children, was the son of a New York businessman of Dutch descent, a Democrat-turned-Republican, who was a civic leader and philanthropist. Theodore Sr., or “Thee,” made a fortune importing of plate glass for the booming building construction industry; at the same time he regularly gave struggling employees cash advances and even at times paid for their medical expenses and burial fees. “Teedie” Jr. adored and emulated his father; “Seize the moment!,” one of Theodore Sr.’s credos, became one of his son’s as well. His family was the Victorian embodiment of mawkish sentimentality and selfless devotion. They indulged themselves and each other in gushing letters and group hugs that they termed “melts.”

Teddy cultivated late nineteenth-century American intellectual pursuits; he loved military and natural history, and his favorite novel was James Fenimore Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans* (1826). True to the nineteenth-century forward-thinking model of childrearing, Teddy recalled only one incident in which his father physically punished him. And, among ceaseless other philanthropic ventures, Thee turned his reformist ire on Randall’s Island, a below-par orphanage that would also later incur the withering written indictments of Jacob Riis. Roosevelt Sr. was upset at the idea that minors were charged with over one third of all serious felonies in New York, and hoped to improve the education and living conditions of these “apt pupils in the school of vice.”

328 Grondahl, 11.
329 Grondahl, 26.
encourage these boys to attend Bible classes—at the same time as he financially supported the establishment of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.  

It can therefore be confidently stated that the Roosevelts were any Progressive reformer’s dream family, living the ideal life inaccessible to children of ignorance, poverty, and vice. In fact, as noted earlier, Teddy was born a sickly child. His father encouraged him to seriously pursue both mental and physical exercise which he did with passionate enthusiasm. He succeeded in developing into a robust youth, through hard work, but also due to opportunities provided to him that would have been impossible for a sickly child born to poor parents.

Clearly, then, Teddy, a quintessential Knickerbocker, was a wholesomely raised blueblood—a child of the elite. This fact makes his dedicated campaigns on behalf of social reform all the more fascinating. Generally speaking, the wealthy barely recognized opportunities to participate in social reform. But with men like Roosevelt, perhaps because of the model set by his father, the tide was changing. Like rags-to-riches businessman Andrew Carnegie, a Scot who grew up in a world where English industrialists were oppressors and the ill-treated poor undeniably existed, Roosevelt was willing to see past his silver-spoon horizons and acknowledge the mistakes his own class made. His serious support of social betterment embodies the spirit of Progressive reform on a microcosmic, individual level. “He spoke in a rich baritone flavored with an East Coast aristocrat’s affected ‘Harvard accent,’” and indeed, was educated from the young age of seventeen at

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Harvard University. His private residence was a Shingle-Style mansion, a mixture of the humble and the opulent, and John Singer Sargent, expatriate master of imaging the “who’s who” of the Gilded Age upper-crust, painted his portrait. He was a man of self-contradictions.

Roosevelt’s early Progressive political service was as governor of the state of New York. Before this, in 1895, he was a police commissioner for New York City, and feared by outlaws everywhere—as indicated by George Luks’s comic strip of an Irish slum kid chasing a crooked cop while disguised as Roosevelt. “Ghost Séance in Hogan’s Alley,” Hogan’s Alley, New York World, March 7, 1897, is a comical image indeed. Mick Dugan springs out from his monster costume alongside several compatriots on Halloween night, harmlessly terrorizing denizens of Hogan’s Alley. He relishes that he and his fellow gamins have frightened Nelse the Cop into believing that the authorities have caught him in an extortionist act, a blow to New York City’s police department. Delightedly Mick announces, “See how rattled Nelse is! He tinks dis is Rosyvelt!”

Indeed, Roosevelt “transformed the Metropolitan Police Department from a perceived confederation of petty criminals into an efficient, modern law enforcement agency,” unraveling the boss system. By 1897 Roosevelt was Secretary of the Navy under President William McKinley. Roosevelt would become most famous for his own presidency and creation of the Progressive, or “Bull Moose,” political party, an allegiance of moderate conservatives and liberals.

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331 Marschall, 5.
A year prior Roosevelt met and was deeply moved by the work of Jacob Riis, then a reporter for the *New York Sun*. Roosevelt’s statements on immigrants and their children show that, true to an era of open racism in popular art and culture, he wanted to assimilate all foreign cultures into an American “melting pot”—yet his intentions in doing so were noble.

Roosevelt served as William McKinley’s vice president. When McKinley died of complications from a wound that he sustained from an assassination attempt, Roosevelt became president of the United States. Roosevelt took an activist position from the start, and permanently changed the level of accessibility between the federal government and the public.

Roosevelt galvanized the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, which is openly referred to in an Ashcan School drawing by William Glackens, *Far From the Fresh Air Farm*, in which children play in front of oncoming carriage traffic and eat contaminated candies.

Roosevelt also interceded on behalf of striking coal miners, “Breaker Boys” who were an exhaustive subject in Lewis Hine’s National Child Labor Committee albums and George Luks's paintings.

Roosevelt was a Republican before co-founding the Progressive Party. Woodrow Wilson succeeded him and, because he was also a Progressive, passed many of Roosevelt’s reformist proposals. The transitional relationship between these two political figures with their seemingly unlikely mixture of personal beliefs, aptly demonstrates the unique nature of Progressive social reform. Wilson, like Roosevelt, was a bespectacled Progressive who came from an upper-class society
that rarely rectified social wrongdoing. He was a devout Presbyterian. He served as president of Princeton University from 1902-1910. But there are numerous differences between Roosevelt and Wilson—the latter’s far gentler, colder personality, which replaced charismatic exuberance with soft-spoken idealism, being only one. Unlike Roosevelt, a Progressive, and William Howard Taft, a Republican, both of whom he beat in the 1912 presidential election, Wilson was a Democrat.

Though the modern Democratic Party is often thought to be the embodiment of socially progressive values, it was a different entity in the early twentieth century, and Wilson espoused Democratic political platforms that were hardly forward-thinking. For instance, Wilson relished D.W. Griffith’s Klan-glorifying 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*, calling it a masterpiece. Predictably, he advocated extremely reactionary policies on American race relations. He is still, nonetheless, considered a leader in the Progressive Movement, who passed a number of bills that Roosevelt championed—the Keating-Owen Act, which decisively regulated child labor (albeit briefly), is a key example, as is the Adamson Act imposing eight-hour workdays. Wilson was also an enthusiastic supporter of women’s suffrage. In broader historical terms, Wilson’s close involvement in shaping armistice literature such as the Treaty of Versailles can not be overemphasized. Yet Wilson still marked a decided shift in the federal implementation of Progressive goals. Roosevelt’s rollicking punch-em-out approach to ending social injustice was gone forever, replaced by a more measured tone of reform.
Indeed, it has even been observed that paintings by Progressive artists, and documentary by Progressive photographers, while retaining a motto of social engagement, somehow lost their sting and their ardor during the 1910’s, correlative with Wilson's assumption of presidency. At the very least, George Bellows, who enlisted during World War I, was directly impacted by Wilson’s decision to enter the United States into the war. Bellows completely ceased painting underprivileged children during the war years, and refocused his energy on the atrocities that he saw overseas.

The New Deal of the American 1930’s, the property of the next Roosevelt in office, is sometimes considered a sequel or rebirth of Teddy Roosevelt’s ideals.

**Child Labor Strikes Organized By Children**

Not only adults, but children themselves, attempted to effect positive changes for America’s youth, and to improve children’s working conditions. Child reformers protested their own exploitation several times during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\(^{333}\) This is a significant historical pattern as the most provocative art depicting the underprivileged challenges the reformist image of abject victimization. It presents a more complicated image of slum kids who are simultaneously wretched and resilient.

One of the first recorded incidents of children protesting their labor conditions was during the 1830’s in the cotton mills of Lowell, Massachusetts. As

documented in the twentieth century by Lewis Hine, textile mill girls worked exorbitant hours, had to climb perilously inside looms to repair them, and often lost limbs to machine accidents. They lived in barely sustainable housing furnished by their bosses at exorbitant prices. If they protested their abysmal living and working conditions, the spinners and doffers at these mills suffered the condemnation of the church and even the press. They lived in a still-Puritanical culture in which children’s corporal punishment and back-breaking labor for “moral betterment” were the norm.

In 1834, in response to a cut in wages, eight hundred mill girls withdrew their bank savings, announced their two weeks’ notice, and walked out on the job in a single day. But without popular support, the strike leaders were fired and their followers forced to return to a job with cut wages.

Led by eleven-year-old Harriet Hanson, the mill girls attempted a second strike in 1836, in response to a raise in room and board prices without a raise in wages. They joined adult women who worked in the “upper rooms” of the mill and organized the strike. The strikers comprised one third of the Lowell mill workforce—some two thousand laborers. The mill owners retaliated by blacklisting and firing the strike organizers, evicting the young girls from their boarding houses, and portraying them as “devils in petticoats” using New England religious dogma. They were thusly fired for allegedly immoral conduct, drinking, smoking, or failing to attend church.

Interestingly, many of graphic artist and painter Winslow Homer’s lesser-known woodcut engravings of children—those that do not portray them in
schoolhouses, at noon recess, or gathering clams on the beach—are of exploited mill girls. Only a few examples are engravings based on The Morning Bell, Woman Winding Shuttle Bobbins, and Quitting Time. This image juxtaposes a broken-down wall-eyed old woman with a young girl standing directly in front of her: a hint at the girl’s dismal future.

The best known of all child labor strikes on behalf of children are the anthracite coal miner strikes which took place in Pennsylvania in 1897, 1900, and 1902, and earned even the support of President Roosevelt.

By 1885, Pennsylvania law forbade children under twelve years of age to work in mines. But parents, largely Slavic and Italian immigrants, simply forged an older age on their sons’ work certificates. Workdays were from seven am until 6:30 pm. The work, involving buying one’s own supplies, consisted of hunching over coal chutes breathing in toxic dust in the dark where mineshafts often fatally collapsed. And the constant coat of coal on the boys’ skin caused a condition called “red tips” in which sulfur deposits caused open finger sores that bled and become infected. Paradoxically the role of a breaker boy, a driver, or a “nipper,” was so crucial to the whole operation that a strike was particularly devastating to a boss. Child and adult laborers alike soon realized this.

The first strike, in Lattimer, Pennsylvania, was called the “Lattimer Massacre.” It ignited when teenage driver John Bodan and several young friends snatched a crowbar from boss Gomer Jones, who had attempted to take the crowbar to a picket line, and beat Jones severely. Workers blew the “work-stop” whistle and abandoned the mine—poignantly, to go home to “play.” In one day eight hundred
miners including Breaker Boys were on strike. Their requests barely exceeded
pleads on behalf of humane conditions: “They wanted an end to compulsory
purchases from the company store and butcher. They wanted the privilege of
paying for and selecting their own doctor. They also wanted a fifteen percent wage
increase...even when the machine wasn’t working.”334 Unfortunately this strike was
violent and coercive in nature; miners from Hazleton and Lattimer marched from
house to house and literally forced any man of working age to join their ranks, even
men of other vocations. Mothers removed their children from school in fear. This
strike ended with the deadly firing of guns between eighty-seven specially hired
deputies and the miners: “we ran, but they kept on shooting as we ran.”335 A nearby
schoolhouse became a makeshift hospital for the miners. The deputies were put on
trial and found not guilty.

A far more effective strike was organized in 1900 by United Mine Workers
president John Mitchell; collieries were simply abandoned, making the mining
region wholly unproductive by October, for forty-three days. Largely in fear of lack
of fuel during the coming winter, bosses conceded an increase in wages to the
miners on October 29.

The strike of 1902 was far more polemical. Restaurants and landlords
refused to service any striking miners. On the other hand, miners attacked the
homes of “scabs,” or line-crossers within their families who returned to work, by
blowing up their porches with dynamite. At this interval, attorney Clarence
Darrow—most famous for his participation in the so-called “Scopes Monkey Trial”—

334 Bartoletti , 90.
335 Miner Martin Rosko, quoted in Bartoletti, 96.
and President Theodore Roosevelt interceded on behalf of miner children.

Roosevelt appointed the Anthracite Commission to investigate the grievances of miners, and threatened to confiscate the properties of mine bosses. At Darrow’s many trials, one boy in particular, Andrew Chippie, provided a “harrowing” testimony earning the press’s advocacy. Ultimately Andrew’s testimony led to a pay increase and eight-hour workday for most miners.

One of the more famous incidents of children fighting back against child labor even yielded a 1992 Walt Disney Pictures film, a musical called *Newsies*, starring Christian Bale as ringleader “Jack Kelly.” The film depicted the messenger, bootblack, and newsboy strike of 1899 in New York City. However, the ringleader of the true historical event was not a handsome seventeen-year-old, but rather, a one-eyed, diminutive child called “Kid Blink;” his real name was Louis Ballatt.336

Newsboys, a commonplace novelty of all American cities, were the most difficult form of child laborers to regulate and reform. This was because they were essentially self-employed and had no clear, abusive “bosses” to target. National Child Labor Committee officials and police officers strove to regulate their activity by establishing boarding houses, having them wear badges indicating their names and “turfs,” and inspecting the conditions of their beats.

The newsboys, however, failed to wear their badges, hid from the police, and sent inspectors to false addresses. Proud of their own entrepreneurship, they purchased papers from newspaper offices, and resold them to the public at a slightly higher price in order to gross a profit. This profit was their daily wage. They

336 Bartoletti, p. 54, 61.
hawked high-traffic areas such as trolley stations, street corners, and storefronts. So long as they earned something every day, newsboys were generally content with their lifestyle, however dangerous. But this was about to change in New York City.

The motivation behind the strike was the shrewd savings of competing newspaper titans Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, of the *New York World* (artist George Luks’s employer), and the *New York Journal*, respectively. Today Pulitzer is ironically a symbolic figure of scholarship and philanthropy. But in the late 1890’s, both he and Hearst suffered from a lag in circulation: unable to raise the price readers paid, the newspaper titans instead raised the price newsboys paid. The price was raised ten cents a day, from fifty to sixty cents per stack of papers. For those underprivileged child laborers, this was a significant sum. The newsboys were outraged.

At its peak, July 24, 1899, the strike garnered five thousand boys. Despite pretenses, such as inviting the strike leaders to an office meeting (Hearst), neither publisher initially gave in. Instead, they sent hired roughs or “scabs” to physically beat back the child strikers, and bought off Kid Blink’s associate, Dave Simons, to lower the boys’ morale. Nevertheless, two hundred boys remained striking at City Hall on July 27. In the process, they destroyed hundreds of papers without selling them, raided newspaper stands, and emptied delivery trucks. Pulitzer caved first, followed by Hearst. They reached a compromise with the strikers, wherein the cost of bundles remained the higher sixty cents, but the boys were to be refunded for all papers they failed to sell. The strike ended August 2.
Of all forms of child labor, boot shining and newspaper selling are the two most frequently portrayed by American artists. This is no coincidence. This form of child labor was virtually intractable; all thinkers of the day, including artists, wished to voice an opinion about its existence.

Children opposed not only their own working conditions, but also their own living conditions. In 1907 the Lower East Side’s Pauline Newman, a Jewish thirteen-year-old, organized a citywide women’s strike against a thirty-three percent rent increase in the tenements: cramped, filthy fire-hazards that were already exorbitantly over-priced. On December 26, Pauline and fellow domestic laborers canvassed their strike door-to-door and amassed ten thousand housewives and their families. This time the newspapers were on the side of women’s social reform, and hailed Pauline as “The New Joan of Arc.” The strikers were largely Jewish families who had a history of protesting raises in cost of living, such as kosher meat price increases. On December 28 Pauline and her friends presented to city officials a list of building code violations made by the landlords who had raised their rent so drastically. The Tenement House Department and Health Department, some of Theodore Roosevelt’s legacies, sent inspectors to confirm these violations. Six thousand of the ten thousand families were still evicted for striking. But two thousand families saw a reduced rent, a small but significant victory earned by a working-class girl’s efforts.

Florence Kelley
In 1903, Kindergarten activist Florence Kelley formed a “child labor committee” in New York, which friends in Illinois used as a model to do the same.

Kelley’s work was paralleled by many woman activists, such as Mother Jones, who once famously claimed “I’ve got stock in these little children.” Jones aided children in the anthracite coal mine strikes of 1900 and 1902. In 1903, Jones led a poignant procession of maimed laboring children to Philadelphia’s City Hall, witnessed by the New York City newspaper reporters whom she had invited.

During that same year, Kelley convinced a friend in government to telegraph President Roosevelt. The telegraph requested Roosevelt’s endorsement of a bill creating a central office in Washington for the investigation of child labor. Roosevelt, fresh from his crusades alongside the Pennsylvania “breaker boys,” enthusiastically boomed, “Bully!” The movement to curb child labor gained favor on the federal level.337

Kelley would continue to be a children’s rights advocate all her life, serving for many years as the national secretary of the National Child Labor Committee. She authored provocative texts such as the 1905 book Some Ethical Gains Through Legislation, whose thesis was that “all children have a right to childhood.” A number of Kelley’s close friends and associates were also important child labor reformists: such as Governor John Atgeld of Illinois, Alice Hamilton, and Kate Richards O’Hare, who published children’s advocacy essays in the Socialist periodical Appeal To Reason.

The National Child Labor Committee, 1904

The National Child Labor Committee, the result of Kelley and Roosevelt’s dealings, was formed in 1904, and by 1907 was recognized by Congress. The NCLC, as it is often abbreviated, was the first organization of national scope to address the problem of child labor. Its founders were Edgar Gardner Murphy of the Alabama Child Labor Committee, an Episcopal rector who had just promoted the passage of a law banning child labor under age twelve; Jane Addams, the legendary founder of Hull House in Chicago, 1889; Lilian Wald, the founder of the Henry Street Settlement in Lower Manhattan, 1893; and Felix Adler, founder of the New York Ethical Culture School, 1876. Delegates ranged from the cautious conservative to the inflammatory liberal, including Socialist journalist John Spargo, who wrote the polemical Bitter Cry of the Children in 1906.

The first successful legislation against child labor was the Keating-Owen Act, signed into law by President Wilson on September 1, 1916. This legislation, which gained bipartisan support, banned goods produced by child workers from interstate commerce.\(^3\)\(^3\)\(^8\) The Keating-Owen Act established a minimum age standard of 14 years for factory work and forbade an excess of 8 hours per workday for laborers age 14-16 years.

After only ten months, the Southern laissez-faire ideologue, David Clark, successfully attacked the Keating-Owen Act as “unconstitutional.” He hired expensive top lawyers to do so, and fooled former child laborers into testifying in

\(^{338}\) This was a feat that Progressive legislators had been attempting since the Beveridge Bill of 1906.
court that they had never been abused or neglected. Children took pride in self-agency, Clark claimed. Robbing them of the right to earn wages independent of their elders only further victimized them. And indeed, working children, such as in the photographs of Hine, sometimes justified their own exploitation, demonstrating a fundamental problem in visual documentary. These children wanted to be perceived as adults, successful contributors to the wellbeing of their families.

In 1919 the Keating-Owen Act was renewed into law, then declared unconstitutional a second time in 1922, solely on the basis that the federal government could not enact its own laws over state laws. And in every case, these laws failed to protect children in the street trades and agriculture.

In 1924, the Child Labor Amendment to the Constitution was proposed, granting Congress the power to “limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of persons under eighteen years of age,” but was criticized for failing to define labor and for setting the age higher than sixteen. The amendment, unsurprisingly, was never ratified.

**The Chicago Child Welfare Exhibit, 1911**

Gatherings to promote child welfare began with the National Kindergarten Association’s exhibits inaugurated as the Kindergarten display at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876. Perhaps the most significant successive exhibition was the Chicago Child Welfare Exhibit. This conference attracted leading child

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reform advocates of the day. Chicago’s show was rife with booths, lectures, and demonstrations related to the subject. The organizers’ goal was to reject the Puritanical customs of child rearing centered on original sin and strict discipline. Instead the guidebook catalog accompanying the exhibit clearly adopts a conceptualization of the child rooted squarely in the rational social sciences, social activism and the government “superparent”: Social betterment came as a result of corrective education.

The exhibition catalog for the Chicago Exhibit drew attention to the preventable infant mortality rate, 3,500 in the city the previous year. It firmly described means by which parents could prevent infant blindness or preventable damage to eyesight (8,000 children per year).

A “baby tent” demonstrated caretaking measures provided by emergency hospital and relief stations, such as mothers’ education courses, baths, and “colonic flushings” (enemas). Other such tents had been established across the city for summer-based infant ailments. Children’s diarrheal diseases from filthy, uncleaned streets—refuse, human waste, and even whole dead horse carcasses remained for days—as well as spoiled bread, milk, and meat, were exposed as shameful in the discourse of middle-class formal and practical education, cleanliness, and restraint.

Next came a glass-walled “infant welfare station” to “demonstrate for observers the best methods of housing, tending, feeding, dressing, and safeguarding an infant from disease.”340 Special sub-tents covered courses in nursing: the food to

340 Marten, 132.
water ratio to give an infant; bottle feeding; sleep; bathing; clothing; and mouth hygiene.

Since today knowledge regarding the care of children has greatly advanced, it is perhaps shocking that so many basic elements of childcare would be considered pertinent to an exhibit expressly established for edification in the proper treatment of American youngsters. But the literature from this exhibition simply shows how radically cutting-edge these products of children's social reform were, how formative to public opinion and practice, and how geared toward teaching as a fundamental tool of social change.

Complications to Child Labor Reform: Race, Civil Rights, and Labor Unions

Around 1879-1880, African-American life in the “Reconstruction” South was far from ideal. Freedom, both legal and abstract, was still a distant dream; for instance, African-Americans in Virginia were subject to curfews and, even if children, placed humiliatingly in bullpens if they broke curfew for any reason.341 Civilian and military white men were not prohibited from entering private dwellings, often to pillage, sometimes to rape black women. “Exodusters,” former slaves who were tired of not being treated like the free laborers that Reconstruction had made them, “used [their] only real bargaining chip...their labor,” to fight for

improved wages and working conditions.\textsuperscript{342} Many migrated to the Northern cities en masse, in search of more modern forms of work. Those who remained found themselves in a fortuitous position of power, because Southern bosses had no choice but to agree to their terms and conditions in order to sustain the only labor that was still available. The South panicked as it watched its labor force steadily dwindling and its economy falling into crisis. This fact in part accounts for the recalcitrant efforts on the part of Southern laissez-faire bosses to block child labor reform: one low-wage (and previously free) source of labor was already being lost in the migrating African-Americans; now another, the labor of minors, was also threatened, and, both times, because of the North.

The main means of organization and retaliation on the part of African-Americans was through church congregations. For instance, in 1880, female members of the First Baptist Church of Richmond petitioned for the right to vote on certain church matters—not for a universal voting right, but merely the right to vote to dismiss or elect their male leaders.\textsuperscript{343} Two hundred African-American congregants made this protest. Their leaders were members Margaret Osborne, Jane Green, Susan Washington, Molly Branch, Susan Gray, and Mary A. Soach. Typical of post-bellum African-American churches, First African Baptist became a site for “constructing a discourse about freedom and organizing a large-scale mass protest;” indeed, the women’s vote argument had precedent in a larger-scale list of anti-racist grievances that was sent as a copy of the church’s meeting minutes


\textsuperscript{343} Brown, 68.
directly to President Andrew Johnson. That same year, 1865, First African Baptist published its grievances in *The New York Tribune*. Interestingly, the *Tribune* was the same newspaper that recoiled from the Ashcan School’s exhibition of The Eight, because its subject matter was not genteel enough—in other words, yet again, we have proof that, during the Progressive Era, the “forward-thinking” and “reactionary” qualities in any individual entity were highly erratic.

Racist treatment of black labor often fell to the Southern Democrats, who, during the nineteenth century, were singularly socially conservative. Democratic politicians blocked pro-black Republican election victories. Democratic electoral tactics were especially pernicious in Louisiana as of 1877. Efforts to restrict black voting went as far as the presidential election of 1880, with, for instance, the misuse of the Fourteenth Amendment in apportioning congressional representatives.

The source of African-American retaliation was twofold. On one hand, African-Americans believed the Southern promise that eventually, they would prosper if they remained in the South and worked hard in traditional agricultural enterprises. One third of all freedmen in the Upper South acquired land between 1865 and 1920, pursuing this goal. Alternately, there was the Northern Progressive promise, comprised of Republicans, independents, and moderate Democrats who “saw a redemption of the idea that some African-Americans embraced traditional ideas about American workers”—that is, the keenly honed Anglo-Saxon Protestant work ethic. Northern Progressives hoped to provide aid

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344 Brown, 72.
345 Richardson, 157.
346 Richardson, 161.
to “uneducated and impoverished” social victims—but also to mold them into their own image in the process.

The North steadfastly promised that African-Americans could expand their horizons and become upwardly mobile. Legislators and members of the press in the North also guaranteed that “scattering” blacks throughout the country would end Southern repression of a black voting majority. These promises became especially convincing with a resolution made January 16, 1879, by Senator William Windom of Minnesota. Windom’s resolution called for a committee of seven to

“inquire as to the expediency and practicability of encouraging and promoting...the partial migration of colored persons from those States...where they are not allowed to freely and peacefully exercise and enjoy their constitutional rights as American citizens, into such States as may desire to receive them and will protect them in said rights.” 347

Tellingly, Louisiana tried to alter its constitution to ban the formation of such a committee in its own state legislature. As a result, recognizing the prejudices that threatened them, African-Americans who had been considering such an exodus since 1876 proceeded North and West. They became, essentially, factory workers and cowboys, both of whom sustained the American mystique of the “strong” and “self-sufficient.”

As African-Americans flooded Northern urban centers and further crowded their tenements and ghettos, the campaign for civil freedoms continued, with many

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347 Windom, quoted in Richardson, 156-157.
roadblocks. To begin with, popular opinions about African-Americans proved far less idyllic than politicians had promised. The press often equated African-Americans with “mobsters,” portrayed as failing economically compared to their lives in the South (Harpers Weekly is one example); worst of all, cartoonists such as Thomas Nast negatively compared African-Americans to immigrants of other races and ethnicities, such as the Chinese, who were contrariwise depicted as “industrious, orderly, and frugal,” who pridefully “refused charity,” and who were “model workers.”348 Even famed social crusaders such as Upton Sinclair openly castigated urban blacks as “brawny Negroes stripped to the waist and pounding each other for money.”349

By the turn of the twentieth century, at the apex of the Progressive Movement, African-Americans sought a new way to combat the “disenfranchisment, segregation, and discrimination in the labor market” that they faced after migrating to big cities.350 They discarded their previously anti-unionist beliefs and adopted leftist political views. But this did not mean that they would be welcome in these previously unexplored circles.

As of the early 1900’s, the American Federation of Labor steadily grew in political power, backing Congressional measures such as the Erdman Act, 1898, to facilitate railroad union disputes, and Theodore Roosevelt’s settlement of the 1902 anthracite coal strike. To be a unionist was to possess liberal political influence. The

348 Richardson, 165.
350 Moreno, 82.
AFL promoted a number of Progressive causes: women’s suffrage, the banning of “Asian exclusion,” the regulation of child labor, and so on.

But unions, like other discrete social and political entities in the Progressive Era, mingled policies that were forward-thinking with those that were reactionary. Dubois was aware of this fact, and lamented about it to fellow African-Americans. His *The Negro American Artisan* asserted that the main obstacle to black prosperity was the tendency of the ruling classes to train both African-Americans and Anglo-Americans on the poorest rungs of society to compete for the same types of labor, but to only allow whites (“Irish or German monopolists”) to vote and form labor unions.351

Furthermore, the building trades, among the strongest AFL unions, used local ordinances controlling licensing and apprenticeship to ban African-Americans from their numbers, or if they did admit them, forced them into auxiliary unions with unequal benefits.352 The “fear of negro competition” drove these measures. Dubois was not necessarily an anti-unionist, but he was opposed to such rampant racist practices, which discriminated as much against African-Americans as did corrupt employers. In a similar outcry, *The Colored American* called unions “labor barons,” a play on the term “robber barons” that was used to identify corrupt Gilded-Age

351 Moreno, 91, 92.
352 Participants in these unfair unionist practices included plumbers, electricians, sheet metal workers, ironworkers, and the “Big Four” industries: engineers, conductors, firemen, and trainmen. Interestingly, Chicago was characterized as one of the first cities to escape these racist pitfalls, and as far as occupations, West Virginia coalmining provided an especially equitable transition atmosphere for Southern black agricultural laborers. Moreno, 105.
business tycoons. Black critics characterized labor barons as “autocratic and
overbearing...narrow, dictatorial, and full of prejudice.”353

It was the American Socialist Party, of which Robert Henri’s student John
Sloan was a member, that recognized capitalists in power pitted black and white
labor against each other purposefully. They aimed to divide and conquer and keep
the working class disempowered: “so as to make their social and economic interests
appear to be separate and antagonistic, in order that the workers of both races may
thereby be more easily and completely exploited.”354 But even Socialists believed
that the race problem was truly a symptom of the class problem, which would be
resolved with the rise of the proletariat. And so, racism in unionist circles and
liberal politics, the forums where blacks and children were most likely to be
championed, remained unsolved.

Interestingly, education, which would become the chief tool of children’s
social empowerment, was also the “way out” for African-Americans. The first
African-American to graduate from an American college was also the first black
American House Representative, Alexander Twilight, of Middlebury College, in
1823. Harvard University and Yale University also famously admitted African-
Americans into their ranks as early as the 1870’s: Harvard’s first African-American
graduate was Richard Theodore Greener, in 1870, and Yale’s first African-American
student to obtain a PhD was Edward Alexander Bouchet, who earned his PhD in
physics, 1874. William H. Lewis played All-American Football for the first time in
African-American history, also at Harvard, as of 1892. And, of course, W.E.B. DuBois

353 The Colored American, quoted in Moreno, 97.
354 R. Laurence Moore, quoted in Moreno, 108.
earned his PhD from Harvard in 1895. In the Ivy League particularly, this trend, the product of an “idealistic liberal New Englisher” school of thought, ironically mirrored the larger American social impulse that every constituency requires an educated elite to represent its interests. College-educated African-Americans experienced a kind of cultural displacement, whereby they served as intermediaries between Anglo-Americans in power, and the black community at large.

Progressive were pulled in many directions, and there were only so many resources attending to time, financial and political support. The Progressive resources devoted to racial civil rights and their complicated relationship with unions were resources less available to child labor reform; two worthy causes, as a result, at times detracted from each other’s efficacy.

**Children’s Pedagogy Reform**

Compulsory education quickly proved the most effective deterrent against child labor—as it did most other forms of social oppression. Pedagogical reform inherited from the nineteenth-century provided the conceptual framework for protesting situations in which children’s needs were unmet. The needs unique to childhood defined children’s rights. Progressives enthusiastically embraced kindergartens and revamped their curriculums to combat what was instilled in underprivileged children under abusive labor conditions.

**Jane Addams**
“This industrialism,” Jane Addams wrote, in her essay “The Spirit of Youth,” 1909:

“has gathered together multitudes of eager young creatures from all quarters of the earth as a labor supply for the countless factories and workshops...suddenly released from the protection of the home...to work under alien roofs...prized more for their labor power than their innocence ...” 355

After unsuccessfully attending a woman’s seminary and suffering a nervous breakdown, Jane Addams co-founded the famous social settlement called Hull House with Ellen Gates Starr, a friend with whom she traveled Europe in 1887. Hull House, established 1889, was located in the West Side of Chicago. It targeted immigrants and their children from Jewish Russia, Bohemia, Italy, and Greece. At Hull House residents were taught rudimentary courses in housekeeping, nutrition, and English; Kindergartens and summer camps were provided to children and jobs to unemployed adults.

Addams was also a member of the Chicago school board, one of the founding members of the Society for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a leader in women’s suffrage and international peace movements, and, finally, a member of the National Child Labor Committee. In 1906, with Jacob Riis and Lillian Wald, she co-founded the Playground Association of America. This was a cornerstone of children’s recreational reform—and an element of the era’s widely shared conviction: teaching children by using a common language, play. Addams was unique among her colleagues for her faith in the positive impact of a small, tight-knit reform community—a conviction shared with her adored father, the Pennsylvania

native Republican John H. Addams—and for her particular focus on the moral, emotional, and physical health of working girls.

Addams represents the best possible twentieth-century adaptation of “purity-crusade” white-collar Victorian reformists, their “sense of restraint, a mixture of comforts and limits,” and their upstanding compassion for children, downtrodden “angels.” Addams’s many social contributions on behalf of women and children came during a transition period. Reform shifted away from private charity values centered on the happiness of the home and “all” people’s desire to obtain domestic luxury—the flip side of which was a harsh Protestant critique of the ethnic poor and an atmosphere of greedy, miserly self-absorption. Even popular condemnations of Victorian architecture, its “exaggerated self-interest” and emphasis on superficial ornament, showed that the middling public wearied of nineteenth-century values. Instead, the reform era into which Addams entered was one of secular values, practical application, and the optimistic rationalism that stirred people like John Dewey.

**John Dewey**

The most influential of all children’s educational reformers at this time was John Dewey, who, like Addams, began his social reform career in Chicago. Dewey

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356 McGerr, 43.
357 McGerr writes eloquently of the crisis social reformist Victorians endured during the Gilded Age: “By the 1880’s and 1890’s, the middle class had to face the painful irony that it was upwardly mobile men, living the individualist creed [that had been their guiding philosophy], who had built big businesses and stood ready to take on their workers. Moreover, the rich had perverted individualism itself. The Victorians balanced individual freedom with self-control, hard work, and domesticity. The rich had seemingly cast aside those balance weights...individualism became an excuse for complete autonomy, a legitimization of indulgence and inequality, and a rationalization of the troubling national status quo.” 56.
was a philosopher, one of the first modern social scientists, and, as of 1909, the President of the National Kindergarten Association.

Dewey was unhappy with teachers’ treatment of children as passive receptacles of knowledge, with the “center of gravity outside the child.”\textsuperscript{358} He fretted that none of the learning environment was respectfully at the scale and level of the child. Like Robert Henri, who mandated that portraitists treat children as equals and symbols of potentiality, Dewey wished to tailor teaching methods to a child’s unique needs.

Dewey transformed Friedrich Froebel’s private, German-speaking Kindergarten philosophy into a pragmatic school system that was applicable to underprivileged ethnic children.\textsuperscript{359} He retained the idea that childhood is a separate developmental state and that free play liberates children to develop cognitively and socially. He even believed that observing children’s interactions on the school playground revealed the quality of their upbringing, and solidified both their personalities and their roles in a social hierarchy. “Upon the playground,” he wrote, “in game and sport, social organization takes place spontaneously and inevitably.”\textsuperscript{360} Children who played cooperatively became forthright, respectable members of a community. Children who roughhoused, gambled or were neglected could be expected to grow up violent, deceitful, and neglectful. Therefore educators had the duty of molding play to represent qualities desired by future American citizens.


\textsuperscript{360} Dewey, \textit{The School and Society}, 12.
While at the University of Chicago, Dewey had had held a Kindergarten with colleague John Herbert Mead. The ultimate pragmatist, Dewey adapted Froebel's twenty “gifts,” based in middle-class German tradition, to the interests of his more diverse demographic.\textsuperscript{361} Through lessons in industrial art and simple practical chores, the children in Dewey’s school learned the indispensable value of producing something useful with their own hands, of obtaining agency over their native environment, of both freedom and responsibility.\textsuperscript{362} These children were to complete manual labor projects for their own intellectual and emotional benefit. This is an important distinction: the work of children in Dewey’s school should not be confused with child labor, which Dewey considered a prostitution of innocence for the fiscal gain of parents and big industries.

Frequently, Progressive reform targeted immigrant slum kids. But Dewey’s philosophy did not merely address communal wellbeing, or the suppression of foreign heritage. Even more than Froebel, Dewey believed in the primacy of the individual and sought to tailor lessons to each child's interests and ability level. He coined this method “the child-centric curriculum.”

Thus Dewey reaffirmed Froebel's belief that children have emotional needs and knowledge-processing capabilities distinct from adults. In doing so, he

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{361} Play denotes the psychological attitude of the child, not his outward performance.” It then follows that what is needed is “complete emancipation” from the Froebelian system of rigid “gifts, plays, or occupations” which in a way do impose an outward system of behavior upon the child. Even freer play and self-mastery are needed. Froebel is, to Dewey, too much for “the worship of external things” instead of the study of the inner states of the child outwardly evoked. (114) Froebel's play is also too limited to his own pre-industrial German “study of contemporary conditions and activities,” not ours.
\item \textsuperscript{362} Objects manipulated should emulate real home and work life: such as kitchen utensils. A kitchen utensil will provide the child a jumping-off point for conjuring a whole kitchen “in imaginative form,” an environment which then “is full of ethical relations and suggestive of moral duties.” (120) “No activity should be originated by imitation,” rather there is a real object the child himself starts off imaginatively from in play-learning.
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perpetuated the schema of childhood as a separate and crucial stage of human development now incumbent upon the state to protect.

**Helen Bradford Thompson Wooley**

As Jane Addams's many social reform interests demonstrate, children's welfare often corresponded with women's rights and the evolving role of women in twentieth-century society. Helen Bradford Thompson Wooley also evinced the close social ties between women's rights and children’s rights.

A lesser-known social pioneer, Wooley was a psychologist who researched the similarities in brain capacity between men and women. She challenged traditional characterizations of the male and female mind that were not based in empirical study, such as the supposedly rational bent and superior scientific skills of men. Her work led to child labor reform because her analysis of gender-based brain function differences naturally led her to question at which stage in human development these differences arose, and to focus on child psychology and children's needs. Also, Wooley, like other feminists and suffragettes of her era, had to challenge the often-complicated role of childrearing in the establishment of women’s equality.

Wooley was both the first psychologist, and first woman, to head the Vocation Bureau of the public schools of Cincinnati, Ohio, where, notably, some of Lewis Hine's most extensive documentation of newsboys, newsgirls, and newsboy reform associations took place. In this role, Wooley attempted to match educational
programs with the intellectual and vocational skills of children on a case-by-case basis, similarly to John Dewey.

Wooley’s scholarship on gender equality in intellectual capability was published in 1903. She worked in the Cincinnati public school system from 1911-1921. She sought to learn why children dropped out of school in order to work, and, after a “massive longitudinal study,” concluded that the effects of truancy were wholly detrimental. For many years, male colleagues and the general public derided her findings.

While living in Detroit, Wooley was one of the co-developers of the Merrill-Palmer Mental Scale for Children. In 1926, Wooley moved to Columbia University to work at the Child Welfare Institute at Teacher’s College. Wooley obtained her PhD summa cum laude from the University of Chicago. E.L. Thorndike was a colleague supportive of her research findings.

The Modern (Ferrer) School of New York

Not all twentieth-century pedagogical reform was the work of moderate liberals. Even radical educators had read and adapted Froebelian educational reform through John Dewey. The Modern School of New York, better known as the “Ferrer School,” was the anarchist and feminist Emma Goldman’s tribute to the recently assassinated Catalan educational reformer Francisco Ferrer y Guardia. Founded in 1911, the school passionately supported free education. Instructors held a day school open to children of all classes. Froebel’s kindergarten was assimilated selectively into their curriculum.
The Ferrer School was the first anarchist working-class school for children in the United States. The Modern School’s influence overseas was Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy’s school at Yasnaya Polyana. The American faculty’s goal was to instill creative expression in children, and, in doing so, to liberate them from the excessively “institutionalized,” standardized elements of civilization. Child attendees flourished from progressive models of free play and interacted with great actors, artists, and activists of the day.

The Ferrer School lasted in New York only from 1911 to 1915. The faculty then migrated to Stelton, New Jersey. The school was forced to move to the countryside because municipal officials and the press perceived the adult libertarian activities as hostile, alienated from mainstream culture. The children were negatively affected by the increased tension between feasible school policies and anarchist polemics.

At the same time, the largely secularist Ferrer School’s faculty experienced friction with another radically forward-thinking form of child education. Their rival was the school system founded by the Italian Catholic Maria Montessori, which is still thriving today. Montessori Schools, as they are now called, reject the conventional grading system of measuring individual merit based on competitive numbers and letters.

By 1920 the Modern School became more moderate, and more closely resembled the pedagogical models of most other Progressive schools; Ferrer’s anarchist ideology was at last sacrificed for pragmatic purposes.

Robert Henri and George Bellows, avid supporters of both Goldman and Dewey, taught art to both children and adult attendees of the Ferrer School.\textsuperscript{364} John Sloan stated of Henri’s interaction with his young students, “He could make pupils with mere flickerings of talent blossom.”\textsuperscript{365} It seemed as if, as both an artist and a teacher, the painter gave renewed meaning to the Kindergarten concept: the “child’s garden.”

**Compulsory Education Legislation**

The struggle for children’s compulsory education, fueled by Progressive, socialist, and anarchist pedagogy, was long and difficult. Teachers and reformists fought the ethnic bias, racism, and classism of bosses: “Of course they lose school, but then these Polacks don’t care,” one boss told Lewis Hine, and another added, “it is better for these low people to be at work. They don’t want school. The children who grow up and can’t read and write are always better off than those who can because as soon as they get a smattering of education, they want to strike for higher wages.”\textsuperscript{366}

In 1917, the Smith-Hughes Act was passed. This reform bill demonstrated the continued union of labor restriction and compulsory education. It allotted one

\textsuperscript{364} Alexander Berkmann critiqued the current American school system, a “powerful instrument for the perpetuation of the present social order with all its injustices and inequalities,” by comparing the system to the Ferrer School at which Henri taught: “We try...to dispense with the stiff formalities...the teacher is not enthroned on a lofty platform, with a row of cowering youngsters...the basic principle was to make the school fit the child...the stronger the individual genius, the more it suffers from compulsion of any sort.”


million dollars to states that agreed to improve their public schools by providing vocational education programs. This was a child’s halfway meeting point between labor and school.367

**Other Societies and Institutions for Children’s Social Reform**

After the National Child Labor Committee was formed in 1904, a number of other notable societies and institutions arose, promoting children's welfare. Their impact was comprehensive, but most aimed to improve children's conditions of living and encourage better citizenship through directed recreational activities. Not surprisingly, these establishments also arose precisely when child labor reform photographers were fervently active, and when realist painters portrayed children in unprecedented numbers.

Among such establishments were: The Federated Boys Clubs, which later became The Boys and Girls Clubs of America, 1906; numerous “good hygiene” associations on the school and municipal levels, largely for the prevention of tuberculosis and other communicable diseases in children; the Boy Scouts of America, 1910 (and the Girl Scouts, 1912); and the Safety Institute of America, 1911.

Certain new societies for children’s welfare focused on highly specific, often gender-based, quandaries of child identity and children’s social rights. For instance, in 1910 the Mann Law passed, forbidding interstate transportation of girls and

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367 The issue remained one of class and ethnicity in the earliest stages of life since labor was usually the fate of the immigrant poor. Labor did not have an upwardly-mobile, assimilating influence. Instead, labor fostered a divisive power dynamic between bosses and workers of different national backgrounds, trapping young employees in dead-end jobs. Presumably, then, the Smith-Hughes Act appeased both the proponents of school’s white middle-class influence and of work's often ethnic experience.
women “for immoral purposes.” And Stanford University Professor Lewis Terman acknowledged that child intelligence must be measured based on separate criteria because the child mind is markedly different in nature from the adult mind. Terman developed the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test in 1916.

Perhaps the most historically significant among these new child advocacy institutions was the U.S. Children’s Bureau, 1912, directed by Julia Lanthrop. This was followed by the controversial Keating-Owen Act and finally, in 1919, the White House Conference on Child Welfare Standards. This last event marked the end of an epoch in which the role and rights of children was heatedly debated, because with it, such questions were provided standardized answers backed by law. The conference directly addressed child employment, children’s health and welfare, and medical care for infants and mothers.

This was not to be improved upon until a similar conference was held in 1930. The conference was followed by the Fair Labor Standards Act signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Although tragically, child labor and child sex trafficking remain pertinent issues even in the twenty-first century, particularly in the so-called “third world,” Roosevelt’s law established a standard that forbade employment of children under the age of sixteen. The Keating-Owen Act had at last reached fruition after one world war, and on the cusp of a second.

As we shall see, the relationships that photographers and painters shared with social reformers at the turn of the twentieth century varied. While photographers were often directly involved in politically moderate legislations and on-site protests against child labor, even serving as government employees, painters
worked more closely with anarchists, socialists, and educational reformers to create a more indirect and slightly ambivalent language of social reform. Even so, intersections between the two were numerous. Extremely close ties between Dewey and the Progressives and twentieth-century artists are numerous. Jacob Riis idolized Felix Adler, founder of the New York Ethical Culture School and sympathizer of Dewey. Lewis Hine worked at Adler’s Ethical Culture School. The painter Robert Henri read Dewey’s *The School and Society*, 1900. Henri and George Bellows taught at Emma Goldman’s Modern School of New York (The Ferrer School), where Dewey’s curriculum was utilized. Surely such close affinities will help elucidate early twentieth-century artists’ attitudes about childhood’s social role.

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CHAPTER VI

SOCIAL REFORM PHOTOGRAPHERS (ca. 1880-1915)

Social reform during the early twentieth century led to new forms of artistic expression. With particular directness, photographers became familiar with, and represented, the issues that troubled social reformers. These issues more often than not pivoted on the welfare of children.

We have now seen that there was an undercurrent of social reform in the work of photographers such as Clarence White, Gertrude Käsebier, and even Alfred Stieglitz, who represented the art photography movement. But whatever social consciousness they possessed was buried by issues of “Art for Art’s Sake.” Social reform photography as a militant statement was the product of a new, Progressive strain of social activism. Its seminal figure was the journalist and police photographer Jacob Riis, and his most prolific protégé was the National Child Labor photographer, Lewis Hine.

Riis’s and Hine’s imagery was often strikingly innovative, and even pioneered a new American aesthetic of unflinching starkness. Yet these photographers were even more unique in their aim: to catalyze positive social change, a goal that they found more important than artistic success.

369 Daile Kaplan puts it succinctly: “In the newly developed social welfare community, where scientifically trained social workers had begun to replace the rhetoric associated with charities workers, photography emerged as an important tool.” Photo Story: Selected Letters and Photographs of Lewis Hine. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992: xxvi.
This does not mean that Riis or Hine lacked artistic facility, nor deliberate strategies in representing abused, underprivileged children. On the contrary, their goals were ambitious, and their images illustrate the successes and pitfalls of making social reform a visual enterprise.

**European Antecedents**

American social reform photography definitively and permanently left the Victorian world, its contrivances, and its preconceptions behind. Even European photography aimed at scientific inquiry and social betterment was a primitive predecessor to the work of Jacob Riis. Despite its less “modern” quality, European documentary preceded American counterparts by only three decades. Only a few notable exceptions matched the tone of American documentary.

During the 1850’s-1860’s, the Pictorialist strain characterized most photography of children. These photographers willfully omitted social commentary and instead depicted nude or heavily costumed children posing as Classical immortals, fairies, heroes and heroines of British literature, and angels. Lewis Carroll and Julia Margaret Cameron are representative examples. If the social impulse struck a photographer, he was usually a man of another profession—most often science infused with the new Positivism—for whom photographs were illustrated support of whatever (sometimes dubious) thesis he championed.

Science and social reform suffered a murky partnership, wherein taxonomic mug shots of troubled or downtrodden subjects “proved” the efficacy of some experiment. For instance, during the 1850’s, Hugh Welch Diamond, a British
physician and founder of the Royal Photographic Society, took photographs of mental asylum patients for his medical research in order to pinpoint pathology in manner and physiognomy. The British medical journal *Lancet* promptly lauded his work as "the Art of Truth...the essential means of reproducing all forms and structures of which science seeks for delineation." Another physician, Thomas John Barnardo, created numbered identity cards with photographs of children in a "Home for Destitute Lads" that he himself had founded. Barnardo’s reformatory received a photography department in 1875 which he used to make 55,000 individual “portraits” of inhabitants. Barnardo’s supposed goal was to amass a record of concrete data about childhood poverty and crime, in an attempt to isolate the source of the children’s moral decay. However, Barnardo staged these photographs to be so posed and maudlin that they are little more factual than a ragamuffin in a children’s book illustration. Barnardo took a “before and after” shot of each boy in order to commercially showcase the moral and physical benefits of sending a child to his reformatory. In the end, Barnardo himself was legally charged with exploiting the children for money by placing them in staged settings and altering their actual dress and appearance to bolster his fund-raising campaigns.

Possibly the European photographer whose work most closely preceded American photography of the underprivileged was the Englishman John Thomson. Thomson actively worked a decade prior to, and contemporaneously with, Jacob Riis.

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What is crucial about Thomson’s method was that he was among the first in a
generation of proto-documentarians to recognize the social “Other”—a concept
recognized today by Post-Structuralists and Post-Colonialists. The “Other” refers to
the implicitly inferior, foreign half of an artificial social binary. The concept was not
just racial or national. The Other was also a person of a lower social class or
minority ethnicity (and also, sometimes, the opposite gender) within one’s native
society. And finally, as Thomson clearly noticed, the Other ran rampant in the
rapidly expanding industrialist city. In his most famous work, Street Life in London
(1876-7), Thomson and colleague Adolphe Smith took photographs of London’s
most wretched denizens, wrote accompanying prose, and captioned their specimens
with a mixture of lived observation, sensationalism, and moral speculation.
Thomson’s work, a kind of guidebook of London’s lurid street attractions, is an
important, albeit rough, predecessor to the groundbreaking, explicitly reformist
imagery that would be made by Jacob Riis, and, later, Lewis Hine—down to the use
of persuasive text-and-image combinations and a sociological perspective.

Jacob Riis

“We know the curse of child labor. Experience has taught us that it is loss, all loss, ever tending
downward...child-life and citizenship are lost; for the children of to-day are the men of tomorrow.”~
Jacob Riis, quoted in A Fierce Discontent by Michael McGerr, p. 107.

Jacob Riis never claimed to be an artist, nor did he attempt to grant
photography high-art status. He was instead explicitly interested in images that
galvanized positive change for the underprivileged. Yet curiously, few artists of the
nineteenth century can rival Riis for creating a mode of imagery that was new and visually original—one that created a largely new and modern artistic language.

**Background: The Early Career of Jacob Riis**

Born in Ribe, Denmark, in 1849, Riis was the third of fourteen children and the son of a Protestant schoolteacher. He apprenticed for a time to a carpenter, and emigrated to the United States in 1870 to do odd jobs in New York, Pennsylvania, and the Midwest. At age twenty-one Riis settled in New York City, where, his autobiography attests, he staunchly refused charity and wandered hungry and in search of work—which included a single hellish day as a coalminer.371

The passage Riis wrote about this mode of employment, a subject of great social and political contention at the turn of the twentieth century, is typical of the photographer. It is touching, tragic, and humorous, an appeal to human sympathy that masquerades as a “good Protestant’s” amateurish and plain-spoken testimony. Yet it is, in reality, skillfully calculated. Riis mentions going into the “bowels of the mountain,” ceilings that were “oozing water,” “nasty little oil lamps,” and an “oppressive darkness and silence,” only to juxtapose these with a comical description of his first experience with a donkey, which frightened him with its “demonic shriek.”372

In 1873, after briefly enlisting in the Danish Army, Riis became a newspaper journalist for the *South Brooklyn News*. He took the job hoping to earn enough

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372 Riis, 45.
money to woo his elusive sweetheart, Elizabeth Gjortz. But by 1877, having been promoted to the job of police reporter within six months of working for the *Tribune*, Riis began to take serious note of the abject conditions suffered by the urban poor.

In 1884 Riis worked for the Tenement House Commission. The head of this organization was Felix Adler, the founder of the New York Ethical Culture School, who would become a key member of the National Child Labor Committee and a hero of Lewis Hine. This connection whetted Riis’s appetite for social documentary.

As a result in 1887, as a result, Riis took photographers Richard Hoe Lawrence and Henry Piffard to the New York slums to photograph tenement-dwellers; by 1888, despite being, in his own words, “no good at all as a photographer,” he began to shoot images of the poor himself, and delivered his first slide lecture on the subject. By 1894 Riis’s photographs, taken between 1887 and 1892, were being regularly reproduced in *The Century* and *The Outlook*. By 1895 he had forged a lifelong friendship with police commissioner and future American president, Theodore Roosevelt. This friendship is even illustrated in Riis’s autobiography, with an 1894 drawing of the photographer seated on a butter tub in a tenement alley, while a stern Roosevelt approaches his dozing form.

While Riis stopped taking photographs after 1892, he continued to publish albums of his work after that date, including *The Battle With the Slum (A Ten Years’ War, 1900)*, 1902, and *Children of the Tenement (Out of Mulberry Street, 1898)*, 1903. He lectured using these images for over two decades and inspired the great figures of modern journalism.373 There are nine memorials, including municipal spaces and

373 Riis was for instance the hero of notables in the field, such as Lincoln Steffens.
public schools, named after Riis, and the United States Episcopal Church has honored him with a feast day on July 2.

**The Making of An American**

In 1901 Riis published his autobiography, *The Making of an American*, which, like most of his other work, became a bestseller. Riis’s intimate, conversational description of his early life vividly illustrates the roots of his social reform ideology and how it was transcribed into his photographs.

To begin with, in his exposition, Riis immediately aligns himself with progressive pedagogical methods. He lauds the enthralling prose of Charles Dickens, which details the life of the poor with both excitement and empathy. In turn, Jacob laments that his stern schoolmaster father was of the “old dispensation” of childrearing—that is, harsh and punitive. Indeed, one of Riis’s first colorful anecdotes is of a schoolmarm who was angry about his boyhood tardiness to the classroom. The “ogre” of a schoolmarm made her displeasure known by comparing schoolboys to pigs, showing Riis a sharp pair of shears, and declaring that all pigs had a slit in one ear as punishment for laziness.\(^{374}\) In reflection, Riis declares that “to help clean [indecent American schools] out was like getting square with the ogre that plagued my childhood.”\(^{375}\)

Riis champions a child’s freedom to imagine and daydream; he complains, “I hear of people nowadays who think it is not proper to tell children fairy-stories. I am sorry for these children. I wonder what they will give them instead. Algebra,

\(^{374}\) Riis, 4.

\(^{375}\) Riis, 5.
perhaps. Nice lot of counting machines we shall have running the century that is to
come!" As for locating the solution to the problem of treating children cruelly, and
forcing them to conform to age-old customs, Riis, a true Progressive, cites the public
school. He also prescribes a “rigid annual enrollment” to keep the public school’s
largely ethnic immigrant attendees accountable. He argues that a lack of personal
accountability, the result of being uprooted from old customs and standards, is what
makes second-generation American immigrant children unruly and violent: “We are
creatures of environment...a man everywhere is largely what his neighbors and his
children think him to be...government makes for our moral good too.” As a
traditional Old-World Protestant, but also as a new-fangled humanist, Riis believes
that a man needs to belong and be counted on, while always remaining purposeful
and industrious.

Furthermore, later in the same chapter, Riis asserts that compassion of the
sort that he experienced in his hometown led to classlessness, which is the
cornerstone of an ideal society. He judges that problems arise when people
would rather adhere to “traditional orthodoxy”—that is, unquestioned and long-
standing social conventions—than be kind to their less fortunate neighbors. There
could not be a more obvious indictment of the status quo or a sharper call to social
action.

The Legacy of Jacob Riis

376 Riis, 28.
377 Riis, 37.
378 Riis, 37.
379 Riis, 18-19.
In 1905 Riis joined the Charities Publications Committee and became a writer for *Charities and the Commons* (later *Survey*), another association that no doubt directly influenced Lewis Hine, who shot photographs in his early career for the same magazine. Indeed, later in his life Riis collected the work of younger reform photographers, and in his collection were a dozen prints Hine made in 1911 for *Century*.  

Riis’s work led to specific instances of social reform, the first of which, during the reform mayoralty of William R. Strong, was the demolishing of unsanitary New York tenements. Among these were the Mott Street Barracks, the source of haunting images of a mother and her naked children on a rooftop; Mulberry Bend (or “Death’s Thoroughfare”); and Gotham Court. He has also been credited with inspiring free Kindergartens in New York City, and Medicaid. This is probably ultimately due to a twenty-panel show of his work in New York in 1900. Riis’s most important public exhibition, which garnered a show of ten thousand New Yorkers in a mere two weeks, was his 1900 “Tenement House Exhibition,” organized by Lawrence Vellier. In direct response to this show, a New York Tenement House Department was formed in 1902 in order to evacuate the city’s worst tenements and file lawsuits against absentee landlords.

Riis’s 1914 obituary strangely failed to mention that he had ever been a photographer, but his social impact was undeniable: “Neither bits of unmediated

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381 Yochelson, *Jacob Riis*, appendix.
382 Yochelson, *Jacob Riis*, 14.
reality nor aesthetic constructions, [his photographs] are the unintended legacy of a man who called himself a photographer ‘after a fashion.’”

**Jacob Riis: The Photographs**

“Recently a man, well qualified to pass judgment, alluded to Mr. Jacob A. Riis as ‘the most useful citizen of New York.’ Those fellow citizens of Mr. Riis who best know his work will be most apt to agree with this statement. The countless evils which lurk in the dark corners of our civic institutions, which stalk abroad in the slums, and have their permanent abode in the crowded tenement houses, have met in Mr. Riis the most formidable opponent ever encountered by them in New York City.” ~Theodore Roosevelt, "Reform through Social Work: Some Forces that Tell for Decency in New York City, McClure’s Magazine, March 1901.

Riis took photographs of poor children and their living conditions in hopes of stirring enough horror and sympathy to “rescue” them. Two typical instances of Riis’s social reform photographs are *The Baby’s Playground* (1890, gelatin dry plate, Museum of the City of New York), and *Street Arabs* (1890, gelatin dry plate, Museum of the City of New York). In the former, a washed-out and ghostly exposure, an unsupervised infant wanders in a filthy tenement stairwell. The latter photograph looks like an elaboration of British Pictorialist Oscar Rejlander’s street urchin photographs, such as *Night in Town* (1860, albumen silver print, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York). In Riis’s exposure, three little boys huddle in the cold outdoors trying to sleep, wearing rags. A social pioneer, Riis clearly asserts that the downtrodden are victims, who suffer based upon detrimental environment, not innate moral shortcomings.

In many cases, the amateurishness of Riis’s work ironically makes it powerful, and even sets the stage for future innovations in the American artistic language. Many later painters, such as Edward Hopper, could not have, for instance,  

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383 Yochelson, *Jacob Riis*, 15.
depicted eerily bare human interiors without Riis’s stark photographic precedent: the dirty and weary poor depicted in raking light and shadow, surrounded by tenement slum walls. Riis’s photographs took real events and heightened the human awareness of deplorable circumstances which even actually witnessing such things could not reproduce so vividly. There is something hyper-real about his blunt aesthetic and its record of visual minutiae—even clutter. This creates a sense of haphazardness: it feels as though Riis was snapping quick moments inside a dangerous and chaotic environment, instead of taking hours meticulously posing his subjects (as he truly did). It also conveys that Riis was trying to provide brutally honest information about the circumstances of poor children.

Riis’s photographs were notably produced at the same time as markedly more diplomatic, saccharine paintings of underprivileged children. Interestingly, Riis achieves a superior sense of verity over contemporaneous painters because of his inexperience with new camera technology. Thus photography quire unintentionally produced a new aesthetic of social consciousness in the depiction of children.

For instance, Riis’s Bootblacks and Newsies Shooting Craps (1894, gelatin dry plate, Museum of the City of New York), portrays a menacing man in a fedora, hands in coat pockets, leaning against a cobblestone wall that recedes in a sharp diagonal down an alley, watching five small boys playing their vice-inducing game. One boy stands like the man, also overseeing the game, also with his hands in his pockets. The rest of the boys squat over the game, thoroughly engrossed. All of the youngsters are dressed in long-sleeved shirts and suspenders. The gristle of the
environment; the dank shadow cast over the children’s huddled activity and the tiny strip of natural sunlight let in by the high walls; the closed door at the end of the alley and the man closing off the children's exit: all these elements create a sense of tension, even claustrophobia. The originality of Riis’s approach becomes apparent when compared to the work of a sentimental genre painter, John George Brown.

Next to Riis’s *Bootblacks and Newsboys Shooting Craps*, John George Brown's limitless paintings of clean-cut, robust newsboys and bootblacks between the 1870's and early 1900's—such as *A Tough Story* (1886, oil on canvas, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina), *The Card Trick* (1880-89), or *The Street Dance* (1883, oil on canvas, Private Collection)—convey no such unease. These paintings generally appear as charming *tableaux vivantes* against a solid studio background rid of social context. But neither Brown nor Riis was exactly a "liar" about the social conditions of his age.

Brown viewed the plight of urban poor children romantically, as an urban novelty. For instance, at the end of his career, he complained to a *New York Times* reporter about the dwindling number of street child models that he could find. "Where once I had but to start for a walk along Broadway to find ten at my heels," he claimed, by the 1900's meddling social reformers had removed children from the street trades and rid New York City of "her picturesqueness and quaintness...and charm."384 Brown further called his former models "Julius Caesars" of the street,

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384 *The New York Times*, November 17, 1912. It should be noted that Brown’s very complaint that urban child labor had been eradicated and his models depleted by social reform and compulsory education laws betrays an inaccurate understanding of actual events. The newsboy street trade in particular was almost impossible for the National Child Labor Committee to eliminate due to the “self-employed” nature of the job and the difficulty in regulating and penalizing underage newspaper vendors and their suppliers. Reformists tried all manner of extreme measures from newsboys’
while he called government-aided children “beggars” and “little slaves.” Brown hired either children who were well-tended to pose for his paintings or he hired urchins and ordered his studio assistants to wash them clean to make them suitable models. Art historians have uncovered the names and identities of Brown’s favorite models, such as Paddy Ryan. Their biographies further prove that Brown attempted to portray the life of street gamins using children who were never so unfortunate. Brown’s selective vision of underprivileged children was well-intended albeit slightly delusional: one of “self-reliant individuals - reliant on themselves as ‘entrepreneurs’ in an economic sense, but also self-reliant in forming community with one another for their mutual advantage.”

But Riis cannot in turn be portrayed as a heroic artist who never altered what he witnessed. Considering the technical limitations that he faced, namely operating before an era of instant photography, his work is extraordinarily convincing—yet it was still staged. He also framed children selectively, in order to create maximal shock and sympathy and to precipitate positive change for the young—and like Brown, he did so at a price. While Brown portrayed children with total agency over their circumstances, Riis portrayed them with none. There is evidence that Riis elaborately posed his child subjects, requesting that they exaggerate an appearance of wretched defeat. This began a tradition that photographic historians and semioticians have criticized as “forcing social victims to

associations to outfitting children with badges labeling the name and “turf” of each newsboy. The battle was ongoing well into the 1930’s.

385 Ibid
386 See both Martha Hoppin and Mary Sayre Haverstock
387 Ibid
emit signs”—that is, aiding social victims by trapping them in a representation of total disempowerment.388

Both artists were producing illustrations of particular rhetoric: While Brown followed Charles Loring Brace and Horatio Alger, Riis followed Teddy Roosevelt and Felix Adler. In other words, neither type of image of underprivileged childhood produced in the late nineteenth century may be called “truthful” in the most objective sense.389

It is clear that Riis inspired later documentary photographers—notably, Lewis Hine—with images of certain child subjects. In turn, these photographers were part of a thriving visual dialogue with painters. *Minding the Baby* (1898, gelatin silver transparency, Museum of the City of New York), is an obvious predecessor to Hine’s *Little Mother in the Steel District*, Pittsburgh (1909, gelatin silver print, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York), which in turn has striking affinities with George Luks’s oil painting *The Little Madonna* (ca. 1907, oil

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388 Photographic historians have grappled with the very conceptualization of photographic “truth” and its basic fictitiousness, particularly in the representation of disenfranchised social groups, since the 1970s. See John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographs and Histories*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, and Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Art and Society in the Gilded Age*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1982. See also Trachtenberg’s extensive literature on the function of the documentary photographic “archive.”

389 In 1999, D.H. Mader’s essay "J.G. Brown’s Boys," published in *Gayme*, Vol. 4;1, eloquently summarized this issue: "Or, looking another direction, one can compare Brown’s boys with photographs by Jacob Riis or Lewis Hine of poor and working children at the turn of the century; looking at these, one might suspect Brown of wholesale counterfeiting of reality. But it is precisely here that a note of caution must be sounded. Riis and Hine were choosing their subjects with a deliberate eye to shocking the viewer and motivating reform. While they were not falsifying reality, they were quite consciously turning their camera on subjects which best suited their aims. Brown, for his part, was not attempting to represent all working children, but rather a group who were in some sense the ‘aristocracy’ of the streets. They are neither beggars nor the children of the sweatshops; they were in a very real sense “young entrepreneurs,” something reflected in their own opinions of themselves: for instance, one match-seller who used the facilities of the Newsboy’s Lodging House on Park Place in New York is reputed to have introduced himself to Horatio Alger as “a timber merchant, in a small way.”
on canvas, Addison Gallery of American Art, Philips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts). In the photographs, a little girl minds a living infant sibling. In the Luks painting, she holds up a doll. Dolls were a popular prop of genteel portrait painting during the late nineteenth century, such as by John Singer Sargent, but this child veiled in shadow in a dark alley can hardly be considered privileged. Here Luks underscores the believed universality of a child’s need to play, but he turns the iconography of the doll ironically on its head. The doll alludes to a social practice of the working poor that, far from play, placed responsibility prematurely in children’s hands. This social practice, the work of the “Little Mother,” was a pervasive form of child labor and neglect: parents who were absent working exorbitant hours could not help but make their daughters (and, occasionally, sons) take care of infant siblings. At the very least, it is clear that Riis’s exposé work brought this subject to the attention of later artists.

**The Role of Improved Camera Technology: What is Groundbreaking**

At the time of his friendship with Teddy Roosevelt, Riis became a muckracking journalist. As we have seen, he worked for the *New York Tribune,* *Scribner’s,* and the *New York Evening Sun,* with a sudden and overwhelming fame that maintains his status as a pioneer in his field. How did this transpire?

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390 "[Jacob Riis] was one of my truest and closest friends. I have ever prized the fact that once, in speaking of me, he said, ‘since I met him he has been my brother.’ I have not only admired and respected him beyond measure, but I have loved him dearly...and I mourn him as if he were one of my own family.” -Theodore Roosevelt, Introduction to *Making of An American.*
Improvements in photographic technique at the end of the nineteenth century provided two of the reasons why Riis became the first modern photo-journalist.

The first was magnesium flash powder, invented by Adolf Miethe and Johannes Gaedicke. Riis discovered this subject-broadening tool in 1887. The flash powder was a mixture of magnesium, potassium chlorate and antimony sulfide. Initially, users had to ignite it using a pistol-like firing device simultaneous to the opening of the camera shutter. Riis eventually developed a marginally safer process by which he lit the concoction on a frying pan.

Regardless of the method, Riis quickly realized that with this source of artificial lighting, he could access the dimly lit quarters of the urban slums, the site of the crime, poverty, abuse, and neglect that he wished to uncover. Because he found words alone “made no impression” on the social conscience of his target audience, he would now use a camera to expose social ill.391

The second force behind Riis’s sudden phenomenally powerful influence was dissemination: Riis’s most famous album of social reform photography, How the Other Half Lives, was the first book to be illustrated by the half-tone process. This technique, originally the invention of William Henry Fox Talbot, became a major modern form of mass visual reproduction. 392 The basic principle of the halftone process is to reduce gradations of blacks, whites, and grays to a dialogue between

392 Ironically the half-tone process was also one reason for the cessation of newspaper and magazine illustration: the major mode of employment for many painters of the Ash Can School, who would be the next significant group of artists to portray underprivileged childhood.
tiny black dots, all of the same dark value, and white space. Essentially, the closer
together the dots become in a given space of white, the darker the human eye
perceives that space, and vice versa. An entire gamut of grays can be simulated this
way. Riis’s photographs were directly transcribed onto a metal plate
simultaneously with accompanying text. Images and words were inked together
and printed onto paper. Half-tones eliminated the arduous process of illustrating
text by hand and printing the illustrations separately.

Eventually, the half-tone process would end the careers of newspaper
illustrators—including many members of the Ashcan School—but it was infinitely
fortuitous for nascent photo-journalists. It also redefined the aesthetic of “truth,”
uncovering for the first time the visual shorthand and dramatic embellishment of
sketch-journalists, for it introduced the possibility of blunt, all-inclusive reportage.
Muckrakers, social crusaders, and members of the sensationalist press became
quickly enamored with Riis’s variety of visual documentary. It was easy, if
misleading, to believe that the camera lens was a more “honest” conveyer of social
reality, stripped of bias and, therefore, immeasurably shocking.

Today, our awareness of the mediation in visual “data” borders on cynicism.
But even now, photographs still more convincingly convey the human condition of
bygone times. Paintings and drawings fall short in underscoring the severe gap
between wealth and poverty during the Gilded Age. Rather, one must compare
photographs. For instance, John H. Tarbell’s photograph (1900) of the Vanderbilt
family’s brand-new Biltmore Estate, featuring a stunning profile of the mansion and
an exquisite reflecting pool, suddenly becomes grotesquely opulent next to Riis’s
tenement photographs. Many such images are especially horrific juxtaposed with the Tarbell. For example, there is Riis’s bare and gloomy *Bunks in a Seven-Cent Lodging House, Pall Street* (1887, gelatin dry plate, Museum of the City of New York); or the famous image of bleary-eyed Italians literally sleeping on top of each other, *Lodgers in a Crowded Bayard Street Tenement, Five Cents a Spot* (1889, gelatin dry plate, Museum of the City of New York). Perhaps the most shocking comparison is with *Roof of the Mott Street Barracks* (ca. 1890, gelatin dry plate, Museum of the City of New York). This photograph portrays a squinting dark-skinned woman, her two naked, emaciated infants, and a gaggle of other children loitering on the roof of a tenement. Riis reports that the only other place they could play was downstairs in a space surrounded by frequently flooded, reeking outhouses.\(^{393}\)

Because of the half-tone process, Riis’s images exposed these unsustainable conditions, which took place as rampantly as the glamorous excess of steel and railroad magnates. These comparisons underscored and indicted such excess.

The cost-effectiveness of half-tones was attractive to *Scribner’s*. The magazine had published *How the Other Half Lives* as an 18-page article in Christmas 1889 using aesthetically reductive single-line drawings copied from the photographs. The cheap mass production combined with the means to “capture, rather than mask, the unique, disconcerting graphic qualities of the photographs” rendered the book a best-seller.\(^{394}\) Its success led to its immediate sequel, *Children of the Poor*, 1892, which solely focused upon slum children. Not only could Riis use

\(^{393}\) Yochelson, *Jacob Riis*, 58.

\(^{394}\) Yochelson, *Jacob Riis*, 11.
images to add poignant immediacy to social concepts—he could also do so on a widely distributed scale.

While Riis’s photographs were reproduced as half-tones, so were drawings illustrating the text that he wrote. The resultant product was a unique documentary collage in which photographs and traditional art stood side by side to promote social betterment. Contributing illustrators were often unexpected. One example was the Ohioan Kenyon Cox. Cox was an academic conservative who ordinarily decried art of contemporaneous subjects as shock-value campaigns by inferior artists. He ordinarily painted smooth-brushed, timeless allegories of beautiful women in Classical attire personifying utopian social values. Cox’s unlikely involvement in a socially conscious visual project proves that patterns of reform and anti-reform were not particularly clear-cut at the turn of the twentieth century.

Champions of social betterment often occupied the progressive vanguard on one social issue, while in other ways remaining militantly reactionary. Artists were no exception.

Riis was also one such self-contradictory individual. He traveled the country delivering lanternslide lectures in churches and courthouses in passionate defense of the poor—not an easy venue, as the churches he approached often rejected his request to lecture, in fear of offending landlords and the gentry.395 Yet despite his tireless crusading, Riis often referred to these very subjects as “human rodents,” “rats,” and “vermin.”396 His harsh racial stereotyping is uncomfortable by standards

395 Riis ultimately had to bed the City Mission Society, the Broadway Tabernacle Church, and a clerk in the New York Health Department to sponsor his debut onto the lecturing scene. Alland, 29.
396 Yochelson, Jacob Riis, 88.
of modern political correctness; for instance, according to one of Riis’s early biographers, Maren Stange, he once stated, "The Jews are nervous and inquisitive, the Orientals are sinister, the Italians are unsanitary.” Much of this seeming self-contradiction has to do with Riis’s background, which mixed conservative religious tropes of the earlier nineteenth century with early Progressive sociology, as well as the oscillating charity and xenophobia of the Progressive Era.

**Jacob Riis: The Living Conditions of His Subjects and the Rhetoric of Representing Them**

It was not just improvements in camera technology, but also the evolving rhetoric of poverty and social victimization that Riis utilized in a profoundly new way.

Riis had six children of his own who never had to suffer what his photographic subjects endured. These subjects, the waifs and “guttersnipes” of the tenements, were not a new facet of American visual culture, but the way that Riis portrayed them was new. Riis was the father of a generation of artists who attentively and earnestly portrayed underprivileged life in the American city. Riis and descendents portrayed a world robbed of consolingly wholesome triteness, openly admitting the unsolved crises of urban growth.

Underprivileged children lived in American cities far before Jacob Riis’s time. But Riis’s work had impact because it was made during a shift in *perceiving* the urban novelty of the “street child,” a shift that, as we have seen, began between the 1830s and 1860 with literature such as Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* and Charles
Loring Brace’s *Dangerous Classes of New York.* In the 1880s-1890s, the street child so prevalent in Riis’s photographs devolved from a figure of proactive individualism—epitomized in, for instance, the work of Horatio Alger—to a figure of menace and a symptom of moral decay. Timothy G. Gilfoyle writes:

“For over half a century, the street child was an inescapable fixture of the nineteenth-century industrial city. Lacking formal education, adult supervision, and sometimes even a home, such youths were derided as ‘rats,’ ‘gamins,’ ‘Arabs,’ ‘urchins,’ and ‘gutter-snipes’....[and] represented the logical nightmare—the replacement of community, familial and even spiritual bonds with the rootless individualism of the nomad.”

The conditions of living for this target group of American children were indeed deplorable. Infant mortality rates in New York, Chicago, and New Orleans, due to overcrowding and poor sanitation, were shockingly high. Summer deaths caused by dehydration from cholera and other diarrheal diseases were commoner in children over the age of two, but also occurred with children two years of age or younger due to hyperthermia or improper storage of cow’s milk used in place of breastfeeding. This was even the standard at children’s hospitals, such as New York’s Foundling Hospital, Ward’s Island Hospital, Infant’s Hospital at Randall

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397 It should be noted that Brace epitomizes the notion of the “ambivalent” social reformer who existed before the twentieth century and its new faith in objective social sciences; as Gilfoyle writes, Brace “articulated the paradoxical stereotypes of the street child: a cute, fastidious urchin with nascent entrepreneurial values and pragmatic wits, and a corrupted, irredeemable devil full of evil motives and selfish desires, the dangerous class writ small.” Timothy G. Gilfoyle, “Street Rats and Gutter-Snipes: Child Pickpockets and Street Culture in New York City, 1850-1900,” in *Journal of Social History*: 855. This ambivalent reception of underprivileged children and disobedient children was never fully exorcised from American images of childhood, and certainly resurfaces in heterogeneous ways for the Ash Can School.


Island, and Nursery and Child’s Hospital.\textsuperscript{400} Conditions did not improve until modern sanitation standards were practiced—such as the invention and distribution of simulated milk by Henry J. Gerstenberger, a medical professor at Western Reserve College in Cleveland, Ohio.\textsuperscript{401}

The lives of Riis’s street children were also highly complex.

Sweatshops and factories replaced apprenticeships, and children migrated to these new places of employment. What family businesses remained were still forced to put their young children to work in order to make ends meet. In the better cases, entrepreneurial fathers tried to portray their children’s work as a matter of filial pride in a trade brought over from the Old World. For instance, Rose Cohen, a Jewish immigrant working in New York City’s booming garment industry, wrote in her memoirs as a child seamstress:

“[When we entered our shop], I saw five or six men...The men turned and looked at us when we passed. I felt scared and stumbled. One man asked in surprise: 'Avrom, is this your daughter? Why, she is only a little girl!' My father smiled. 'Yes,,' he said, 'but wait till you see her sew.'” \textsuperscript{402}

Shortly thereafter, though, Rose confesses,

“When I at last heard the noon whistle from the big paper factory on Water Street I used to bend my head low to hide the joy. I felt ashamed at my eagerness to leave off work. When I came into the street...I felt dazed by the light and the air and the joy of knowing that I was free.” \textsuperscript{403}

\textsuperscript{400} Condran and Lentzner, 327.
\textsuperscript{401} \textit{Think: The Magazine of Case Western Reserve University} (Fall/Winter 2011): 32.
\textsuperscript{402} Fass and Mason, Rose Cohen, “A Child Worker in the Garment Industry,” a 1918 autobiography of a Jewish immigrant in New York City’s garment industry.
\textsuperscript{403} Ibid.
Rose’s emotional conflict between taking pride in her family’s business, and enjoying the liberties of childhood, is poignant. It characterizes the psychological quandary faced by many of Riis’s subjects, both parents and children. It also demonstrates that one of the most prevalent “legitimate” urban American industries at the time was in garment manufacture, a business that could be set up with relatively little personal expenditure beyond a sewing machine and a family of willing hands.

Other children found illegal means, such as pickpocketing, healthier and more lucrative. Their crimes were impossible to regulate because they were almost never witnessed. Street gamins formed surrogate “families” which have been deemed “an oppositional subculture” to the middle-class America of Riis’s time. Even within Riis’s stomping grounds, New York City, clusters of street children lived individuated lives within groups called “mobs,” formed “beats” (turfs), and had unofficial social hierarchies comprised of various roles in theft operations. The two primary roles were the “wire/pick/bugger/tool” (the person who conducted the theft), and the “stall” (the person who “distracted or jostled” the victim of the theft). As of 1886 over 12,000 homeless children wandered the streets of New York City alone.

Children often took pride in their ability to survive, and even thrive, on the streets. For instance, a child pickpocket, Larry Caulfield, declared with amusement

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404 Gilfoyle, 854. As child thief Sophie Lyons bragged, pickpockets made over $100 per day compensating for lost incomes after their fathers died or deserted during the Civil War, and this way of living became professionalized in future generations.
405 Gilfoyle, 863.
406 Gilfoyle, 855.
that, as a child, he could take advantage of an illusion of harmlessness. He was able to get close to people's wallets, or "leathers," especially rich women's, in a way that no adult male could.\textsuperscript{407} Indeed, as David Nasaw has noted of street children and child laborers, "There was something irresistible about innocent-looking children trying so hard to earn money. The incongruity between their size and salesmanship attracted customers."\textsuperscript{408}

In 1854 eighty percent of felony indictments and fifty percent of petty offenses in New York were committed by minors under 21 years old. Interestingly, though Riis and his peers blamed immigrant-born children for these crimes, an 1876 repeat of this same study reported that 82 percent of the child thieves were native-born.\textsuperscript{409} The confusion may have arisen partially from the fact that many child pickpockets deliberately memorized the dialects of immigrants and foreign-born police officers in order to blend into ethnic neighborhoods while conducting their business.\textsuperscript{410} And contrary to popular stereotypes, most of these children, regularly abandoned by their parents, lived together and, though impoverished, were not homeless.

Perhaps the most densely-populated home for street children in New York was The Bowery. Most of the street children appeared to be male, but there were numerous girls in the newspaper purchase-and-resale profession, or "newsgirls."

\textsuperscript{407} Gilfoyle, 857.
\textsuperscript{408} David Nasaw, "Children at Work in the City," in Fass and Mason, \textit{Childhood in America}, 2000: Working Children.
\textsuperscript{409} Gilfoyle, 859.
\textsuperscript{410} Nasaw in Fass and Mason.
To amend these conditions, local governments enlisted many private agencies, such as the Newsboys Lodging Houses of the Children’s Aid Society. The notion of the government actively rectifying social ill did not arise until the twentieth century. Thus private charities remained the primary aids to the poor, and it was to these people’s sentiments that Riis catered.

Riis himself wrote the most about two specific types of social ill perpetuated upon children. The first was the “padrone system,” wherein foreign middlemen abducted children from the Neapolitan Alps and surrounding areas and forced them into indentured servitude in North America. The second was the “baby farms” network, essentially a system of child abuse, neglect, or even infanticide for money. But Riis’s writing was prolific and also covered numerous other topics of child exploitation. He was among the first to emphasize that “the special vulnerability of the child,” a thriving nineteenth-century trope, “resulted in the recognition that not all children are equally well cared for...the responsibility for them may well lie outside the family.” He also habitually demonized impoverished parents, but only after disclaiming that their circumstances drove

\[411\] Allegedly baby farmers are individuals who take two to four illegitimate children under their roof and “give them sour milk and paregoric until they starve to death,” then get inexperienced or crooked medical doctors to sign a certificate to the board of health to say the children died of “inanition.” This is an emotionally heated recount of a Victorian-era terminology and practice of a mother giving away bastard offspring to strangers who served as guardians and wet nurses, for pay. Because the practice was so riddled with poor childcare and lack of actual supervision, the pejorative “baby farming” came to be assigned to it. In some cases it is deserved: actual infanticide was reported to occur and led to the hanging of these surrogate “mothers,” such as, famously in Britain contemporaneous to Riis’s writing, Margaret Waters and Amelia Dyer (executed 1870 and 1896, respectively). Particularly in the case of lump-sum adoptions, it was more profitable for the baby farmer if the infant or child she adopted died, since the small payment could not cover the care of the child for long. In Britain several laws were passed to regulate baby farming (and one wonders how this may have been modeled by American legislators): The Infant Life Protection Act, 1872; the Children Act in 1908.

them to monstrous behaviors. These behaviors were, while not acceptable, understandable.

Indeed, Riis wrote long diatribes concerning infant mortality rates, in his “Waifs of the City’s Slums,” 1890, a lurid brochure of New York nightmare-tourism. Riis especially railed against “poverty and want,” descriptive nouns which closely resemble two characters in Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (1843). The characters are the personifications of Ignorance and Want: two gaunt, bedraggled children cowering under the robes of Christmas Present. Confronting the anti-philanthropic Ebenezer Scrooge with these figures, the St. Nicholas-like Ghost calls them greatest threat to human civilization. An adherent to a similar philosophy, Riis warned that poverty and want “smothered the instinct of motherhood” and led to infant abandonment.\(^{413}\) He accused medical students of dissecting the bodies of dead foundlings: the affluent classes dehumanized children of the poor to such an extent that they better served the cold science of money-grubbing young doctors. Riis castigated particular charitable institutions such as Randall Island Infants’ Hospital for permitting this and other sub-standard practices. He also criticized the St. Irene’s Asylum, whose female employees benefited from child abandonment by earning a wage as wet nurses. At the same time he acknowledged the crisis of the women who nursed the foundlings, who had babies of their own who were starving.

**Riis: a Summary**

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\(^{413}\) Riis, cited in Fass and Mason.
As a key figure in the history of children’s social reform, Riis has a paradoxical role. Riis was indeed a seminal figure. But it is important to note that he remained, in many ways, a social conservative and an exemplar of religious, charity-based reform. As a result his mode of depicting underprivileged children was not always progressive, and his work is sometimes obviously artificial—a conundrum that would characterize later efforts of kind, such as Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell’s collaborations during the Great Depression on the rural American poor for Life. This “burden of representation” emerges from the fact that Riis had to create a context in which an “other half” existed for the middle-class to patronize. And notably, Riis himself was a product of the middle-class. His images are full of easily recognizable cultural types who are simultaneously victimized and menacing.\footnote{See Keith Gandal, The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.} Showing Their Trick, Hell’s Kitchen Boys, New York (1887, gelatin silver transparency, Museum of the City of New York), featuring children who are both desperate and aggressive, and stiffly posed, is one example. Riis entirely staged the incident, asking three boys to hover over another youngster whom they had “pick-pocketed,” while a fourth boy looked on, against a wooden wall with graffiti.

Taken as a whole, Riis’s work combines stark sincerity with a Victorian-Era rhetoric that was laden with concepts of the “deserving poor” and the “social menace,” roles that his subjects played simultaneously. But due to the crude state of camera and flash technology, Riis’s images, clumsy and unpolished, enhanced the photographer’s claim to “truthful evidence” of what poor slum children suffered.
Lewis Hine

Lewis Hine was the first photographer to self-identify as a creator of “social photography.” As the previous texts suggest, he was also among the first generation of photographers tasked to galvanize social reform on behalf of children when childhood was being totally redefined.

The nineteenth-century schema of youth pictured by genteel America, and exploited by Jacob Riis, was changing. Riis had been the first to blame a detrimental environment for the menace, and tragedy, of street children, but he had fully utilized the trope of the “precious and innocent angel” in doing so. And though he was undeniably progressive, his decisions were governed by a conservative Protestant ideology firmly rooted in the nineteenth century.415

Riis’s view of children did not become obsolete in the early twentieth century. But around this time, American culture underwent another struggle to define childhood as a discrete stage of human development. The role of the child, not only as a precious and priceless being, became also the role of a social tool, almost a propagandistic mascot of American society’s potential to fail or thrive. This

415 Twenty-first century political correctness indeed provokes us to scorn Riis’s methods—Riis, a conservative Lutheran who “had little faith in the government to correct social ills, arguing instead for Christian charity,” employed racial and ethnic stereotypes to appeal to wealthy benefactors, prompting inevitable negative comparison to subsequent Progressive documentarians, most frequently Lewis Hine. For instance, citing Bonnie Yochelson, Sewell Chan of the New York Times writes, “Ms. Yochelson debunks what she views as some of the misconceptions that have surrounded Riis. He was by his own account ‘a photographer after a fashion,’ not a professional. It was the Progressives, not Riis, who truly pioneered the tradition of documentary photography. And although Riis traveled in the same reform circles as the great photographer Lewis Hine, it was Hine who subscribed to the Progressive faith in science and the ability of government expertise to address social problems.” New York Times City Room February 28, 2008. Despite this fact of contemporary visual reception, it is important for social art historians to remember to consider Riis as a man of his time, by which standards he was quite forward-thinking.
was probably due to two broader social changes. The first was the increasing heterogeneity of densely populated American cities, with resulting frictions between starkly differing cultures. The second was the birth of the modern social sciences (anthropology, archaeology, economics, psychology, modern history, and sociology), seen as the means to deal with these frictions. Sociologists such as William James, G. Stanley Hall, and John Dewey mandated that the custodians of the young condition children early to become good citizens. These same intellectuals insisted upon perceiving social victims as specimens or positivistic data.416

Now, the basic nature of children, the basic rights inherent to their age, once the topic of philosophical debate within the pages of provocative novels and children’s literature, became controversial on an explicitly socio-political level. By controversial, I mean in the most strident sense.

At the same time, the fate of a particular youth demographic became a central social concern. The demographic in question was underprivileged immigrant children: child laborers. Child labor is perhaps the most significant subject in Lewis Hine’s career.

Hine’s challenge was to portray laboring children as convincingly authentic and sympathetic underdogs despite the many questions being debated. He had to grapple with complicated issues of visual representation that were linked to the dilemma of defining childhood itself. He had to portray children truthfully—

416 Kate Sampsell Willmann even suggests that one can understand the close ideological relationship between William James and Lewis Hine, and Hine’s burning impulse to be a kind of visual social scientist, by examining their activist descendents during the 1930’s, Rexford Tugwell and FSA head Roy Stryker. She bolsters this claim by reporting that Hine once stated William James’s “Moral Equivalent of War” was his “credo.” Willmann, 9.
children who were sometimes happy to be cogs in the system of child labor and proud of their “independence.” In such a context, a child who was pictured as smiling, healthy, or self-sufficient could be a dilemma of visual representation, for Hine must neither victimize his subjects nor diminish the magnitude of their personal struggles.

Hine produced aesthetically beautiful portraits full of pathos and strong personalities. He also produced specimens whose individuality is subordinated to prove a social point. He sought to show that children were self-sufficient, industrious, innocent, experienced, victimized, individual, and part of a larger trend of social injustice, all at once. This was an impossible, self-contradictory goal, and yet his efforts produced some of history’s most haunting images of children robbed of childhood. Luckily for Hine, in only two decades great advances were also made in camera technology, assisting his mission; for instance, faster lenses were invented, magnesium flash powder improved in forms of execution, and Hine’s chosen camera type, the hand-held 5 X 7 inch box camera, was standardized.

There are surprisingly few focused studies of specific elements of Hine’s work. Most scholarship on Hine is weighed down by forays into Postmodern theories about the function of the visual “archive” and the problems inherent to “objective” documentary, observations which are certainly indispensable, but are not sufficient as historical or visual studies.
The lack of such studies is certainly not due to a lack of raw material, but rather, an overabundance. The Library of Congress possesses 5,132 photographs by Lewis Hine. 417

It would be quixotic to attempt a comprehensive analysis of Hine’s images of child labor and social reform. Instead, I have chronologically detailed individual episodes in Hine’s career in which key photographs a) represent a specific, extensively documented form of child labor and b) in some way form the visual basis of contemporaneous paintings. One learns much about the American child’s social role in the translation between “straightforward” documentary and “realist” painting, both of which in fact took considerable artistic license to promote the artists’ own view of youth.

Background

Born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin in 1874, Hine was himself a laboring child, an experience he never forgot.418 Being a Wisconsin native destined Hine to be a documentarian on behalf of children as the state was a forerunner in progressive child education; indeed, Hine met Frank Manny, principal of the State Normal School

417 There is a massive online archive of Lewis Hine works in construction called the “Lewis Hine Project,” found here http://www.morningsonmaplestreet.com/lewishine.html. The site provides links to the Library of Congress as well as numerous other image databanks, and was covered by a National Public Radio segment. This is a rich new resource to be investigated.

418 In biographical notes that Hine composed in 1940 as a “resume” to accompany an application to the Guggenheim Foundation, he wrote of his child labor experience: “Parents kept a restaurant until 1890—they, my older sister & I lived upstairs. Finished grammar school, 1890, and went to work in upholstering factory until late 1893. Depression closed factory and I had long periods of unemployment which I filled up with handy work such as cutting & splitting firewood, delivering bundles for local cut-rate clothing stores and a small department store. Sold water filters from door to door. Was employed by local bank first as janitor, then collection clerk, hounding merchants who had drafts drawn upon them for delinquent accounts…” Daile Kaplan, ed. Photo Story: Selected Letters and Photographs of Lewis Hine. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992: 177.
in Oshkosh, while working there as a sweeper, and was encouraged by Manny to attend the University of Chicago alongside pedagogical pioneers John Dewey and Ella Flagg Young. Subsequently trained at Columbia University as a sociologist, Hine became a teacher at New York Ethical Culture School through Manny, by then its principal, in 1901. This school had been founded in 1878 by Felix Adler, who was a devotee of the Kindergarten movement, the founder of the National Child Labor Committee, and Jacob Riis’s idol. Here Hine also educated important future documentarians such as Paul Strand, who is too often solely acknowledged as the protégé of Alfred Stieglitz.

Though he never once mentioned his predecessor in print, Hine did much to further the tradition that Jacob Riis forged. His first documentary was a moving album of Ellis Island immigrants facing their bewilder ing new nation. He contributed freelance articles about the educational power of photographs to *The Elementary School Teacher, The Outlook*, and the *Photographic Times*.

Simultaneously, during 1906-1907, under the employ of the Russell Sage Foundation, Hine worked on the groundbreaking Pittsburgh Survey. He assembled both ordinary prints and photomontages of exploited working-class families (1906-08). Hine sold these photographs to Paul Kellogg, editor of *Charities and Commons*, which became *The Survey*, as the magazine’s first staff photographer. Though he had contributed negatives to the National Child Labor Committee unofficially since

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419 Major child labor albums by Hine which were part of *Survey* included: a collaborative project with Lillian Wald (best known for *The House on Henry Street*, which is in a vein similar to Helen Campbell’s *Darkness and Daylight* series which, according to Marianne Doeze ma, so influenced painters of the *Ashcan School*), Mary Dreier, and Frances Kellor concerning the living and working conditions of immigrants who constructed the Ashokan Dam, a water-supply system of New York City; “Roving Children,” an insert about immigrant children; and early photomontage works of child laborers that Hine called “Time Exposures.”
1904, in 1908 Hine became a full-time staff photographer. Hine made an enormous photographic record that uncovered social ill against children—social ill that governmental aid could rectify.

During World War I, Hine worked for the Red Cross taking field photographs. During the 1920's he produced heroic, emblematic imagery of physically ideal proletarian men controlling industrial machinery—as powerful as the children that he had photographed were helpless. He pictured inhabitants of psychiatric hospitals and also assessed the living conditions of working-class African-Americans. During the 1930's, he enjoyed a brief resurgence of fame capturing victims of the Great Depression for the Tennessee Valley Authority, and the fearless workers who were in the process of constructing the Empire State Building. Judith Mara Gutman, the first serious Hine scholar, has characterized this period of his career as his “surreal” style.420

In 1938 Hine befriended the art critic Elizabeth McCausland and the photographer Berenice Abbott, and began to write letters to Roy Stryker, the head of the FSA's photographic division, hopeful to obtain a Guggenheim Foundation grant. Though Hine's work deeply influenced Stryker and colleague Rexford Tugwell, helping to form the concept of the “photo-essay,” the grant never came to pass. And despite producing a lifetime of indispensable documentary imagery, Hine died in poverty and heartbroken by the recent death of his wife, on November 3, 1940.

Hine's first posthumous retrospective exhibition was held at the Riverside Museum in 1940 thanks to McCausland and Abbott, but his work was not to receive

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serious attention again until the next Riverside photographic exhibition, held in 1968, called “the Concerned Photographer.” This may or may not have pleased Abbott, who, in 1990, asserted that Hine’s child labor photographs were not “politically motivated,” and that to call them political was simply the result of the “American desire to reduce everything to a formula.” Abbott reveals that a bias still exists in the art world against political art, as if images can not be simultaneously beautiful and socially conscious. Such a bias in fact does a disservice to Hine and a deeper understanding of what his images attempt to convey. Indeed, Hine himself protested the cursory manner in which Beaumont Newhall introduced his socially engaged work in *Photography: A Short Critical History*. Hine wrote a letter to Newhall on January 30, 1938 that decried Newhall’s writing on his child labor work as “an inadequate layout...I was interested in bringing up the difference between child labor (the negative, harmful aspects) and child work (that which gives training and educates).”

Many of Hine’s photographs, given to the Photo League upon his death by his son Corydon, became the property of the George Eastman House. This was their destination because the Museum of Modern Art, at which Newhall was the first photography curator, refused an offer of donation.

It is Hine’s work for the National Child Labor Committee that I will explore in detail. I must emphasize that Hine’s work for this social reform organization

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spanned child labor comprehensively, and could easily encapsulate several dissertations in its own right. I am able only to highlight those forms of child labor that had the most impact upon contemporaneous artwork that addressed children’s social rights.

**Hine and the National Child Labor Committee: An Introduction**

Hine referred to his photographic subjects as “The Human Document.” For the National Child Labor Committee, Hine made photographic documents of laboring children in groups of peers, with adults, or as close-focused individual portraits. He shot the living and working conditions that these children endured.

Hine made his records seem statistical. He added captions about the children’s names, ages, heights, weights, and job descriptions, something he was able to do only because he kept a tiny notebook and pencil stashed in his pocket and, there, jotted clandestine memos about his subjects. With enough professedly concrete evidence, he critiqued the cultural myth of the nineteenth century that underprivileged children could be happy entrepreneurs or that society did not need to worry about “bad boys.”

Hine also took cues from the charitable photographic projects of nineteenth-century British and American predecessors, such as Thomas John Barnardo and

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425 Examine, for instance, the seemingly innocuous image *Newsies and Bootblacks Shooting Crap*, 1910. Hine “factually” acknowledged the unruly conduct of boys in these two trades, which painters such as John George Brown rendered far more picturesquely. Hine instead absorbed troubling demographic facts, such as a Juvenile Court record of seven large cities and twelve American reformatories. Working children contributed “a disproportionate share of delinquency compared to children who had never worked.” See Hugh D. Hindman, *Child Labor: An American History*, Armonk, New York; London: M.E. Sharpe, 2002: 237. The study was released by The United States Department of Labor.
John Thomson, those early pioneers of the tradition of social ethnography. For Hine, the most important concept that these men contributed was that not only people of foreign ethnicity, race, and nationality, but also the underprivileged within one’s own society, were “alien” subjects to be “studied”.426

Hine faced opposition from parents, bosses, and middlemen who collected working-class family members and hired them out, who were referred to as “padrones.” and often had to assume false personae. For instance, to gain access into factories and sweatshops, Hine posed “nattily dressed in a suit and hat” at intervals as a bible salesman, a fire inspector, an industrial photographer, and an insurance salesman.427

Once he breeched these boundaries, Hine’s basic method was to juxtapose likeable industrious children with hurtful working conditions. He used exaggerations of scale to dwarf children next to the environments in which they were endangered and clearly did not belong. There are many blatant examples. In *Addie Card* (1910, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), a thin little girl leans against a large menacing loom. In *Manuel the Young Shrimp Picker* (1911, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), a little boy stands barefoot in a stained apron in front of a mountain of shrimp. In *The Newsboy on the Steps, 1 am* (1912, gelatin silver print, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), a little boy sleeps on a large public stairwell, exposed both to the elements and to adult predators, and clinging to the newspapers that he needs to sell.

426 Ibid.
427 *Photo Story: Selected Letters and Photographs of Lewis Hine* ed Daile Kaplan.
Hine: A Chronology of Child Labor Photographs

Lewis Hine created visual information banks across the country: from the broader street trades in the cities; tenement work in New York City; the glassworks, steel mills, box factories, coal mines, and cotton mills; fruit and vegetable canning on the East and Gulf Coasts; and agricultural field labor, such as cranberry bog picking. Throughout his career he consistently focused upon the labor of newsboys (as far east as Massachusetts and as far southwest as Texas), who are, not coincidentally, the most often portrayed child subjects of the Ashcan School.

Also throughout his career, Hine pictured the living conditions and recreational activities of slum children as well as scenes of police and Progressive intervention in these activities (through municipal parks and playgrounds, newsboys’ aid societies, and so on).

Finally, during the 1910’s, Hine borrowed strategies from European avant-gardists such as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and the Dadaists in order to create some of America’s first persuasive photomontages, all targeting child labor. The following photographs span the years 1908-1917 and are broken down by year and, when able, month. The works cited represent highlights of Hine’s career rather than a comprehensive account.

Hine and the NCLC in 1908

In 1908, Hine visited New York City; Cincinnati, Ohio; Indianapolis, Indiana; Morgantown, West Virginia; and Lincolntown, North Carolina. He photographed newsboys and newsboy associations (charitable living quarters), producers of
domestic goods such as cigarette rollers and seamstresses, “Little Mothers”

(children babysitting younger children), glassworks boys, and textile mill boys.

**Newsboys**

It is noteworthy that so many of Hine’s photographs of newsboys (and a rarity, newsgirls) were taken in Ohio. Next to Illinois, Ohio was the most progressive state in the American Midwest in proposing child labor reform legislature, as well as children’s educational reform, particularly in the city of Columbus. Hine released an album as part of a three-album collection called *Street Trades: Child Labor Portrayed Through a Variety of Trades in the United States*, published annually by the National Child Labor Committee from 1908 to 1924. 428

Hine continued to document the most prominent form of urban child labor. He did not always document newsboys at work; he also portrayed them being aided by charitable societies who hoped to make better use of their playtime and to provide them shelter. “*The Manly Art of Self-Defense*: Newsboys’ Protective Association, Cincinnati, Ohio, August, 1908 (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), also from Hine’s *Street Trades* albums, shows two boys in boxing gloves inside a gymnasium training to channel the aggressive, learned behaviors of street living

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428 The Library of Congress description of these three albums states of the contents: “Photographs show primarily newspaper sellers (including boys, girls, and a few adult “newsies”), bootblacks, messenger and delivery boys, and food vendors, but other service workers such as bowling alley pinsetters, movie theater ushers, delivery wagon drivers, and one youthful automobile chauffeur in Oklahoma are also included. Images include posed portraits; work activities, emphasizing hours (including night work) and weather conditions in which children worked; recreational activities (“rough-housing,” street games); habits considered potentially damaging to children (unsafe streetcar riding practices, smoking, spending earnings on movies); and facilities and activities offered by organizations such as the Newsboys’ Protective Association (e.g., reading rooms, showers). Some images document street life in the city—including outdoor markets, signs, and modes of transportation. Locations include: Alabama; California; Connecticut; Delaware; Florida; Indiana; Kentucky; Massachusetts; Missouri; New York; New Jersey; Ohio; Oklahoma; Rhode Island; Tennessee; Texas; Vermont; Virginia; Washington, D.C. Also included are photographs of exhibit panels that use the images to protest child labor practices in the street trades.”
more productively. There are five boys on each side of the duelers. Hine has cleverly framed the composition between two highly symmetrical weight-lifting apparatuses and lines of hangers. Yet he also provides casual, seemingly incidental visual variations such as the wall calendar on the right and the forward-leaning diagonal of the black-clad boy on the left. Clever compositional posing such as this underscores the fact that Hine’s work, however inartistically it is often viewed, was often visually sophisticated.

Three African-American children look on alongside other boys of multiple ethnicities; the implication of racial harmony and “healthy” masculine pursuits is idyllic. The work, like others in its album which featured newsboys’ day trips to Cincinnati baseball camps, serves as consoling visual evidence of a solution to slum children’s social vice.

**Coal Miners**

A form of child labor that was especially infamous, and thoroughly covered by the popular press, was coal mining. The well-known Socialist journalist John Spargo devoted a hefty section of his *Bitter Cry of the Children, 1909*, to child coal miners.\(^{429}\) Shocking abuses were so well documented in its time that, during a coal

\(^{429}\) Spargo reports that 25,000 boys under sixteen were employed in coalmines and that in Pennsylvania, the law that no child under fourteen was permitted to work in mines was regularly broken with 150 reported nine and ten year old laborers in a single town. He adds a vivid, sometimes maudlin, sometimes chilling account of the ‘trapper’ and ‘breaker’ boys forced to work at this dangerous form of labor: Work in the coal breakers is exceedingly hard and dangerous. Crouched over the chutes, the boys sit hour after hour, picking out the pieces of slate and other refuse from the coal as it rushes past to the washers. From the cramped position they have to assume, most of them become more or less deformed and bent-backed like old men. When a boy has been working for some time and begins to get round-shouldered, his fellows say that, ‘He’s got his boy to carry round wherever he goes.’ The coal is hard, accidents to the hands, such as cut, broken, or crushed fingers, are common among the boys. Sometimes there is a worse accident: a terrified shriek is heard, and a boy is mangled and torn in the machinery, or disappears in the chute to be picked out later smothered and dead. Clouds of dust fill the breakers and are inhaled by the boys, laying the
miner strike in 1902, Jacob Riis's old friend Theodore Roosevelt, by then the American President, joined the side of the miners.

George Luks was a painter of the Ashcan School who was more prone to poke calculated fun at social issues than to pay them serious homage. But even he became preoccupied with painting child coalminers during the early 1920's, while visiting his childhood home in Pennsylvania and remembering with nostalgia his parents' advocacy of the Molly Maguires.

Lewis Hine would dedicate an entire album to these juvenile miners, or “Breaker Boys.” This first album, comprised of 100 photographs between the years 1909 and 1911, was Coal Mines: Child Labor at Coal and Zinc Mines in the United States. Hine's later NCLC albums featured child coal miners as well, published until 1924.

In September 1908, Hine visited the West Virginia and Indiana coalmines to photograph Breaker Boys. This would be one of many trips; most of Hine's subsequent targets in this form of employment lived in small mining towns in Pennsylvania.

foundations for asthma and miners' consumption...Outside the sun shone brightly, the air was pellucid, and the birds sang in chorus with the trees and the rivers. Within the breaker there was blackness, clouds of deadly dust enfolded everything, the harsh, grinding roar of the machinery and the ceaseless rushing of coal through the chutes filled the ears. I tried to pick out the pieces of slate from the hurrying stream of coal, often missing them; my hands were bruised and cut in a few minutes; I was covered from head to foot with coal dust, and for many hours afterwards I was expectorating some of the small particles of anthracite I had swallowed.” Spargo, Bitter Cry of the Children, quoted at http://www.morningsonmaplestreet.com/josephpuma1.html.

430 The Library of Congress entry for this album (LOT 7477) states: “Photographs show boys and some men in mine interiors and exteriors in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Alabama, and Tennessee, as well as boys involved in zinc mining in Aurora, Missouri. Includes documentation of work related injuries, as well as mining equipment and conditions. Also includes a photograph showing conflicting information on one worker's baptismal record versus what was stated on his age certificate, to show how his age was falsified.”
A poignant image from Hine’s coalminer album is *Young Driver in Mine: Had been driving one year. (7 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. Daily) Brown Mine, Brown, W. Va* (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). This child, around 13 or 14 years old, is covered in coal dust, wearing oversized overalls and a canvas cap with a light at the tip—the type historically worn before bosses were forced to issue hard shell hats for miners’ safety. Perhaps the most outstanding elements of the image are the boy’s fatigued but stiff stance, his piercing pale eyes that signify his youth yet gaze aside with longsuffering, and the premature wrinkles on his young forehead.

Glassworkers

In the same regions of the United States, Hine photographed glassworks boys. One can not help but recall Alfred Stieglitz’s photographic portrait of his daughter Katherine—*Kitty, 1905*, upon seeing Hine’s *Lunch time, Economy Glass Works, Morgantown, West Virginia. Plenty more like this, inside*, October, 1908 (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). Hine’s image is from the 156-photograph album *Glass Factories: Child Labor at Glass and Bottle Factories in the United States*, published by the National Child Labor Committee in the years 1908-1924.431

We recall that, in Stieglitz’s album, Kitty grasps a book, and behind her is a drawing on the wall of the shockingly brutal nursery rhyme of “Three Blind Mice.” In Hine’s image, two little boys covered in grime rest in a factory loft eating lunch while they are also flanked by drawings. These drawings are poignantly innocent chalk

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431 The Library of Congress entry for this album states: “Photographs show work activities and portraits in glass and bottling factories in Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, Missouri, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Alexandria, Virginia. Work sites in the latter two locations include an integrated work force of white and black workers. Images document working conditions and work hours, showing workers at their lunch breaks and working at night. Also includes three exhibit panels that use the images to portray child labor in glass factories (Hine nos. 3514, 3745, and 3745-A).”
doodles of human heads, sketched directly onto the factory wall—innocence
inscribed onto a place of children’s subordination. In both cases, children’s safety is
called into question. But whereas for Stieglitz the menace exists inside the child as
his own daughter’s ruminations on a frightening fairy tale, Hine documents the
actual social state of child labor, implied to be unfitting for the age.

Indeed, though they are often seen as antagonistic (Hine for instance
referred to Stieglitz and his acolytes disparagingly as “Seceshes”), Stieglitz and Hine
in actuality operate as complements in their era’s schema of the intrinsically
valuable and dependent child.

**Messenger boys**

At times, however, Hine’s visual strategies met with difficulty. *Midnight 4, 11,
08, Messenger boys in heart of Tenderloin, New York City, 1908* (Library of Congress,
Washington, D.C.), from the *Street Trades* albums, depicts two wary teenaged boys
standing in uniform in front of a restaurant at nighttime. Here there is a
contradiction of theory and visual reception. These boys are likely “boosters,” or
pimps.432 This reality contradicts the Progressive notion that children are basically
innocent and deserving of aid, and shows how Hine often struggled to frame the
rhetoric of his social reform movement in a convincing way. The incident recalls
historian James L. Flannery’s frustrations with delineating child abuse and neglect
based on rules that can sometimes feel conditional and arbitrary—frustrations that
Hine shared:

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432 Hindman, 216-17. One messenger boy reported to Hine’s colleague, Edward F. Brown of
Philadelphia, that messengers procured cigarettes, hats, meals, drinks, corsets and other articles of
clothing, and groceries for the whores, and received fallatio as a “reward.”
“...The lives of these working children straddled two very different spheres, one resting on the outer edges of recently emerging notions of childhood and the other entering into the adult working world of industrial America...Determining who and what a child was, of course, was and perhaps still is a tricky business. Legal, biological, and social/cultural standards can change over time, some of which lead to different conclusions and many of which can operate simultaneously and even contradictorily...a boy of fifteen who is financially independent and emancipated from parental supervision may act and be treated in many respects like an adult, while a college student of twenty may engage in behaviors more characteristic of a child and may even be protected as such under doctrines such as in loco parentis. Child labor reformers of the Progressive Era tried to avoid the ambiguities and pitfalls of these shifting legal and cultural definitions of childhood.” 433

**Hine and the NCLC in 1909**

In 1909, Hine visited Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania’s steel mills, and Boston, Massachusetts, and photographed the living and playing conditions of urban slum children.

Hine’s *Playground in Tenement Alley, Boston, 1909*, is one such photograph.

The image is part of the 811-photograph album *Miscellaneous Child Labor in the United States*, published 1908-1924 by the National Child Labor Committee.434

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434 The Library of Congress description of this album states: "Photographs show child labor in a variety of trades: furniture manufacturing, lumber industry, marble polishing, basket and broom manufacturing, shoe industry, meat packing, cigar and cigarette making, candy making and service work in department stores, ice cream parlors, pool halls, and bowling alleys. A few images of child vaudeville performers are also included. In many cases, workers are shown going to or coming from work or collecting pay, rather than engaging in work activities. Procedures intended to regulate labor practices, such as obtaining work certificates, are included. Images documenting work-related injuries and health care activities are included, as are a few "posture photos."" Also shown are
seemingly impromptu audience of children stands on heaps of rubble in an alley outlet watching a makeshift young sports team, while their ringleader winds up to pitch a ball to his teammates.

**Hine and the NCLC in 1910**

In 1910, Hine visited Washington, D.C.; St. Louis, Missouri; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; New York City, New York; North Pownall, Vermont; Brown Mills, New Jersey; Pemberton, New Jersey; and Birmingham, Alabama. He photographed newsboys, glassworks boys, living conditions of slum children in New York’s Lower East Side, bootblacks, vice-related forms of recreation, cotton mill girls, cranberry bog pickers; and “A.D.T. boys.” Hine focused half of his work in 1910 on children in New York City because these were the conditions of his salary raise to $150 per month. 435

**Bootblacks**

Hine openly attacked a favorite fixture of American urban lore: bootblacks.

*Bowery Bootblack. New York City.* July 1910, is located in volume two of Hine’s *Street Trades* albums. For Jacob Riis’s counterpart in painting, John George Brown, bootblacks, always rosy, clean-cut and smiling, were a symbol of the self-sufficient children scavenging for food and fuel and informal recreational activities, including boys playing craps on streets, "hanging around," and leaping on streetcars. Activities offered by boys’ clubs and settlement houses, and playground activities, including baseball, are also featured. Schools, particularly for immigrants, and vocational education activities are depicted. Also included are a substantial number of exhibit panels dealing with labor issues—a few show actual exhibit installations; some exhibit objects and cartoons; as well as portraits of officials of the National Child Labor Committee, including Owen Lovejoy and Jane Addams, and groups of female factory inspectors. Locations represented include: Alabama; Connecticut; Delaware; Florida; Indiana; Kentucky; Massachusetts; Michigan (1 image); Missouri; New York; North Carolina; Oklahoma; Rhode Island; Texas; Vermont; Virginia; Washington, D.C."
business savvy of the quintessential young American. But for Hine, the regular appearance of bootblacks in American cities takes on an entirely more dismal meaning. Hine’s bootblack is the disempowered player in this social transaction; the boy wears a harried expression and hunches over a looming, faceless adult’s shoe.

However, just as the relationship between Riis and Brown is more complicated than one of mere adversaries, neither are Hine and Brown entirely at odds. Hine has retained Brown’s sentimental vision of children’s intrinsic preciosity. But he has adapted this paradigm to suit the new belief that child’s welfare is an adult-run government’s social obligation.

**Textile mill laborers**

1910 was also the year during which Hine produced his most famous images: those of cotton mill child laborers, in this case in Vermont. The statistical portrait of Addie Card is among them. It is astonishing what this simple photograph of a child next to a piece of industrial machinery has inspired in subsequent viewers. In 2005, responsive to all of these visual testimonies, an independent researcher and webmaster of the site “The Lewis Hine Project” conducted an investigation of Addie Card’s hometown and family history. Perhaps in doing so the author hoped to exorcise ghosts of retrospective social outrage. Perhaps he hoped to understand the personal and cultural forces behind Addie’s employment and school truancy from

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436 Though that said, *Doffer Girl* of 1907 is probably Hine’s single most representative image, featuring a petrified, dirty-skinned girl with lopsided braids in a factory setting. The doffer girl’s name is undocumented but a similar and equally famous photograph of a young female textile laborer, taken a year later, is *Sadie Pfeifer, Lancaster Cotton Mills, South Carolina* 30 November 1908. In cases such as Addie’s, and the Breaker Boy Joseph Puma’s, there has been extensive effort to document the adult lives of individual child laborers.

437 In other sources Addie’s last name is listed, inconsistently, as Laird, and the date of the photograph is listed at times as February and not August. The website is [http://www.morningsonmaplestreet.com/lewishine.html](http://www.morningsonmaplestreet.com/lewishine.html).
age 12. A novel was even written with Addie’s photograph as the inspiration:

*Counting on Grace*, by Elizabeth Winthrop.

Judith Mara Gutman provides one explanation for Addie’s extraordinary and seemingly timeless emotional impact. Gutman asserts that Hine created portraits with two main points of focus which controlled the movement of the viewer’s eye in a constant back-and-forth interplay. Hine invariably made these two points of focus 1) the child, and 2) an object that symbolized the child’s oppressive workplace. Because of this, the visual interplay in a Hine photograph also became an ethical crisis for the viewer, who was “discovering” the social injustice vicariously alongside Hine. Gutman writes:

“When [Hine] used two centers of organization in a photograph, he let our eyes dance back and forth between them. He set us on edge, made us move from one center to the other, only to move back to the first. He showed us how two centers of life were always the issue, how life would unbalance, then rebalance between one and the other. When Hine used these dual centers of organization he created a controlled movement that was held in check only to be let loose and drawn back to its proper and earlier spot...he used these dual centers with people and with machines...”

**Cranberry harvesters**

The most difficult battle that Hine waged on behalf of working children was against rural child labor, and this battle began in 1910. Rural child labor was especially intractable because for centuries, before emigrating, Western Europeans had unofficially employed juveniles to work as part of family-run agricultural
businesses. Children contributed to pooled family incomes in this way, particularly before the Industrial Era, and concordantly before home and the workplace became distinct and separate entities. Because industrialization did not affect the rural labor the way that it did city work, and because slum families pulled their children out of schools to follow rural labor from May through November to bolster the family income, rural child labor was not easily challenged. And because agrarian owners, bosses, and padrones were usually laissez-faire Republicans who took issue with federal intervention in state-based businesses, opposition to NCLC investigations such as Hine’s was particularly fierce.

Perhaps the pinnacle of this fight for Hine was in the cranberry bogs. One haunting image from this series is *Millie Cornaro, Philadelphia, 10 years old. Been picking cranberries for 6 years. White’s Bog, Browns Mills, N.J. This is the fourth week of school and the people here expect to remain...September, 1910* (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). This image is located in the first volume of the 733-photograph, three-album series *Child Labor in the United States Depicted in Field Work and Other Agricultural Activities*, published by the National Child Labor Committee between 1909 and 1917. Millie and her mother squat over the tedious, back-breaking labor of picking berries on the narrow ledge between canals of murky, bug-infested bog water. As many photographs of children whose legs are covered in bites and sores attest, among such bugs were disease-carrying

439 The Library of Congress entry for this album (LOT 7475) states: “Photographs primarily document field work and agricultural activities, but images also depict workers’ housing conditions and schools. Includes cranberry picking in New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin; berry harvesting in Delaware and Maryland; tobacco farming in Kentucky and Connecticut; beet topping in Colorado; cotton picking in Texas and Oklahoma; dairy farming in New England. A few images are of African American schools in Kentucky and Oklahoma and public health activities in Oklahoma. Also includes a few maps and pamphlets on child labor.”
mosquitoes. Despite being in the middle of miserable work, the swarthy-faced Millie peeks up at the camera and steals a smile. In the background, falling out of focus in the low depth of field, a man cups his hands and surveys the labor, while white dots, signifying other white-scarved workers’ heads, gradually shrink into the distance. The implication is a field full of child laborers who are resilient but exploited.

Ironically the image recalls something between Stieglitz’s early-career Pictorialist photographs of “peasant girls” in Europe, and paintings of working women and children by Eastman Johnson in the 1850’s and 1860’s—cranberry pickers on Nantucket. But while Johnson’s women and children are inconsequential specks in a pastoral New England landscape, for Hine the up-close, exposed human condition is a central concern.

Hine’s battle with White’s Bog and its infamous padrone, Gus Donato, was particularly fierce. The Southerner David Clark was pulled into this ideological war, and, as mentioned, spent his plentiful sums on top-notch lawyers and paid off former cranberry bog child laborers to make vague testimonies in federal court. These children were told to state that their work in the bogs had somehow helped them adapt to life in America. In reality, such work resulted in perpetual school truancy, which prevented the children from learning proper English. Jane Addams of Hull House was even involved to mediate letters between cranberry bog boss, Mr. White, and a high-ranking member of the NCLC, Owen Lovejoy.

This led to a battle, ultimately disadvantageous for the NCLC reformists, between the state-centric South, still grappling with the economic devastation of Reconstruction, and the federalists in the more industrialized North. The reformists
were overwhelmingly Northerners, but there were a few Southern moderates who advocated restrictions on agrarian child labor. This changed when talk arose of a federal bill banning the sale of goods produced by child laborers that crossed state lines: a bill that became, in 1917, the Keating-Owen Act.

**Hine and the NCLC in 1911**

In 1911, Hine visited South Pittiston, Pennsylvania; Biloxi, Mississippi; Richmond, Virginia; Eastport, Maine; and Bessemer City, North Carolina. He photographed more Breaker Boys, shrimp pickers and oyster shuckers, newsboys, glassworks boys, sardine cutters, and cotton mill workers.

**Glassworkers**

Sometimes this body of images provides fascinating evidence that Hine’s child models were aware of their part in completing a photographic document. Because he respected his subjects, often Hine allowed his models to pose based on their own terms and conditions. In doing so they refused to be portrayed as victims. One example is *Two young carrying-in boys in Alexandria (Va.) Glass Factory. Frank Clark (on left) 702 N. Patrick St., could neither read nor write, having been to school only a few weeks in his life. Two older brothers work in glass factory, and his father is a candy maker. Frank is working on night shift this week. Ashby*

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440 In the case of this photograph, Joe Manning conducted an interview with Ashby Corbin’s daughter Anna, and we discover indeed a warm human record with which Hine’s photograph—an image of a real, living person, victimized but not anonymously statistical—is fully compatible: “I think he was a good father. We all loved him. He liked to have fun. He liked to joke around with his brothers when they were all grown men. They used to play around and poke each other. He liked to listen to music, old hillbilly music like the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers. He liked to tease us a little. I remember that whenever we would ask where something was, we’d say, ‘Where is it at?’ And he would say, ‘It’s behind the at.’ He was always correcting us about that.” Found at [http://www.morningsonmaplestreet.com/ashbycorbin2.html](http://www.morningsonmaplestreet.com/ashbycorbin2.html).
Corbin (on right), 413 N. St. Asaph St. Has had only four terms of schooling. Location: Alexandria, Virginia. June, 1911 (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). This image is located in the Glass Factories album.

Frank and Ashby posture proudly. They lean on each other in touching mutual support. Still, their conduct raises the same consistent moral and ethical concerns of Progressive reformers: The children forget mainstream Anglo-Saxon Protestant decorum. Hine’s captions—always crucial—imply that the source of their misconduct is their lack of schooling. They stand in rubbish piles. Frank has even unbuttoned his shirt at his midriff, no doubt a gesture of self-relief at the inclement heat at the glassworks.

The shack out of which the two children have ventured stands ominously to the right. As with the headscarf of cranberry harvester Millie, this index of child labor is echoed by the endless stretch of more shacks—implicitly, rampant with more child laborers—in the fuzzy background.

**Hine and the NCLC in 1912**

In 1912, Hine broke his pattern of documenting rural child labor and returned to New York City to photograph more footage of tenement children’s living conditions and rough forms of play. He also depicted tense interactions with police officers. He visited Jersey City, New Jersey to continue cultivating his expansive visual record of newsboys, or “newsies.” Finally, he visited tenements in Chicago, Illinois, and photographed the living conditions of immigrant families there.
As *Cop and Kids, New York City* (1912, gelatin on glass, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), attests, immigrant children saw police officers with ambivalence and fear. In this image the tension is subdued but still quite obvious as the children nervously skitter around the police officer who emerges from the building. Perhaps Hine, not a police photographer like Riis but a sociologist, is making a comment on the soured relationship between the law and the people who need it most.

**Hine and the NCLC in 1913**

In 1913 Hine returned to the subject matter of Breaker Boys in March, visiting Seranton, Pennsylvania. He also moved the farthest south and west in his reform photography career; he shot “Helpers” (very young female escorts and domestic aids) in Columbus, Georgia, and newsboys in Waco, Texas.

**Hine and the NCLC in 1915**

In 1914, Hine continued to produce a type of imagery he had begun to produce during the Pittsburgh Survey, photomontages. One year later, Hine produced still more photomontages, among them his most famous, called *Making Human Junk*. The image was first featured in the *Child Labor Bulletin*, Volume 3 (1914-15).

The text and images are expertly interwoven in a way that might satisfy the political montage-producers in Russia—the likes of Aleksander Rodchenko—less than a decade later. The message is quite simple: Children become “human junk” when forced to work for a living. The delinquent behavior that they exhibit is the
product, not the source, of urban moral decay. Hine also ingeniously frames this message in the context of the very assembly-line factory system that usually employs these child laborers. Rather than glass, textiles, coal or cranberries, wicked children are the goods being “manufactured.”

Hine’s output of photomontage condemning child labor was relentless. In fact, one year he and his staff were harshly reprimanded for deliberately timing the release on Thanksgiving Day of a poster accusing the typical American nuclear family of purchasing holiday foods prepared by laboring children.  

Hine and the NCLC in 1916 and 1917

In 1916 Hine visited Fall River, Massachusetts, and photographed various types of messenger and server boys such as “Doffers.” In early 1917 Hine visited Boston again, and photographed the physical deformities of young female domestic laborers, asking them to strip down to only their skirts in order to do so. He placed the girls them against walls with their backs to the viewer like taxonomic specimens. A good example is Incorrect sitting position for postural deformity and dorsal curvature cases. Scoliosis. Stooping, lopsided or humped over position. Work in this position is harmful. Need for advice of examining physician. Location: Boston, Massachusetts. January 1917 (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). This image is located in the second volume of the Miscellaneous Child Labor albums.

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441 See Kate Sampsell Willman, Lewis Hine as Social Critic, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009.
Child nudity serves a far different role for Hine than it served for Pictorialist photographers, who conflated children’s nudity with their unquestionable moral purity. It also serves a different role than it does for Ashcan School painters such as George Bellows, who painted nude “river rats” and “kids” in order to make cutting and smugly shocking remarks about the highly typical moral decay in the American city. Here, instead, nudity is almost a symbol of exposé journalism: social wrongdoings and their devastating effects on innocents literally being uncovered on the surface of flesh. Far from ambivalent figures of both sympathy and fear, these slouched little girls’ whittled shoulder blades and waists garner only pity. At the same time, we feel like encroachers, violators, forcing these children against a wall—a sense of complicity in their suffering which may very well be the psychological state Hine is trying to induce.

**Lewis Hine: Conclusions**

Obviously, Lewis Hine’s massive documentation of child exploitation, the next step in a new American visual tradition forged by Jacob Riis, had an incalculable impact on the visual culture of childhood. But where could artists working in the same decade have seen Hine’s photographs? This is important to ask because these photographs clearly influence their paintings and drawings on the social role of children. There are several possible answers.

The primary possibility is the connection between Hine, progressive and even radical magazine serials, and the Ashcan School. Daile Kaplan reports that Hine’s NCLC work appeared “regularly in newspapers, N.C.L.C. and other progressive publications, stereopticon slide shows, and, under his own direction,
exhibitions,” and indicates Hine’s remarkable fame as “the most successful
photographer of social welfare work in the country” as of 1913.\textsuperscript{442} Such a title
certainly secures him as a figure of broad public exposure. This is especially true in
a community of progressive pedagogical reformers such as Adler, Spargo, and
Dewey, all of whom were heroes to the Ashcan School painters. But though his
Library of Congress files at least situate individual negatives within correspondent
NCLC albums, most scholarship on Hine fails to note the exhibitions and
publications of his child labor photographs individually. This makes it difficult to
draw a chronology of influence between Hine and contemporaries who were
working in other visual media.

What we do know is that Hine contributed child labor photographs regularly
to \textit{Survey}, and even more importantly, on John Spargo’s insistence, to the
\textit{International Socialist Review}. These magazines, particularly the latter, share an
explicit political affinity with \textit{The Masses}, a socialist periodical edited by Ashcan
School painter John Sloan, a close friend of Robert Henri, George Luks, and George
Bellows, who all submitted art to Sloan’s periodical. These men were also all
draftsmen and painters of American children and childhood.

Also, there can be no doubt that Hine’s work formed the basis of certain
drawings of child mill labor made in the same years by a Socialist colleague,
Boardman Robinson, who worked for \textit{The Masses}. The drawing “Dedicated to Mill
Child Labor Committee,” \textit{New York Call}, November 11, 1917, looks strikingly like
several images in Hine’s seven-album, 1,814-photograph \textit{Mills} series released

\textsuperscript{442} Kaplan, p. 4-5.
between 1908-1924, and was obviously based on the titular reference to the National Child Labor Committee, dedicated to Hine himself. Robinson has added the moving caption by Sara M. Cleghorn, “The golf links lie so near the mill that almost every day the laboring children can look out and see the men at play.”\textsuperscript{443} The work is nearly a replica of one of Hine’s most famous photographs of all time, \textit{Girl Worker in a Carolina Cotton Mill} (1908, gelatin silver print, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). Robinson has reversed the placement of the mill windows and textile loom, like a mirror image. He has added a capped little boy and a bedraggled little girl to the left of the original frocked worker, all to illustrate Cleghorn’s despairing remarks about laboring children who envy the play of overly-privileged adults.

It is significant that Robinson drew this picture and dedicated it to Hine’s staff in 1917, because this was the year that Hine was forced to quit the National Child Labor Committee due to a pay cut and instead enlist as an American Red Cross photographer. Perhaps Robinson saw Hine’s termination as a bitter irony.

Robinson’s urban sketches of children were often openly reformist as well, such as \textit{Five Dollars Will Give A Child Two Weeks of Fresh Air and Good Food in the Country}, July 31, 1913, a drawing of a young mother and a cluster of despondent children sitting on a street curb by a fire hydrant and garbage can. The work seems to directly reference drawings by Ashcan artists such as William Glackens and George Bellows. And Robinson’s more humorous drawings of children, “groups of colorful neighborhood characters” engaging in new forms of mass entertainment, such as \textit{Stimulating the Imagination}, November 17, 1911, page 7, have indubitable

\footnote{\textsuperscript{443} Henry Adams, \textit{Dangerous Drawings: The Radical Lines of Boardman Robinson}, manuscript, Illustration Page 27.}
affinities with John Sloan's sketches, and indeed, Robinson reportedly drew
influence directly from Sloan's work. All this simply goes to show that a popular
Socialist journalist and sketch-artist attempting to portray underprivileged children
saw merit both in the reform photography of Hine and in the more ambivalent
images of contemporaneous artists, and, like doubtless others, formed a bridge
between these two parties. It may very well have been Robinson himself who
introduced Hine's photographs to his friends of the Ashcan School who worked at
*The Masses* for many years.

Additionally, Hine's "Time Exposures" and other photomontages of his child
labor photographs were displayed at the San Francisco Exposition of 1915, attended
by more than 20,000 people.

Finally, in a letter to Hine, Paul Kellogg informed him that *Literary Digest, The
Outlook*, and the *Review of Reviews* were all interested in Hine's work for *The Survey*
and that a deal had been negotiated to let these publications use Hine's prints
without charge "as part of our publicity function." This indicates the further
dissemination of Hine's work to a broad audience—surely a deserved fame, for of all
the photographers who inherited Jacob Riis's legacy of social reform photography,
Hine was the most devoted and the most prolific.

Hine's photographs clearly counter-played with images by the most
significant early twentieth-century painting movement, the Ashcan School. But
neither Hine's photographs nor the paintings of the Ashcan School were created

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445 Paul Kellogg, in a letter to Lewis Hine, April 25, 1922, in Kaplan, 24-25.
entirely before or after each other. They are, instead, part of a more symbiotic trend, a loose sequence in which photographers and painters both periodically returned to shared urban subjects during the same decade (around 1905-1915). As for the Ashcan School, their diverse influences would provide the next unique step in the narrative of children and images of social reform.
CHAPTER VII

TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN REALIST PAINTERS (ca. 1900-1915)

“It takes more than love of art to see character and meaning and even beauty in a crowd of east side children tagging after a street piano or hanging over garbage cans.” —The New York World, in an interview with Robert Henri, June 10, 1906.

Ironically, while most modern art in the twentieth century has been associated with a march towards “abstraction,” the first radical American group of artists to stir up a success du scandale in the twentieth century were a group of “realists”—the group known as “The Eight” or “The Ashcan School.” These men were an alliance of painters of the urban scene, several of them former newspaper and magazine illustrators, who gathered around the leadership of the charismatic painter and teacher, Robert Henri. Notably, the lives and the social plight of children played a large role in the imagery of the group, and yet, while this has been commented on in passing, it has never been the subject of a study in its own right. Robert Henri arguably focused on children more than any other single subject. A portrait of an African-American child, Eva Green, was his signature painting in the famous exhibition “The Eight,” held at the Macbeth Gallery in 1908, which brought his group to national attention. In his later years he focused intently on portraits of children of every race and nationality: Dutch, Spanish, American, native-American and Chinese. Children also played a significant role in the imagery of his key followers—George Luks, John Sloan, and William Glackens; likewise children played a central role for arguably the most gifted painter of the group, George Bellows, in his series of works that gave the subject of childhood a disturbingly modern twist,
such as The Cross-Eyed Boy, 1906, and Forty-Two Kids, 1907. Furthermore, it is clear that these images were associated with new ideas about the role of children and radical programs of education and social reform—although these relationships were often far from simple. To get a grasp of these issues, we first need to consider the artistic program of "The Ashcan School"—and to look more closely at the tricky word "realism" and to consider what it really describes.

The origin of the now widely-used title "Ashcan School" was pejorative, and interestingly became the group's official title several decades after the group's initial fame: in 1934, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the first director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Holger Cahill referred to Henri and his gang as the Ashcan School in their book Art in America. The reference came from a long line of quoted, re-quoted, and mis-quoted anecdotes in the press, including an indictment that appeared in muckracker Jacob Riis's old workplace, the New York Sun. The American public struggled to come to terms with an aesthetic that borrowed heavily from French Realism's "apostles of ugliness" explicitly in order to place uncompromisingly blunt images of everyday life in the aesthetic realm of the gallery and the museum.

The origins of the term “Ashcan School” are many. An exasperated character in a Theodore Dreiser novel castigated the depiction of ash cans as “fine art.” But aside a single early Everett Shinn drawing, Robert Henri’s artistic circle actually never depicted ashcans themselves. The term was more an idiom for the deliberate portrayal of tawdry, banal urban subject matter usually thought inappropriate for a genteel artgoing crowd. For instance, on June 10, 1906, an interview with Robert Henri produced the quote, “It takes more than love of art to see character and meaning and even beauty in a crowd of east side children tagging after a street piano or hanging over garbage cans.” And in April 8, 1916, in the New York Sun, Art Young of The Masses quoted his own argument with Henri faithful John Sloan, “They want to run pictures of ash cans and girls hitching up their skirts on Horatio Street.” Bennard H. Perlman, Painters of the Ashcan School: The Immortal Eight, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979: 196.
Appropriately, then, these contentious painters combined old styles and new, often socially controversial, subject matter. They also intertwined high and low art forms.

As a movement that drew from disparate visual sources, the Ashcan School synthesized prior traditions in depicting children in American art. As a result their paintings of children are hybridized and ambivalent.447

Indeed, interestingly, the “controversy” typically used to describe this urban realist movement is relative. The Ashcan School clearly waged a war on the genteel and academic movements. They revealed that the earlier paintings of street children, by figures such as by John George Brown, were sentimental, “false,” and deceitfully quaint. But at the same time, most Ashcan School paintings, including Ashcan School paintings of children, are also far more placating, humorous, and tame than the fiercely critical images that were produced contemporaneously, particularly in the medium of photography, by social reformers such as Jacob Riis or Lewis Hine. In fact, the paintings of children created by members of this group are very representative of the group’s general approach, and help reveal the complex goals of the group as a whole, which attempted to create a bridge between the worlds of “social reform” and “high art.” And despite their compromises, it would be inaccurate and misleading to dismiss Ashcan School imagery as totally lacking social

“truth.” But where in the gamut of “realistic portrayal” do these paintings belong, and what is the relationship between that “realism” and a social conscience? To answer this question, we should separate it into a series of questions, some directed towards the issue of “realism,” others towards the nature of “modernism,” and its relationship to social change. Let us first address questions concerning “realism.”

**The Problem of “Realism”**

Part of the ambiguity of Ashcan School imagery is the fact that its practitioners ground their work in the historical movement known as Realism. This fact must be explored, and the differing uses of “Realism” explicated, before we can accurately analyze images produced by Henri and his circle.

A much misunderstood and misused term, “Realism” as a discrete movement first arose in mid-nineteenth-century French literature, figurative arts, and philosophy. It was a response to Romanticism and a predecessor to Symbolism. Some of its best-known proponents were the painters Gustave Courbet and Edouard Manet, and the author-critics Emile Zola, Jules-Antoine Castagnary, and Theophile Thoré. Realism then quickly spread to Germany, England (Charles Dickens was practically vilified as a proponent), and, by the end of the nineteenth century, the United States. By the end of the nineteenth century, Realism permeated American literature in the work of authors such as Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris.

The chief feature of “Realism” was a willingness to look at the “ugly” aspects of life as well as things that were “beautiful” or “ideal.” It was often associated with a social point of view, and an interest in social reform, although it could also become
profoundly cynical and nihilistic. In painting, the word has spawned a remarkable degree of confusion, since while the word “realism” is often used to describe forms of visual expression that are detailed and visually exact, in a fashion similar to sharp-focus photography, “Realism” in French painting often contained vigorous brushwork and impasto. Indeed, the “Realists” deliberately distinguished their work, and separated it from that of academic artists, by injecting a strong element of personal expression. As noted, those who worked in an extremely individual style, such as Courbet and Manet, were classed as “Realists.”

Possibly the quintessential text on the quandary of defining “Realism” in art is by Linda Nochlin (Realism, 1971). Nochlin’s thesis is that the transition in art between “Realism” and “reality” is a troubled one. Nochlin writes, “The commonplace notion that Realism is a ‘styleless’ or transparent style, a mere simulacrum or mirror image of visual reality, is [a] barrier to its understanding as a historical and stylistic phenomenon.” In other words, Realism was a distinctive, historically-bound movement with cultural pressures backing its inception. Realism filtered the visual expression of reality as selectively as any other style.

Primarily, Realism complicated the Platonic notion that art should represent only lofty ideals and abstract principles: reduced, as French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire put it, to a “hieroglyphic dictionary” that distilled higher principles into visible form. Realists asserted instead that art should represent the transient, the

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concrete, and the mundane.\textsuperscript{449} As a result, under Realist doctrine, the range of subject matter considered “high art” drastically broadened.

Art should be concerned with “capturing reality”—itself an impossibility, but one in which the Realists, who held a firm belief in the dawning empirical sciences, deeply believed. Indeed, in the age of Positivism, Higher Criticism, New Geology, the Religion of Humanity, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Dialectical Materialism, the faith these men held in science and its constant revision of absolute “truths” was itself a form of religion. It supplanted the so-called timeless universality of church doctrine; it was amoral (Taine, for instance, stated that “vice and virtue are products, like vitriol and sugar”). And art, said the Realists, should reflect this changed orientation. Art should capture things that were as visceral and time-bound as reality itself, both in choice of subject matter, and in the use of materials. A Degas painting of ballet dancers mid-spin or a Monet painting of the transitory effects of light on the same location at changing times of day—a study in constants and variables—could now be considered high art. Manet’s \textit{Dejeuner Sur L’Herbe} (1863, oil on canvas, Musée d’Orsay, Paris), which hybridizes the Classical nude with a slice-of-life moment of gentlemen in contemporary garb lunching, is a humorous and self-conscious attack on so-called “timeless” principles, a deliberately jarring juxtaposition which implies something far more scandalous and banal. And Courbet’s way of applying paint to canvas—bald, unvarnished, rough and hasty in select passages—did not evince lack of method, but was as aesthetically calculated as something smooth and fine-brushed.

\textsuperscript{449} Charles Baudelaire, quoted in Linda Nochlin, 28.
Even more significant than their origins in science was the way in which Realists ascribed to liberal populist social doctrines. Realists were often Socialists, Marxists, and Anarchists. As such, they believed in what Nochlin calls “pictorial democracy”—the affording of equal visual import, equal meticulous detail (or lack thereof), to the most meaningful components of a scene, as well as to the most mundane.⁴⁵⁰ For instance, Courbet’s *Burial at Ornans* (1849-50, oil on canvas, Musée d’Orsay, Paris), treats the white dog on the sidelines with as much visual, compositional interest as the pomp and circumstance of the human burial. That which is heroic and hierarchical, allegedly important and removed, is severely questioned, even mocked. It is no coincidence that this was the era in which caricature became especially popular; Honoré Daumier is a prime example.

Furthermore, the populist Realists believed in the value of “contemporaneity”—immersing oneself in one’s own time, both its high and its low elements, its beautiful and its ugly, its rich and its poor. Realists hoped to dissolve the distinctions between these binaries. They coupled this interest in contemporaneity with a demand for instantaneous depiction.

Most importantly of all, the Realists condoned a mixed usage of their own principles: infused with rhetoric and self-contradiction. They claimed that school-acquired knowledge impeded the “honesty” of the eye and of real observation—a remark oddly reminiscent of the art photographers’ pride in being amateurs—and yet most of the Realists were academy-schooled. They combined indirect representation based on artistic precedents with scrupulous observations of the

⁴⁵⁰ Nochlin, 48.
actual world. For instance, Courbet looked at a popular Renaissance print called *The Wandering Jew* in order to form a composition for *The Meeting* (1854, oil on canvas, Musée Fabre, Montpellier, Herault). But he also depicted the Montpellier countryside as it appeared in 1854, with ornate detail, and he portrayed the men in the seemingly “unmediated” event in contemporaneous garb. As a result, though the painting is actually a hybrid of varied visual resources, it has the air of something spontaneous and styleless: something authentic and “real.”

This is, in fact, also the best way to define how the artists of the Ashcan School treated their socially conscious subject matter. Robert Henri looked to Diego Velazquez and Frans Hals, Ernest Hemingway, Walt Whitman, and Henry David Thoreau for a precedent on which to model his brush strokes and for a philosophy to teach his students. But he also painted real child models in their own clothing, surrounded by accoutrements of their own culture. George Luks looked back to Daumier and to *Punch* illustrations, but he caricatured issues that were so contemporaneous that they were hot headlines. And George Bellows mingled Social Darwinism, exposé photography, racial caricature and American and European precedents to paint the ugly and the degenerate. The express purpose of all of these artists, in depicting the transient and the mundane, was to elevate such previously forbidden subjects to high art.

Interestingly Alfred Stieglitz, who also hoped to exalt an “inferior” art form—photography—also based his early, pastoral photographs of Italian and German washerwomen and peasant children on Courbet, Manet, Millet, and Winslow Homer’s one professed European influence, the French landscapists of the Barbizon
School. Though with different goals and to different ends, artists representing children during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century actually borrowed from quite similar sources.

While the members of the Ashcan School group developed recognizably distinct styles, in their core beliefs they followed the leadership of Robert Henri, who taught them how innovative artistic techniques and reformist social ideas could be combined into a unified statement and could endow their work with both expressive vitality and social relevance. Above all, Henri was a synthesizer: a figure who absorbed diverse strands of nineteenth century literature and nineteenth century art and wove them into a single garment. Essentially, Henri was a follower of the Realists, whose work he absorbed in both literature and painting. Henri was an avid reader who devoured novels by Tolstoy, Flaubert, Zola, and Americans such as Dreiser and Norris, as well as social literature on reform, including that of Socialists, anarchists and communists, and even figures who are now regarded as cranks, such as Henry George, whose notion that only land should be taxed enjoyed widespread support in this period. In painting, Henri’s “realism” was a mix of influences from his training in Philadelphia and his training in France. His adulation was partially derived from the work of his Pennsylvania Academy hero, Thomas Eakins, but also came about due to Henri’s direct study, while attending the Academie Julian, of French Realist art by Courbet and Manet, and, briefly, French Impressionism by Claude Monet and Edgar Degas (whose early careers were as Realists).
The Eight: The Ashcan School and the First American Staged Art

Controversy

As mentioned, the members of the Ashcan School staged the first great success du scandale in the history of American art. In many ways they introduced modern art to the United States and paved the way for its eventual triumph. But compared to later modern artistic movements, the members of the Ashcan School were strangely unschooled in the techniques of artistic scandal and their implications. These artists all seem to have felt ambivalent about the public role of artistic radicalism that was thrust upon them, and to have been unsure whether they should push forward or retreat. In fact, the scandal they created in 1908, while partly the result of deliberate intention, was also simply a collection of accidents which led to a situation they did not fully understand or intend.

On March 11, 1907, George Luks’s painting Man with the Dyed Mustachio (1907, oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown) was vehemently rejected from the National Academy of Design’s annual exhibition. When the Academy’s Winter Exhibition cuts were released, only Robert Henri was permitted, with his Girl in Yellow Satin Dress (ca. 1906, oil on canvas, Private Collection), and only then because of his status as a full academician. As a result, Henri rallied eight American realist painters to respond to the dismissal with a secessionist exhibition of their own. This show had, in fact, already been long in planning. It took place on February 3-15, 1908. The Eight, the artists who participated, were Arthur B. Davies, William Glackens, Henri, Ernest Lawson, Luks, Maurice Prendergast, Everett Shinn, and John Sloan. Prendergast, a Bostonian, knew Henri from their days at the
Academie Julian. Lawson was introduced to the group via the director of the gallery in which the Eight exhibited. Four of these artists—Glackens, Luks, Shinn and Sloan, all of whom had known Henri in Philadelphia during the 1890’s—went on to become members of Henri’s Ashcan School.

Camaraderie among these artists solidified during frequent gatherings at the New York bar called Mouquin’s. Here, because they were former members of the press, Henri and his peers made alliances with writers from New York newspapers and serials, such as James Huneker and Frederick Gregg, both of the *New York Evening Sun*, as well as Henri’s student, the *New York American* editor, Guy Pène du Bois. Joined by a younger Ohioan, George Bellows, who had intended, but failed, to show with The Eight, they formed the complete mature movement. From their inception, the artists of the Ashcan School were savvy, strategic self-publicists, a quality which cannot be ignored in their portrayal of any subject, including children.

The Eight’s show took place at the MacBeth Galleries in New York. This was decided after months of planning for alternate venues. William MacBeth’s gallery walls became the logical solution, since MacBeth had sympathetically exhibited Luks’s *Man with the Dyed Mustachio* immediately following the National Academy’s rejection. Following this gesture of goodwill, MacBeth also compiled a list of all artists rejected from the Academy, vehemently stating that “these absentees could by themselves make a stunning good exhibition, and the necessary steps should be

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451 These alternate venues had included using a vacant store on West Twenty-third street, which was vetoed because Glackens couldn’t afford his part of rental payment for the space.

452 Perlman, *Painters of the Ashcan School*, 150.
taken to ensure the cooperation of every one of them in the future...bringing about concerted action both within and without Academy ranks.”

MacBeth’s statement signals a popular art dealer’s enthusiastic advocacy of an expressly anti-academic, secessionist movement. It demonstrates the impact that these self-promoting artists of scandal had on American art’s subject matter. In an age of muckraking, the Ashcan School used controversy to their advantage. Thus, advertisements for the show issued on May 15, 1908 explicitly referred to the painters as “Eight Artists [who] Form Association in Opposition to the National Academy of Design.” “The Eight,” the truncated title that Huneker afforded the artists, became a catchy brand name for defiance itself. For the first time, being counter-cultural was a positive element of an artist’s personal identity.

Indeed, press coverage of the Eight showcased “a sympathetic understanding” of their motives; The New York Herald referred to them as “men of the rebellion,” and the Sun rendered their title of “apostles of ugliness” a badge of honor. MacBeth enlarged his usual half-page ad in the National Academy’s Winter Exhibition to a full-page when he advertised the show of the Eight. Critics on the side of the Academy, such as Royal Cortissoz of the New York Tribune and Charles De Kay of the New York Times, railed against the show, but their sardonic dismissal of the Eight only provided the clever rebels more printed space to publicize their artistic goals. The controversy itself benefitted the Eight.

A hodgepodge of subjects characterized the show: modern leisure pursuits, Impressionistic and Post-Impressionistic landscapes, portraits of citizens on the low

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453 William MacBeth, quoted in Bennard Perlman, 151.
454 Perlman, Artists of the Ashcan School, 152.
rungs of society, and most of all, genre scenes of tawdry activities and
disenfranchised people. Shinn portrayed popular and high art forms together, such
as the ballet. Lawson provided the landscapes, and Davies forayed into his own
cryptic mystical symbolism. Sloan depicted hairdressers surrounded by one of the
earliest American uses of written text in visual art (signs advertising various urban
goods and services), popular elections, people crowded around the new form of the
moving picture, and a woman carrying a bucket of cheap alcohol while being
degraded by judgmental passers-by. Prendergast and Glackens painted playing
girls, bathers, and crowded parks and beaches—places where classes seemingly
collapsed and contemporary spectacle ensued. Luks represented the American
equivalent of peasant, street life. And Henri chose to display, almost entirely, child
portraits: among them Laughing Child (which was the first image that the audience
faced upon entering the gallery), Little Girl in White Apron, Little Girl with Back
Comb, and Portrait of a Girl.

Bennard Perlman has generously proclaimed of this landmark, “No single
exhibition of American art has ever produced such widespread
consequences...painters were considered avant-garde if they only condoned the art
of the Eight. The Henri associates quickly became the crusading leaders of what
some were quick to label as a newly found American school of painting.” Indeed,
the National Academy responded by eliminating its jury and appointing a one-man
organizer for its Spring Exhibition; in order to cater to, rather than compete with,
the Eight, who represented a serious threat, Harrison S. Morris invited the Eight to

455 Perlman, Painters of the Ashcan School: The Immortal Eight, 182.
show again at the National Academy where they were allotted a wall in the Academy’s galleries. George Bellows was invited to Academy membership. A fall traveling show of the Eight was planned, with possible venues at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Toledo Museum of Art, and the Detroit Museum of Art.

Why, so often, did these “men of the rebellion,” artists of the first major American counter-cultural aesthetic movement, portray children?

**The Ashcan School and Children**

Children were the new century's next generation, focal territory over which middle-class America’s warring factions of status quo and reform battled. Children had always been indices of potentiality, transition, and the continuation of local customs and cultural norms. But now demographics shifted remarkably, adding a new contentiousness to the subject of childhood. Urbanization, industrialization, and immigration disrupted cultural homogeneity—that is, the sovereignty of middle-class Anglo-America—in an unprecedented way. As a part of this milieu, Henri and the Ashcan School recognized, and fully exploited, the fact that childhood as a subject was uniquely charged.

Too often, however, Henri is disregarded entirely. He is not considered an artist in his own right, and his students are lumped together as a band of former sketch-journalists who uniformly painted urban scenes in a candid, slapdash manner. But differences in training, age, and attitudes toward, particularly, disenfranchised children, are abundant within this artistic movement. Differences between the Ashcan School and its sister element in early 1900’s visual culture—
reform photography of the very same types of children—are also rarely explored in art historical literature. A closer reading of these men as individuals, who had nuanced relationships with the Progressive Era and its educational and legislative movements, may enrich our understanding of their part in the dialogue on children’s social role.

Robert Henri

“The majority of people patronize children, look down on them rather than up to them, thinking they are 'cute' or 'sweet' when it reality it is the children that have not yet been buried under the masses of little habits, conventions and details which burden most grownups.” ~Robert Henri

Background

Robert Henri, born Robert Cozad, was the ideological center of the Ashcan School. He was a native of Cincinnati, but lived a portion of his childhood in Nebraska. The family location out West abruptly changed with his father's flight from the law for murder. Henri was educated at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts under Thomas Anshutz. As Henri’s lifelong admiration of Thomas Eakins reveals, Anshutz had in turn been a disciple of the canonical father of American Realism.

Eakins was not the only American painter of a prior generation that Henri adulated. He also idolized Winslow Homer: significantly, a predecessor famous for painting American children. Henri kept a copy of Charles Caffin’s American Masters of Painting, 1902, and his “well worn” pages on Homer's paintings reflect his glowing praise of the late nineteenth-century artist, who “has grown out of his
environment, the most reasonable and fertile way of growth both in plant life and in man.”

In Paris, as William-Adolph Bouguereau’s pupil, Henri attended the Académie Julian. He first emulated Impressionism, but became a painter in the mode of seventeenth-century Flemish and Spanish Old Masters—Frans Hals and Diego Velázquez were two of his favorites. He mingled the dark and painterly mode of centuries-old Europe with the bald, flat style of the French Realists, such as Édouard Manet. This comprised his mature style, a formula from which he rarely deviated until the mid 1910’s when he became increasingly absorbed in modern color and compositional theory.

At the end of his training, Henri established himself firmly as a portraitist, and it is through portraiture that most insights about his treatment of childhood can be made.

Henri’s most significant contribution to the course of modern art was as a pedagogue. At the Pennsylvania Academy during the late 1890’s, he forged close relationships with his longest-standing Ashcan School pupils Everett Shinn, William Glackens, John Sloan, and George Luks. Meetings of the “Charcoal Club” on Tuesday nights in Henri’s studio featured live models and readings of Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau, among others in the realist and transcendentalist camp.

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457 The quintessential resource of Robert Henri’s career remains the late Bennard Perlman’s Robert Henri: His Life and Art.
458 Significantly, both Whitman and Thoreau were steeped in the same philosophies that conditioned American schools in permissive childrearing, and that made American pedagogues so receptive toward the German Kindergarten. Ultimately, Henri would champion the Progressive notions that arose from the nineteenth-century educational revolution; it is easy to see in what ideologies his espousal of forward-thinking childrearing originated.
Henri married twice—first Linda, and later, when a widower, the younger Irishwoman Marjorie, who survived him. Despite his two marriages, he had no children of his own. Although childless, Henri revered children and his work on children is almost a secular apotheosis of the age. He ascribed passionately to radical notions of child education. He was a disciple of John Dewey, who asserted that the socialization of young children through strategic play-lessons was the only way to improve society as a whole. Henri was also an instructor of art—both for children and adults—at Emma Goldman’s Modern School of New York, or “Ferrer School.” Henri absorbed the cutting-edge notions of the child’s rapidly changing social role. Henri’s alliance with Goldman’s teaching staff evinces that he was attentive to fluctuations in the philosophical orientation of Progressive reform as a whole, which briefly became permissive toward radical Marxism and other extremist political platforms before falling back upon more moderate positions.459

As a result of such a socially engaged background, coupled with a strident anti-academism, Henri’s paintings caught the daily modern life of children spontaneously and sympathetically. He wished to present children as distinct individuals of a separate and fleeting age—almost urgently. Perhaps naively, he tried to achieve this goal not only for children of his own race, nationality, and class, but also others: affectionately terming his portrait subjects “my people.”460


Henri was also an instructor at William Merritt Chase’s New York School of Art as of 1902. There he had met Bellows and challenged his fellow native Ohioan to improve his “ad art” and rise to his personal best. From 1915 to 1927 he also taught at the Art Students League, where he authored his famous manual on art, *The Art Spirit* (ca. 1930).

Henri was an aggressive proponent of innovative art forms, most famous for organizing The Eight at the MacBeth Galleries in 1908, and the Independents Exhibition in 1910. In fact, thanks to Henri, the Ashcan School can be credited as the first in a long tradition of American art movements that used overwhelming negative attention—scandal—as their raison d’être.

But Henri was ousted by the radical modernist art community long before his death of cancer in July 1929. The shift in artistic authority was evident as early as Henri’s chilly reception at the Armory Show, 1913, by Walt Kuhn and a former member of The Eight, Arthur Davies.461 Henri nevertheless provides us with perhaps the most abundant body of twentieth-century paintings exclusively intended to portray the children of the world through an American’s eyes.

In 1931, with the help of John Sloan, the Metropolitan Museum of Art honored Henri with a memorial exhibition. 462

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Henri was the father of the Ashcan School, and the person who formulated its visual vocabulary. It was because of Henri that his students painted in a style that mingled Velazquez, Rembrandt, Hals, Whistler and Manet, and featured urban scenes, generally “impolite” subjects, and, abundantly, children. For this reason my study of images of children by the Ashcan School begins with Henri.

**Often Noted, Rarely Understood: Henri’s Dignified “Melting-Pot”**

**Children**

Henri’s paintings of culturally diverse children are frequently mentioned in art historical literature. Though Henri painted during a time in which America anxiously asserted its cultural independence with considerable anxiety, his portraits prove that part of his country’s national uniqueness was its heterogeneity. They celebrate the positive side of the imperialist, anti-isolationist age, rarely acknowledged because, by cautious, cynical twenty-first century standards, the “melting-pot” mentality of tidy cultural typologies is also thought naïve, even socially irresponsible: and yet, to disregard it, in all its manifestations, is also neglect a large portion of American social history.

Henri’s milieu delighted in the diversity of humanity before the diplomatic restraints of political correctness. Artists and intellectuals searched for defining ethnic characteristics, for the “indigenous,” and presented it as praiseworthy in: children’s books; travel books and photographic tour-books; world’s fairs—often the measuring stick of a city’s clout and culture; interior décor; and architectural styles. Collections of international arts, bric-a-brac, and artifacts that were inspired
by African “tribes,” Orientalism, chinoiserie, and japonisme, now became popular. These same artists and arbiters of taste also frequently used the so-called “inherent” traits of a given race, nationality, or ethnicity as fuel for caricature, a commonplace that was both humorous and subversive, as well as degrading and insulting. Though we are quick to condemn all of these impulses as forms of stereotyping and oppression—which indeed they were—they were as typical of their zeitgeist as a twenty-first century YouTube video or FaceBook advertisement.

In grouping Henri’s images of children by their social identity (race, class, and ethnicity), I will first focus on his singular urban child portraits: those of African-Americans. I will revisit significant questions about the artist’s child portraits—questions that may be extended to Luks and Bellows as well. For instance, what is the value of portraying urban poor children “pleasantly” and “happily”? Did Henri really “idealize” all of his child subjects, rendering them racial mascots—as many scholars have claimed? And if he were such a diplomat, was this patronizing, or was it even the positive foil to other typecasting exercises such as racial caricature (which several of his students were guilty of producing)? Finally, what role did Henri and his students’ direct and active involvement with Progressive elementary educators play in these concerns?

Henri’s Portraits of African-American Children (New York, La Jolla), 1904, 1907, and 1914

Henri’s most famous paintings of children, even now, are of African-Americans. The early works of this category are Portrait of Willie Gee (1904, oil on
canvas, Newark Museum, New Jersey), and Portrait of Eva Green (1907, oil on canvas, Wichita Art Museum, Kansas).

Henri’s painting Portrait of Willie Gee, 1904, depicts a small boy with close-shorn hair, in a black coat with a white cravat. The attire he wears is plain and nondescript but also discrete, gentlemanly, and well-tailored. Even under the voluminous coat it is clear that he is underweight, though this fact is not focal. His eyebrows furrow, his clear eyes turn consideringly toward the viewer, and he holds a bright red apple. The lighting behind him is warm and brown and very reminiscent of Rembrandt van Rijn, yet the treatment of paint has the slapdash quality of Frans Hals. Indeed, the combination of a spiritual incandescence, a respectable formality, and a sense of spontaneous depiction all make this painting extraordinary to view.

Gee, a Fifty-Seventh Street resident and son of a former Virginia slave, was Robert Henri’s Sherwood Studio newsboy. It is interesting that Henri would pick a child of an especially controversial urban demographic, engaged in an extremely problematic street trade for Progressives to rectify (because they were self-employed, newsboys could not be “rescued” from a foe in the form of a clear-cut “boss”). But Willie, as an exalted individual, is no social menace. His portrait is a dignified, sober likeness of a young African-American holding an apple, a traditional symbol of health, sustenance, good education, and American folk heroes. Such iconography asserts Willie’s wholesome “American-ness” and implicitly links him with explicitly white American cultural heroes such as Johnny Appleseed—a conceptual link that did not set well with Henri’s less forward-thinking viewers.
That, or perhaps they were even more disturbed by an unintended alternate reading—that of the apple as temptation, as metonym for the carnal, animal sins of Eve and Adam that xenophobes and racists in turn associated with African-Americans. Either way, Willie’s audience received him cruelly.

In 1923, Willie’s portrait was removed from display at the Corcoran Gallery due to racist protests. It was returned to the artist, and it never sold. The painting had represented Henri in the National Arts Club’s “Special Exhibition of Contemporary Art,” opening January 4, 1908. In 1920’s Washington Willie’s visage was deeply controversial. The crime Henri had committed was his “excessive” sympathy for African-American culture. After receiving a series of complaints, and fearing that threats of vandalism would be carried out, the museum sent the painting back to Henri. Henri, hurt and appalled, donated the painting to the Newark Museum, where the wall plaque even today diverts attention away from its painful exhibition history, crediting its presence to an "anonymous donor."

But discussion of Willie’s peculiar provenance does not end there. Disjunctions between earlier biographies of Henri, and official statements released by the institutions that housed Willie’s portrait, are both striking and puzzling. For instance, though Bennard Perlman stated in print that the Corcoran Gallery returned Henri’s painting because Henri was concerned about visitors’ markedly racist commentary, modern-day inquiries directed at both the Corcoran Gallery and the Newark Museum produce different explanations. When I spoke with research associates and curators at both institutions, asking specifically why Willie’s portrait was removed and relinquished back to Henri, the Corcoran provided me with the
portrait’s dense curatorial file. In the curatorial file, there are three separate prior correspondences between academics asking the same question about the same portrait, and Corcoran curators. The seemingly well-worn explanation for the return of Willie’s portrait to Henri is as follows:

“The Corcoran did indeed once own the portrait. It was acquired in December 1919 directly from the artist who had submitted it to the Corcoran’s 7th Biennial (December 1919-January 1920). It was returned to Henri in January 1924 as partial payment for another of his paintings, *Indian Girl in White Ceremonial Blanket*, which was exhibited in the 9th Biennial.”

In the next sentence of this letter, the Corcoran’s assistant curator of American art adds, “The Corcoran’s return of paintings to artists as partial payment for other works was not an uncommon practice.” She even provides another example in the work of another artist in the Corcoran, Frederick Frieseke. This haste to dismiss racial tension in the handling of a painting of an African-American child may actually confirm additional difficulties that the painting, and the painter, once experienced. This letter was a response to a viewer who was affiliated with the City University of New York (CUNY). The inquirer asked for “the possible reasons, if any have been documented or speculated upon, as to why Willie Gee was returned

463 A letter to Margaret Stenz, of Brooklyn, New York, sent by Dorothy Moss, Assistant Curator of American Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., on 10 March, 2000. Located in the curatorial file of Portrait of Willie Gee, as of June 26, 2012. Similar letters were sent to similar inquiries by Mrs. Robert Solomon, Director of Special Projects at the Newark Museum on 30 September, 1975. In this case, interestingly, Mrs. Solomon outright asked if it would “be alright” to publish the Corcoran’s previous ownership of the painting in a Newark Museum exhibition catalogue—when before and since, the Newark has called the painting the gift of “an anonymous donor.” The controversy of the work’s provenance is an obvious but never explicitly stated issue in each of these correspondences. However, the general circumstances surrounding the return of Willie’s portrait are accurate: The Corcoran’s curatorial file also contains copies of the MacBeth Gallery Papers, and cites a transaction between Robert Henri and the MacBeth Galleries on 26 December, 1923, on the return of the Willie portrait. It is stated that Henri initially sold Willie’s portrait to the Corcoran for $1500, and *Indian Girl in a White Ceremonial Blanket* is discussed as the exchange piece, as soon as Henri approves the transaction in writing.
and why the second portrait was deemed to be more desirable.”\(^{464}\) Sometimes silence is more revelatory than any answer, as may be so in this case—because this inquiry was never directly answered, and in fact it only raises further questions.

For instance, it may have been a “common practice” to use returned paintings as partial payments, but why did Henri opt for a return of this particular painting, when he had so eagerly bestowed the work in 1919? Was it because of circumstances unique to Henri’s personal or financial situation in 1923-4?

Throughout 1924, Henri, mourning the death of his dear friend George Bellows (January 1, 1924), made one of his extensive annual escapes to Ireland, experienced declining physical health leading to a drastically reduced output of paintings, and quarreled with Albert Barnes, forcing Henri to repurchase three works he had sold the doctor.\(^{465}\) This repurchasing proved costly for Henri, who was already financially struggling, and who lost a valuable patron. Could these have been the reasons why Henri settled for another repurchase of a painting of which he was so proud? Or was there simultaneously more transpiring, issues that had to do with Willie’s race, and Henri’s unconventionally dignified portrayal of a black child?

What, indeed, was more appealing about giving the Indian Girl portrait to the Corcoran instead? The Indian Girl Julianita (1916, oil on canvas, Private Collection) is another beautifully simple image of a child. Her pretty face, an interestingly indecipherable combination of Asian and Hispanic features, peers out of a large white cloth and is the only visible part of her person. She gazes stoically to the

\(^{464}\) A letter to Sarah Cash, Curator of American Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., sent by Margaret Stenz of Brooklyn, New York, forwarded to Dr. Cash’s assistant curator Dorothy Moss, 1 March, 2000.

\(^{465}\) Bennard Perlman, Robert Henri: His Life and Art, p. 134.
viewer’s right. Her arms, cleverly delineated by folds in the white cloth, are folded defensively across her chest. A traditional Native American rug in white and rust peeks from behind her, alongside larger, asymmetrical diagonal geometric patterns in darker hues.

One cannot help but wonder if a 1924 audience saw greater appeal in something about the more mystically remote quality of this young sitter—the way her gaze does not engage the viewer; the way the “ceremonial” cloth makes her a more iconic and universal form; and the way that, simultaneously, the “Indian” rug patterns place her squarely in a folkloric American tradition symbolic of a fading Old West. Certainly Henri’s colleagues, such as the photographer Gertrude Käsebier, were fascinated by the “fading civilization” of the Native American, and took pains to “record” indigenous peoples. Their “purity” of race, their removal from the white mainstream, utterly fascinated artists, anthropologists, and natural scientists at this time. Was there something comparably alarming about the fact that Willie, a social Other, wore nice but nondescript, everyday clothing that any Caucasian boy would wear? The fact that he was painted with such immediacy that he could be spotted any day right outside Henri’s studio, or in the streets of any urban center? Perhaps the combination of dignity and ordinariness—permissible encroachment on the world of Anglo-America—made Willie’s portrait a less desirable collectable than the “Indian Girl’s.”

Either way, if the practice of trading paintings as partial payment was so common, as is claimed, then surely there must be aesthetic reasons, unrelated to race and ethnicity, worth mentioning in a letter. Most strikingly, if Perlman has
recorded that there were threats of vandalism which no one at the Corcoran (or the Newark) is willing to discuss, was he given perjured information when he wrote his monograph decades ago, or is it considered more discrete museum policy in the contemporary era not to further mention the racial tensions that surely transpired in 1924? In any case, it is remarkable that Willie’s pleasant, dignified, forthright portrait catalyzed such strong audience reactions in its time.

But what about this little boy who stirred so much controversy? What sort of a life did he lead? Despite his iconic visual status, Willie’s personal identity is largely a mystery. United States Census records from New York City never mention a Willie, Bill, or William Gee who is African-American; all New Yorkers by that name in those years are Caucasian. There are three William Gee’s listed in the 1901 New York City directory, but they are adults whose professions are as “carpenter,” “clerk,” and “manager,” none of whom resides on Fifty-Seventh Street; nevertheless these matches may be worth a more extensive genealogical investigation, in case they are paternal male relatives of the newsboy whom Henri painted.466 Further research into the biography of Henri’s most famous child sitter is warranted. Knowledge of Willie’s life would shed light on the living conditions under which Henri’s children, frequently of the working class at the height of child labor, operated; what more could Henri have done, for instance, to visually illustrate the hardships Willie faced, and was doing so even among Henri’s goals—or is Henri, in some ways, a throwback

466 Gee, Wm. carpenter, home 591 West 141st
Gee, Wm. clerk, home 839 East 69th
Gee, Wm. manager 364 Broadway, home 24 Park Place, Brooklyn
This information was learned upon consultation with the New York Public Library’s United States and Local History and Genealogy Librarian, Asa Rubenstein, at the library’s Irma and Paul Milstein Division, 26 June 2012.
to John George Brown? It is at least reasonably likely that Willie’s mother was one of the generation of “exodusters” to leave the American South around or after 1879, in search of fairer labor in the North.

It is also interesting that Willie’s mother was a former Virginian: Richmond, Virginia from the 1860’s-1880’s was the site of especially tumultuous civil rights protests—often those that granted both women and people of color broader social privileges. Importantly, Richmond’s anti-racist battles, which also included worker strikes during the Reconstruction Act, 1867, received a great deal of media coverage. Virginia contributed to the turning tide in perceptions of African-Americans in the public sphere. Willie is the child of an African-American woman from a state that, two decades prior, famously endured social tumult. His representation as an intelligent, respectable future American citizen, a child of the generation at the center of the crisis, is especially significant. Ultimately, Willie’s portrait proves that Robert Henri, far from being a mere sensationalist, had the courage to endure controversy in order to advocate all children compassionately.

In a similarly noble tone as the Willie portrait, Henri’s oil painting The Portrait of Eva Green, 1907, captures composed amusement in a young African-American girl.

Eva’s age, fourteen years, is surprising with respect to her childlike face and small physical build. However, her bonnet, with its elegant pearl-tipped pin, her backswep hair, her red bow, her full rosy lips, and most of all, her air of assured composure evince a poise beyond childhood. Yet simultaneously, Eva’s coyness does not become smugness. She does not take such finery, or such positive
attention, for granted. Her high-set, pencil-thin eyebrows are incredulous as is her modest smile.

In order to pit them negatively against the formal virtuosity of the genteel painters, skeptics of the Ashcan School often accuse Henri’s portraiture of resorting to a “euphemized” visual language. That is, critics charge that Henri flattered and indiscriminately generalized his sitters and their living conditions. This allegation is untenable if one really studies Eva’s face: Henri has captured a gentle suggestion of unevenly set eyes, as well as a domed forehead, protruding front teeth, and dimples. While they do not render Eva an ugly child, these mild aberrations mark her squarely as an identifiable individual.

Eva dresses in well-tailored clothing. It would be useful to know whether the attire is her own or was furnished for her by Henri. If it is the former, the likeness implies a hopeful upward-mobility for African-Americans of the early twentieth century. Regardless, it suggests that Henri, as with Willie, had no misgivings about portraying an African-American as someone wholly capable of obtaining respectable social status. For a boy, Henri connoted education and endurance, and for a girl, he portrayed all the accoutrements of ladylike fashion savvy; both children are highly aware of their moment of glory as portrait subjects.

Willie and Eva’s likenesses must be contextualized within the long African-American civil rights battle, which was well underway when Henri was an active artist. The African-American Civil Rights Movement derived from the patterns of black exodus from the Deep South immediately following Emancipation in 1862. In

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search of newer, reputedly more lucrative, forms of industrialized labor in the North, African-Americans abandoned agrarian work in the South. Southern bosses panicked and appealed to state legislatures to continue to obstruct black wage rights as well as the black vote itself, but this only provoked accelerated migration of black laborers to the cities. Unfortunately, the absence of black workers in the South also exacerbated rural forms of child labor, since bosses needed to find some form of relatively wage-free help to continue to run their staple industries.

Unfortunately, too, for African-American migrants, work in the industrialized North proved unpromising. This was due to the continued racial prejudice on the part of the American Federation of Labor, and the various labor unions under its jurisdiction. Labor unions reputed to defend the interests of the working-class man and his family, but they extended membership, with its benefits, only to white men, who allegedly fit the mold of “industrious, charity-refusing self-reliance” so precious to American culture of that age. Socialists and anarchists, usually the most likely to champion the downtrodden, ignored the way in which capitalist bosses pitted black and white labor against each other, because they labeled the practice a “class problem”: they contended that when their goal of the total eradication of class was accomplished, this, among other problems would be resolved. Labor unions battled to liberate working children, but usually in order to drive up the minimum wage and eliminate competition for jobs.

This fact places an interesting tension on relations between African-American workers and child labor reformers, who were largely unionists. Therefore it should be noted that paintings of black child laborers were likely to be especially
controversially charged. Such paintings would receive ambivalent reactions from 
racist Anglo-Americans. But they would also receive ambivalent reactions from 
African-American workers who felt themselves deprived of the benefits of joining 
the same labor unions who championed child labor reform, albeit for often selfish 
reasons.468

Within this context, it is extremely significant that Robert Henri portrayed 
African-American children as people of dignity and potential. He did so during an 
era in which race jokes were acceptable even to many social progressives. For 
instance, only two decades earlier, Edward Kembell’s serial “Kembell’s Coons,” 
which featured grotesque caricatures of rural pre-industrialized African-Americans, 
was as typical a form of Sunday comics as “The Peanuts” is today. As historian Ian 
Gordon has recently demonstrated, racial insensitivity continued to characterize the 
visual culture of the early 1900’s during Henri’s mature career. Perhaps the best 
instance of this is the work of Richard F. Outcault, an illustrator and newspaper 
artist destined to battle for sovereignty over the comic serial world with none other 
than Henri’s far savvier friend, George Luks.

Outcault produced “Buster Brown,” a serial featuring a gang of mischievous 
but well-meaning Anglo-American children whose activities pivot on a dandified 
white boy. With bonnet, flaxen locks, and a perpetually, naively puzzled facial 
expression, Buster remarkably resembles Burnett’s Little Lord Fauntleroy and all of

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468 However, it should be noted that African-Americans comprised one of the populations with the 
lowest occurrence of laboring children in their families, and that therefore their grievances with 
unionist racism did not side them with anti-child labor reform activists. Brian Gratton and John 
Moen, “Immigration, Culture, and Child Labor in the United States,” in Journal of Interdisciplinary 
the nineteenth-century spinoffs that his literary figure generated. But during the
1890’s, Outcault also attempted to launch two comic serials with African-American
male protagonists. These cartoons were “Sambo and His Funny Noises,” and “Poor
Lil Mose.” Both such protagonists were gold-hearted little boys, sensible, folk-wise,
and likable to such an extent that it is difficult to characterize Outcault’s work as
outright racism. Yet, their sympathy always hinged on the placating promise that
they were too simple-minded and lazy to be upwardly mobile—and threaten the
implicitly white reader’s position of power. Additionally, like so many other
minorities, the African-American boys represented nature, the unadorned, the
sensual—even the animal—with no concern for the cerebral or the socially refined.
At the same time, on more than one occasion, Sambo and Mose came out on top of
chaotic situations usually caused or exacerbated by cruel white children trying to
persecute them.

Revealingly, only Buster Brown survived long-running syndication, also
becoming the mascot of posters, lunch boxes, and other commodities. Buster was
tenable to a mainstream American audience in a way that black children could not
be, unless they were constantly put down and abused by other characters—
specifically white characters—and did not have the last laugh.

In this milieu, Henri openly defied a very specific, highly acceptable genre of
racial humor of the time, called the “Tip Coon” joke.469 This joke’s humorous impact
pivots on the temerity of the black protagonist. Implicitly an “inferior” being, the

469 For more information see Robert Gambone, Life on the Press: The Popular Art and Illustrations of
George Benjamin Luks, University Press of Mississippi, 2009 and Ian Gordon, Ian. Comic Strips and
African-American, often a child regularly tormented by white peers, dreams of finery while he or she labors toward social advancement—or is otherwise “lazy” and laughingly blamed for his or her social inertia. For instance, in an episode of Outcault’s “Poor Lil Mose,” the titular character stands in finery with a red bowtie next to a monkey and a trained bear; they are portrayed implicitly as equals of a lesser class—something subhuman that can nevertheless be trained in civil comportment for the amusement of others.

George Bellows, too, quoted grossly exaggerated facial features and hunkering, imbecilic bodily positions from Kemble’s Coons to execute his drawing Tin Can Battle: San Juan Hill. 470

But, unlike Outcault and even Luks and Bellows, Henri’s Willie and Eva, earnest and hopeful, instead portray what all of Henri’s child sitters do: positive potential for the future of American society.

The third of Henri’s famous African-American child sitters was a newsboy like Willie, but he lived in La Jolla, California, and his name was Sylvester. Henri’s oil paintings The Failure of Sylvester (oil on canvas, Cheekwood Museum of Art, Nashville, Tennessee) and Sylvester Smiling (oil on canvas, Private Collection), both executed in June 1914, remain humanistic portrayals of one of the most viciously caricatured minorities of Henri’s time. By this point, though, the depiction of a working-class African-American child has notably changed. Henri selected a darker-skinned black model. His overall portrayal is less heroic. It features balder, flatter

expanses of color and value that are more reminiscent of Manet than of Henri’s much admired Old Master Hals, and colder and more uniform lighting closer to Manet than another of Henri’s Old World idols, Rembrandt. Henri also stopped using the three-quarter-view perspectives that he had exploited for Willie and Eva’s portraits. This method itself carried a degree of subversion in its era: working-class black children placed squarely in a highly familiar, lionizing portrait tradition—rendered as regal as nobles, socialites, and important statesmen who had been similarly treated in past art. Henri also once situated the viewer at exactly or slightly below the child’s eye level: as an equal or even an inferior. All such strategies are suspended in the paintings of Sylvester.

Sylvester is not dignified, but endearingly, humanly clumsy. Yet his clumsiness places him closer to pejorative mainstream views about African-Americans than Willie and Eva’s quiet poise. In the most famous work of Sylvester, he has slumped over in sleep while being painted, and this is his comical “failure.” While it is tempting to demonize this image as a period-based jibe at the “laziness” of African-Americans, the facts of Sylvester’s employment and Henri’s artistic tastes make such an assertion dubious.

First, Progressives documented newspaper sale as a grueling enterprise that could have easily exhausted any child by the end of the workday. A poignant single image that attests to this fact is Lewis Hine’s Newsboy on the Steps with Papers, Jersey City, New Jersey, (1912, gelatin silver print, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), which captures a white child around ten years old literally collapsed in a
stairwell using his stack of wares as a pillow. This tiring business was also
Sylvester’s mode of employment.

Secondly, one can argue that Henri’s portrayal of Sylvester as tired and “lazy”
is more honest, and, as such, more subversive, than a more flattering (that is,
appealing to a white audience) image. Henri does not portray Sylvester as the type
of neurotically industrious citizen that would appease and reassure those
Progressive Anglo-Saxon Protestant legislators who encouraged the black exodus
from the South in 1879. Sylvester is merely human, and his habits at times gently
clash with the approved mainstream.

Finally, Henri never borrowed imagery from the popular and highly
accessible racist caricature of his age, at least not in the way even close colleagues
such as George Bellows and George Luks did. Perhaps as a painter, Henri was better
able to afford the luxury of progressive morals.

With these considerations in mind, it is most likely that Henri was making a
sentimental joke about his gold-hearted young sitter, who stayed with him like a
trooper even while exhausted and, in that sense, is by nature conscientious, not lazy.

There may be several reasons for the subtle differences between Henri’s
portrayal of Willie and Eva, and his portrayal of Sylvester. First, perhaps Henri’s
clopping design metaphorically evokes Sylvester’s adolescence and the gangly
physique and awkward emotions that accompany it. But also, Henri’s less reverent
tone may reflect Bellows’s paintings of adolescent New Yorkers—boys whose
bodies were so lanky and attenuated that they seemed deformed, such as *Frankie
the Organ-Boy* (1907, oil on canvas, Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, Missouri)
who interestingly shares Sylvester’s awkwardly formal pose (that is, the pose Sylvester held before falling asleep) of hands folded in lap while seated.\textsuperscript{471} It is likely that in 1914 Henri would be reassessing Bellows’s work, since the two were both teachers at the Ferrer School and attending Hardesty Maratta and Denman Ross’s lectures on color theory.\textsuperscript{472} Henri and Bellows would naturally be collaborating particularly closely on artistic experiments during these years.

**Robert Henri: Reforming Prior Research**

Having seen some of Henri’s most representative paintings of children, we now understand the unconventional nature of his approach to painting children, and we have seen how social issues are inextricable from his work. But this has not always been apparent in art historical studies of this artist. In fact, it is my express aim to rectify certain problems that I have encountered in previous studies of Henri’s paintings. Henri’s portraits epitomize the complex turn-of-the-century impulse to characterize, categorize, celebrate and ridicule the diverse. But most of the analyses of his paintings are surprisingly superficial.

Typically art historians approach Robert Henri’s oeuvre by conducting an itinerary, in chronological order, of his many journeys across country and overseas. Henri’s first great expert, Bennard Perlman, is a quintessential example. Perlman discussed paintings in the order that Henri completed them, regardless of the

\textsuperscript{471} One must of course be cautious to make this visual tie-in, as the reason for the awkwardness of some of Bellows’s boy models, such as *Frankie the Organ Boy*, and *Cross-Eyed Boy*, were physical and mental deformities, not the ordinary clumsiness of adolescence.

subject matter encompassed. Certainly, having a timeline of Henri’s corpus helps to “zoom out”: to understand the grand artistic themes with which Henri grappled. And since very few art historians have treated Henri’s work comprehensively, even this broad approach is useful, in that it creates the much-needed skeleton upon which research may be based.

But for a focused study of Henri based upon a single theme—American childhood—the negative result of a chronological survey is a dry inventory of child portraits with few meaningful connections made between the works. The information is never synthesized. Because they are episodes in a chronological list of works involving subjects other than childhood, discussions of child portraits suffer textual gaps that make these analyses unintentionally redundant.473

473 Newer Henri scholars such as Valerie Anne Leeds have, for instance, attempted to dissect Henri by consciously noting the social identity of his sitters. As one example, Leeds discusses Henri’s tendency to paint Native American child sitters in front of the pottery and woven tapestries traditional to their subculture, delighting both in their social resonance and formal qualities. But perhaps due to restrictions in writing essays for commercial galleries, Leeds still formats her text chronologically. She is forced to spend time referring back from one portrait of, for instance, one Irish child of Achill Island to another, in a circular way, solely in order to refresh the reader’s memory. This limits her arguments, and Leeds is not alone in this quandary; this approach has kept the Ashcan School in a state of research in which Henri and his disciples are almost exhaustively mentioned, but rarely deeper understood—especially when an individual element of their careers, such as children, is spotlighted.

There is one exception: In Picturing the City, and Metropolitan Lives, her two compendia of the careers of the Ashcan School artists, Rebecca Zurier tackles the problem of “realism” as the express goal of Henri and followers, something that distorts the viewer’s understanding of what is pictured. Henri claimed that one must paint, and quickly and spontaneously so as to be “authentic,” only what one sees, without changes based on personal vision or aesthetic pleasure. In reality, Henri and students each highly filtered their images. For instance, Henri was a visual diplomat. Shinn was a newspaper reporter and everything he drew or painted was the result of a shorthand sketch on site followed by generous adlibbing in the studio. Glackens and Sloan were seriously impacted by the savvy drawing style found in the English satirical periodical Punch. Zurier’s observation is a crucial one, but again, plays a thematic role as the problematizing of “realism” as a term, and remains a series of issues rather than a focused analysis of childhood. See Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and their New York, Washington D.C.: National Museum of American Art; New York: Norton, 1995 and Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School, Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2006.
What, then, are the unanswered questions about Henri’s attitude toward children? Recent research both in the social sciences and in art history make it abundantly obvious that, though this was Henri’s dearest goal, one can not earnestly understand the American social scene at any point in time as a “melting-pot” of cultures. Particularly during this unprecedented period of immigration in which Henri lived, one must acknowledge the multi-layered differences between races and ethnicities in daily experience. Denizens of American cities were increasingly forced to coexist or violently clash as differing peoples literally lived on top of each other in crowded tenements. Immigrants produced highly visible, territorial ghettos to preserve their original cultural identities and cope with the frightening difference of others’. Only one passage in Rebecca Zurier’s Metropolitan Lives betrays the dizzying list of ethno-racial distinctions:

“The Italians and Jews who settled on the Lower East Side were different from native-born New Yorkers, many of whom were British, Irish, or German stock. But what gave the Italian and Jewish communities their complexity became apparent only with close knowledge: They were all deeply divided among themselves. Italians were more likely to think of themselves as Calabrians, Sicilians, or Basilicati. Jews had a more developed sense of themselves as people sharing a faith, but still thought of themselves less as Jews than as Jews from Russia, Lithuania, Galicia, or Poland...” 474

Contrasts in religious and gender-based identity, inevitable byproducts of a study of ethnicity and race, also existed.475 Gender in particular played a central role in the portrayal of children by the Ashcan School. For instance there is no

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474 Zurier, 37.
475 “Religion was also a source of division, not only between Jews and Catholics, but also within religious groups. Jewish and Italian immigrant communities contained the highly devout as well as groups of anarchists who were contemptuous of religion...” Zurier, 37.
denying that Henri and his students worshiped the Rooseveltian cult of male virility. This mentality conflated with “American-ness” itself, in order to battle a certain vague fear of the cosmopolitan expatriates who were, since the mid-1870’s, perceived as overly-refined “sissies.” Thus the Ashcan artists projected rather shrilly the manly traits that they valued into the little boys that they painted. They even frequently reused child models of a racial or ethnic background that encouraged hyper-masculinity and often produced physical violence.

There is no way these issues may be avoided in a study of child portraits in American cities. But until only recently, scholarship has mitigated the significance of social identity in Henri’s sitters, both young and old.

Indeed, in contrast with the vast body of literature on images of children in the nineteenth century, that on images during the twentieth century is slim. For instance, there is only one serious attempt to investigate images of children in early twentieth century painting, an exhibition organized by Berry-Hill Galleries in New York City from December 2, 1998 to January 16, 1999, a commercial art dealer. While occasional references to children can be found in monographs on artists such as Henri, Luks, Sloan, and Bellows, these references are generally brief. When children appear in these texts—such as those by Zurier and Marianne Doezema (1992)—they are grouped rather generally with other disenfranchised collectives, such as women, African-Americans, and underpaid workers. In other words, visual attitudes toward the social role of children comprise a chapter of such research, but are frustratingly sandwiched within a myriad of topics, such as women’s rights, religious conflict, and ethnic conflict. As I have done with Henri, I will attempt to
rectify this pervasive problem with his successors through studies of images of children by the Ashcan School.

**Robert Henri: First Conclusions**

Henri did not idealize all his child subjects. When he did, their diplomatic image did not eliminate the fact that he was trying to provide a counterpoint to the grotesque racial caricature that was normative in his day. The fact that many contemporaneous viewers stridently protested Henri’s images of minority children betrays just how subversive these depictions were.

“Dignity,” Bruce Weber announced in the Berry-Hill Galleries exhibition *Ashcan Kids*, in the winter of 1998-99. “That is the keynote of Henri’s portrayal of children. In this he was not only obeying his own instincts and the progressive currents of the day, but was also following in the tradition of Velazquez and Rembrandt, who invariably bestowed dignity on the ‘lowliest’ of sitters.”476 This dignity of which Weber speaks is conspicuous in Robert Henri’s hundreds of portraits of children of varying races, ethnicities, nationalities, and both genders. “If you paint children,” Henri declared in his compilation of teachings, *The Art Spirit*:

“you must have no patronizing attitude toward them. Whoever approaches a child without humility, without wonderment, and without infinite respect, misses in his judgment of what is before him. Paint with respect for him...he is the great possibility, the independent individual.”477

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Archival studies into the living conditions of Henri’s individual child sitters, compared subsequently to how Henri represents their young lives, would be highly illuminating. But even as they stand, these works give the viewer a good idea of Progressive rhetoric. What Henri accentuates, omits, or distorts through portraits of children, in his relentless pursuit for “his people,” makes the selective strategies of his colleagues likewise more visible.

**George Luks**

“Children seem to have in their eyes a definite glimpse of something, a wonder, a half-awakened expectancy. This is at once one of the most engaging and one of the most elusive things an artist may try to catch...to paint children is to approach the historical! ... This one may become a pugilist and that one an idealist. It doesn’t matter. Each will be worthwhile, a leader, a voice.” ~George Luks, quoted in Edward H. Smith, “‘Kids’ That Luks Paints,” The World (New York), February 13, 1921, Magazine Sec., p. 9.

George Luks was a friend of Robert Henri. He met Henri in 1884 while spending a single semester attending an antique drawing class at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Luks was charismatic—even bombastic, an often-inebriated colorer of truths about everything from his age to his wartime exploits—and versatile. He rapidly exhausted himself of artistic styles and subjects. Luks's work was so prolific and cursorily executed that he exemplified Henri’s pillars of great art: spontaneity and candor.
However, Luks trained quite differently from Henri, primarily as a commercial illustrator and newspaper artist, and this dualism influenced his way of portraying American childhood.

**Background**

George Luks played roles well. In fact, as a genius of mass media, he “ventriloquized” others so often that it is challenging to examine his images in search of a definitive view of American children.\(^{478}\) Luks’s paintings were like polyphonic sound: he sought to appeal to multiple audiences—the members of his own class as well as the various sub-cultures of the immigrant poor. His social messages about children are, therefore, especially ambivalent—even self-contradictory, as Luks juggled both ridiculing and ennobling his impoverished, foreign subjects in the space of the same sheet of paper. He was the sort of man who made sketches of American soldiers battling in Cuba, while simultaneously cracking jokes for the leisure sections of the world’s most popular newspapers.

However, the fact that Luks loved and admired youth was indisputable. To Luks children, especially left to their own devices, had creative potential, a capacity to perceive beauty and adventure even when they lived in squalor. A perfect example of this is *Children Throwing Snowballs* (1905, oil on canvas, Private Collection), a gestural painting of seven little boys who turn filthy gray-brown piles of snow at the threshold of a dingy factory—a locus of child labor—into a vivacious

\(^{478}\) “Social Ventriloquism” is a term popularized in art history by Rebecca Zurier, with respect to Luks and his colleagues.
snowball game. The joy is theirs alone; two adult street vendors merely watch their antics, utterly perplexed.

To Luks, these enviable skills that children possessed were precarious. Overly-meddlesome parenting, in the form of controlling or coddling, could turn children prematurely into pretentious, conformist, even neurotic, adults: as a satirical cartoon by Luks, "Children Nowadays," Truth, March 8, 1893, demonstrates. The image features bratty boys and girls in runaway carriages ordering around adults like servants and displaying an array of social pretensions. Though the drawing is essentially a joke, nothing, to Luks, was more tragic.

Indeed, the artist once declared, "There is beauty in a hovel or a grog shop. A child of slums will make a better painting than a drawingroom [sic] lady gone over by a beauty shop." The indomitable and imaginative qualities of children, as Luks saw them, explain why.

Luks represented a mixed belief in Progressive social reform on behalf of children. This derived from his own social background. His parents were Eastern European immigrants who settled in working-class Pennsylvania and sympathized with the "Molly Maguires": radically liberal strikers from the Pittsburgh area coalmines. George's father Emil was a public health doctor. This background of rich social activism conditioned Luks's sympathy for the underprivileged.

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480 See Stanley L. Cuba, George Luks. Luks was born in 1868 in Williamsburg, Pennsylvania, the child of Eastern European immigrants who had arrived in America just after the Civil War. His childhood was spent in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania surrounded by striking coal miners and their radical Irish "Molly Maguires" labor organization. His parents were socially conscious advocates of labor, and his father was a public health doctor whose sanitorium Luks would later paint.
However, a Vaudeville career with brother Wil also made George capable of using the poor as subjects of comic derision.

In Luks’s oeuvre, an attitude of sobriety constantly counter-plays against the carnivalesque. These two moods are also divided by media: painting and drawing. Luk’s paintings were largely somber or otherwise straightforward in their praise of the young. On the other hand, his cartoon drawings ruthlessly, humorously parodied the social tumults of the day through the eyes of unruly kids. There are exceptions, such as the quietly mournful pen and ink drawing, *Child Eating Apple*, which uncannily resembles Jacob Riis’s half-tones of small abandoned children, or the accusatory “How Children At Play Daily Risk Their Lives,” *New York World*, July 5, 1896, which critiques the dangers that new forms of public transportation posed to the unattended young. But these examples are limited to Luks’s early career and they are exceptionally rare.

Nevertheless, working for *Puck* and *Truth* probably exposed Luks later on to the sobriety of the subject of children’s welfare; for instance colleague and editor Art Young drew a fully colored cartoon against child labor around 1912. The image, a parody of enslavement in Classical Greece, pits barefooted and sometimes bedraggled boys and girls, who are rowing a ship and collapsing from exhaustion, against a burly boss with a whip. The boss wears toga imprinted “GREED.” The ship is darkened by eloquent crosshatching. A sign on the wall behind the mean-faced overseer scathingly reads out an ordinance: “CHILD-LABOR INVESTIGATORS: SENTIMENTALISTS, CHARITY ORGANIZATIONS, AND ALL MEDDLING OLD WOMEN: KEEP OUT.”
Luks’s newspaper comics are especially rich, for unlike Robert Henri’s unilaterally positive portraits, these drawings drew attention to children who did not fit a clear mold—children who were in some ways “childlike” according to American social reformers, but who were in other ways not. Luks focused on children who posed uncomfortable social questions, and he used humor to do so.

How, then, did Luks’s unique background—as a child of social reformers, but also as a Vaudeville actor—impact his way of portraying children? For instance, there is an obvious difference in tone between his comics and his paintings, and his attitude is often a paradox of levity and gravitas.

Furthermore, clearly some of the most compelling images of children and social reform produced by Luks are in the form of jokes at their expense and at the expense of social reformers trying to “save” them. Did this have a positive or negative impact on actual social reform movements and publicity campaigns?

**George Luks: The Comic Strips**

Never is Luks’s multi-faceted view toward underprivileged children clearer than in his cartoon serial for the *New York World*, “The Yellow Kid.” Luks’s cartoon career also encompassed regular contributions to *The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, Puck, Truth*, and lastly, *The Verdict*. But his work for the *World* was never surpassed in productivity or fame.

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The protagonist of *Hogan’s Alley*, as the comic was originally titled, was wisecracking, big-eared, and beady-eyed Mick Dugan. His alias, “Yellow Kid,” was a nickname earned because he was the subject of the first experiment in full-color Sunday comics; it was also the source of the term “yellow journalism.” Dugan was often mistaken as a Chinese-American, but was distinctly Irish in name and dialect. He was such a mascot to general readership that he instigated a copyright war between the *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst’s employee, Richard Outcault, Dugan’s original creator. Outcault went to the Supreme Court in a desperate effort to copyright the character of Dugan—succeeding only in copyrighting his name, but not his appearance, and not the setting of Dugan’s exploits. “The Yellow Kid” was in essence an early echo of the brand-name phenomenon, and as such, an effective mascot for popular social opinion.

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482 So often was this ethnic mistake made that there is a “Yellow Kid” episode by Outcault, desperately trying to validate the identity of his protagonist, in which Dugan meets Li Hung Chang, an ambassador from China—who actually was visiting New York City at the time—and jokes to the audience that the ambassador mistakes him for a countryman.

483 Outcault and successor Luks used images of children to engage controversial socio-political issues in the modern American city. For instance, Mick Dugan’s appearance is significant—big ears and ruddy cheeks—which utilizes stereotypes of the Irish immigrant. At times audiences mistook him as Chinese, which incensed Outcault enough to make a cartoon lampooning the error by having Dugan meet, and also be mistaken as a fellow countryman by a Chinese ambassador who visited New York. But by and large, Dugan’s appearance and bearing were a conscious, and easily recognizable, exaggeration of American Irishness. So was Dugan’s parodied dialect. That he is Irish is a calculated maneuver on Outcault’s part, and something that Luks consciously chose not to suppress when he adopted Outcault’s cast of characters. The surges in Irish immigration to New York City may have been behind the eagerness of cartoonists to caricature and thus visually and ideologically control them. In 1840 around 4,000 Irish entered New York City, but between 1850 and 1855 their numbers had increased 200 percent. American moral and cultural authorities such as the Reverend Lyman Beecher had skewered the customs and social conduct of Irish-Americans, lamenting their superstitions and fighting nature.

484 Between February 17, 1895, and March 15, 1896, Outcault’s “Yellow Kid” (the eventually focal character, who would later be named Mick Dugan) had only a minor role in eleven small black and white panels. From March until October, when Outcault left the paper, Dugan was the series’ star every Sunday and color was incorporated. The character was so outrageously popular that he spawned a war between Hearst and Pulitzer for a copyrighted Yellow Kid. Luks was brought on specifically to egg on Hearst and drive up competition for circulation. Luks used a different style for
extent to which Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst battled over the rights to ownership of Mick Dugan and his partners in mischief reveals the almost absurd cultural power of the turn-of-the-century mass press, and the equally ridiculous yet fitting copyright vendetta of rich publishing tycoons to own a fictitious ragamuffin in an era of “golden streets” and slums.

With such a powerful visual tool, Luks tempered turn-of-the-century America’s faith in social activism, using a reborn faith in the self-sufficient agency of street children. His work was a raucous, politically incorrect version of John George Brown’s pretty-faced bootblacks painted during the 1880’s-1900’s. In Brown’s world, the street gamins of America’s major cities are actually little heroes straight out of a Horatio Alger novel; as heroic good citizens, they put aside racial and ethnic distinctions to, for instance, aid a lost ragamuffin in finding her way home (see The Lost Child, 1883). While Brown must be credited for broaching the topic of poor slum children, his work next to Luks’s becomes saccharine. He paints primarily Irish, German, and African-American kids, who all belonged to well-established, advertisements made concurrently than he used in Hogan’s Alley, which suggests that he deliberately duplicated Outcault’s style for marketing (and goading) purposes.

We may very well click our tongues at Luks for his opportunism, but we cannot understand the Yellow Kid as belonging to either Outcault or Luks. Nor can the Yellow Kid be the subject of philosophical debates over whose imagery is the original and whose the copy. The “Yellow Kid” became public domain as surely as “Coke” became a word synonymous for soda. Dugan and his world were public domain with which both artists, and extremely variant audiences, “were free to create an interpretive context for the viewer.”

Despite this statement, of course, Outcault suffered from seeing his creation appropriated and rendered a superior graphic serial. To regain authority over the Yellow Kid, he attempted everything from writing the Library of Congress requesting a patent on Dugan’s character (he succeeded only in copyrighting the title “The Yellow Kid”) to moving the setting of his version of the comic to McFadden’s Flats, and eventually, the less blatantly politically-charged realm of Europe. Outcault’s misfortune may have simply evinced less of a cunning capacity to appeal simultaneously to multiple audiences. But this was Luks’s strength. Luks’s Dugan and gang are naughty but ultimately lack truly despicable traits, sympathetic both to working-class ethnic audiences who wish to see them triumph and to middle-class Anglo-Saxons who can still find them harmlessly laughable. Outcault’s Dugan and gang on the other hand are capable of real cruelty and violence. His parallel comic-strip ventures appeal to a decidedly singular audience.
unthreatening social groups brought to American cities during the 1840’s-1860’s. These kids are always clean-cut and jolly regardless of their circumstances.

Luks instead frankly acknowledged the immutable difference between middle-class white Progressives and their ethnic immigrant subjects. Thus the slum kids at the core of “The Yellow Kid” make fun of the efforts of reformers to “save” them. These children instead establish a way of living on their own terms. Marks of ethnic and racial difference are exaggerated specifically to draw attention to their foreignness and their rebelliousness.

A good instance of Luks’s defiant slum kid cast is “Valentine’s Day in Hogan’s Alley,” *New York World*, February 14, 1897. Children participate in “an emerging public culture promoting free social contact...among the sexes.” The premature sexualization of tenement children was a recurrent concern for Progressives. Middle-class reformists hoped to curb a salacious outcome. They planned to indoctrinate a uniquely American cultural practice in children, whose beliefs and behaviors, according to John Dewey, were still malleable. Thus social crusaders

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485 Prominent among the children Luks painted were those brought by the newer wave of immigration, including Eastern Europeans (largely Jewish) and Italians (largely Catholic). The American city’s established nationalities and ethnicities were not spared by Luks the satirist, either: particularly Irish-Americans. Only Anglo-American children ever escaped caricature and ridicule, but one wonders if their angelic appearance was not also a farce, since they often looked like the cast of Luks’s archrival Richard Outcault’s “Buster Brown” series.

487 See Gambone, 135-138.

488 Indeed, passages from expose journalism give us much evidence of this: Similarly, “There can be but one result from this herding of the poor in non-sanitary tenements; and that is death, both physical and moral. Disease and vice prevail everywhere. The honest children of the honest poor become debauched and go to recruit the army of crime and the denizens of the slums. How can it be otherwise, when conditions of life are such as to violate daily every principle of modesty and decency?” (102, James W. Shepp and Daniel B. Shepp, *Shepp's New York City Illustrated: Scene and Story in the Metropolis of the Western World*, Chicago Illinois: Globe Bible Publishing Co., 1894, 194).
introduced to tenement children the exchange of valentines. However in Luks’s drawing, bewilderment or perversion of the tradition ensues.

Eastern European children play violins while gawking at piles of valentines left to clog the thoroughfare. They stand near goats, symbols of sexuality. Marty Kane the Irish Pugilist, a stock Luks character, leers at a young woman, “yer my valentine see!” A gamin at the lower left burns the valentines. With him, Buster, the Masked Anarchist, another regular, states, “Wait till it gets dark ’en then I’ll open it.”

The sexual conduct of slum kids worried Progressive reformers; Luks made a joke out of a subject that many contemporaneous artists addressed. We should recall that the blurring of child and adult spheres, particularly sexuality, was abundant in the early twentieth century. To solve the dilemma, G. Stanley Hall, like William James before him, proposed a new liminal physical, psychological, and sexual state of human existence: adolescence. But it took a while for the general public to understand and accept that something existed between the axiomatic innocence of childhood, and the axiomatic worldliness of adulthood.

Such uncertain terrain for children of a certain age inspired both outrage and placid acceptance. An aghast Lewis Hine documented the pimp-work of telegraph boys in the Tenderloin. More ambiguously than Hine, as we shall see, George Bellows painted the sexual posturing of child sitter Paddy Flannagan (1907, oil on canvas, Private Collection). And without recrimination, Robert Henri allowed the pre-adolescent Miss Wolff to pose nude for the evening figure drawing class at the
Ferrer School. Luks was certainly aware that the subjects he chose were socially relevant. They were hot headlines.

Luks’s slum kid characters were unruly, but they were also generally kind-hearted. For instance Robert Gambone points out *Holding Up the Ice Cart*, August 1, 1897, in which the same children give water to a weary horse after raiding its buggy.

Nevertheless, Luks made no attempt to mask the rebellious, unsavory behavior of the street children who were the focus of social reform. Instead, he celebrated these traits and helped kids get away with derailing the schemes of reformers. Progressives believed that play was how values were indoctrinated and behaviors corrected. This conviction spearheaded activist societies such as the New York Society for Parks and Playgrounds, gymnasiums, and vacation schools. But Luks’s children seem aware of efforts to redirect their playful energies—and they, instead, seize control.

For instance, in “Hogan’s Alley Baths,” Kid and compatriots are successfully lured away from polluted bathing and public urination. These are crimes of which young “dock rats,” such as in George Bellows’s *River Rats* (1906, oil on canvas, Private Collection) and *Forty-Two Kids* (1907, oil on canvas, Corcoran Gallery of Art), paintings of only a few years later, are guilty. But thusly transplanted to a municipal

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489 It is worth noting that the Ferrer School, at which Henri taught, was an enterprise dedicated to martyred anarchist Francisco Ferrer y Guardia. I find this significant in that Henri’s friend Luks may have satirized the Ferrer School and the general social crusader atmosphere of the anarchists and Socialists, as well as the inordinate levels of fear the middle-class felt toward these sects, through his child “anarchist” character, Buster.

490 Among such reformers was the then-police-commissioner and buddy of Jacob Riis, Teddy Roosevelt, whose name Mick invokes in one episode in order to efficiently spook corrupt cops.

491 The *New York Times* wrote of such endeavors that “improper play” could be “dreadfully injurious” to children, but a “wholesome influence,” could reverse that injurious process of street play and the raucous impropriety of the poor immigrant home.
bath, Dugan and friends cause such pandemonium that the local policeman is forced to turn off the water.

Are these cartoons of unruly slum children damaging caricatures, and do they exploit a hot topic to bolster Luks’s fame? Or do they make meaningful contributions to a social reform dialogue? Perhaps both. Robert Gambone, the latest and most comprehensive scholar of George Luks’s comic career, theorizes the transgressive power of humor. Gambone seemingly borrows ideas from Mikhail Bakhtin. He claims that Luks, who had a background in popular entertainment, used sometimes sophisticated, sometimes crude humor to bridge the social gap between wealthy Anglo-America and the ethnic poor. By making the children of the disempowered so absurd that they were funny, by heightening their indices of social difference (racial, ethnic, economic) to a ridiculous extent, Luks rid them of their threatening quality. Luks thusly broached controversial topics such as traffic and transportation, illicit sexual conduct, rigged Tammany Hall elections, food and drug regulations, corrupt police officers, the rise of “leisure time,” new forms of public recreation, and municipal spaces. He did so through the power of laughter, and through the sympathetic narrating of an endearingly irreverent child (Dugan).492

One may make the case, or perhaps the apologia—as recent social art historians have—that humor in art of social subjects is a double-edged sword. On

492 That these children often sported the distinct features of ethnic and racial caricature was a means to that end, though perhaps unintentionally, because it humorously appealed to the ruling class: it was a way to ridicule the foreign poor whose eventual control of American society they feared—it was a way to control, ideologically, the very children who posed such a threat, immigrant slum kids, by laughing at them. Once rendered less frightening by their powerlessness, Dugan and compatriots, mascots for children of the living urban poor, bridged the gap between those with social power and the downtrodden, who surprisingly accepted (or perhaps, seeing the value in playing along with stereotypes, tolerated) their own appearances and customs being the topic of an ongoing joke.
one hand, it conveys inhospitable assumptions about a target social group—racial, religious, or class-based. On the other hand, jokes at a specific person or type of person’s expense release tensions between social groups by openly acknowledging the problem at hand. Because humor is among the most permissible, and universal, forms of social interaction, a humorous context permits the artist an unusual leeway to undermine the very preconceptions that he seems to uphold. A cartoon serial of an African-American child, for instance, may laugh at the child’s perceived foolishness, while simultaneously humanizing him to the cultural mainstream and, though there are obvious repercussions, making him lovably harmless rather than socially menacing.

In Edward Kemble’s case, this would be an interpretive stretch. But in the case of George Luks, who was once again taking cues from Richard Outcault, the issue is more complex.

Luks created a series of “Uncle Remus” cartoons that played directly on the mystique of the Old South. These drawings both represented and displaced racial tensions by portraying all of the characters as animals (much like the strategy of George Herriman, the producer of *Krazy Kat*). More directly, however, one of Luks’s Hogan’s Alley cartoons introduced an animal character that referenced one of Outcault’s black child protagonists. Its name was “Mose the Trained Chicken,” and it appeared in a drawing of a “Yellow Kid Incubator Show,” a parade down the streets of tenement New York with a magical incubator of the future that generated newfangled devices. Mose, a clever and street-savvy character, was one such product, and, like the other items the incubator spat out, destined to produce
pandemonium once he gained access into broader, and higher, society.493 The narrative borders on the absurd, but while it inspires chuckles, it also reveals deep-seated racial fears that existed in Luks’s time, as well as Luks’s ability to juggle controversial social topics in a frank way that somehow never resulted in his censorship. Mose the Chicken earned his own comic strip beginning June 27, 1897, and “the comic aspects depended on stock Negro characterizations derived from vaudeville and the popular fiction of the day.”494

Luks’s Cartoons: Conclusions

In conclusion, then, Luks acknowledged often-debated concerns of slum kids’ public conduct but he did so in the form of jokes. Nevertheless, in these jokes, he made it clear that slum kids had no intention of changing their behavior. Instead, like an even more rebellious form of the “Bad Boy,” they adapted Progressive reform efforts to suit their desires.

George Luks: The Paintings

Luks’s paintings are far gentler than his cartoons. These paintings celebrate enviable traits unique to children while also advocating reformist theory. In The Spielers (1905, oil on canvas, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, 493 “Mose the Chicken blurs the line between the realist's subaltern and an outlandish side-show attraction when he crosses over into the urban world. He appears in the incubator show "Hogan's Alley" cartoons, displaying an instinct for advertising wholly consistent with the fact that he himself becomes a freakish spectacle in the context of the Yellow Kid’s world. A cross between an African-American and a chicken, he organizes the dual display of "chicks" in one incubator and "chinks" in another. The minority becomes a sideshow attraction, and the marginal becomes an escape. “ Ian Gordon, Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945, Washington and London, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998.

494 “George Luks, American Artist” by Judith H O’Toole, in Cuba, George Luks: An American Artist, p. 98.
Andover, Massachusetts), a big-boned blond girl and a small redhead girl, visual and cultural contrasts, dance together exuberantly in an alley. This image expresses the Progressive theory that play defines human beings in the early childhood state and teaches social values. Despite their cultural differences the two little girls dance together.495

The age of the two girls has, interestingly, been questioned. Their heads are large in proportion to their bodies, suggesting they are age ten or under, but their body shapes, their facial makeup, and the exposure of their legs to the viewer for (his) pleasure all suggest that they are adolescents who are, via their careless play, ironically precocious in the art of seduction. Luks was not the sort of personality to condemn raunchy conduct. Thus, if a “playful tart” reading of this painting is sustainable, it is likely that Luks was making an amoral observation of the changing times. He may have been influenced by his colleague, John Sloan, who produced numerous prints and drawings of un-corseted teenaged girls watching dirty nickelodeon movies.

Sometimes, Luks’s paintings of children were forthrightly reformist. In The Little Madonna, 1907, a small girl clutches a doll in a dark alley. Here Luks sheds his satirical tendencies to depict a somber and indicting incident of an underprivileged child who is being neglected. The little girl is playing like others Luks paints, but here her play alludes to “little mothers,” children who prematurely cared for infant

495 It should be noted that Luks fixated through his entire career on painting images of children at play, with toys often at the center of their activities. This evinces Luks’s ties to Henri, who championed John Dewey and the most advanced experiments in Kindergarten practice in the Progressive Party. Images of children learning, thinking, and self-mastering through play by Luks include: The Guitar (Portrait of the Artist’s Brother with his Son), 1908, and Boy with Baseball, 1925.
siblings because their parents worked exorbitant hours. Little mothers were the subject of entire rescue societies, such as the Little Mothers Aid Society, and often appeared in the photographs of Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis. In Riis’s case, both little girls and little boys caring for siblings were photographed. It is interesting that this subject was once treated as an endearing slice of life by the titans of genre painting, such as Winslow Homer—in, for instance, one of his Gloucester Harbor paintings of the 1870’s, *Minding the Baby*. By Luks’s time, however, placing one child in charge of another, while parents were absent, had become a mark of abuse.

**George Bellows**

Robert Henri’s prize pupil, George Bellows, was one of the masters of American figure painting. Bellows expounded upon controversial, socially relevant urban subjects already broached by other artists. He once said of his paintings, which pushed the limits of decency in realist art further, “Others paved the way, and I came at the psychological moment.”

Born to Republican Protestants, the most shocking Ashcan artist of all was much younger than his colleagues. He represents the last vestiges of the golden age of childhood imagery that began in the nineteenth century and concluded with the Ashcan School.

**Background**

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496 George Bellows quoted in Marianne Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America*: 199.
Bellows’s tragically short life began in Columbus, Ohio. He attended the Ohio State University from 1901 to 1904. He abandoned his university career and moved to New York City to paint under the tutelage of Henri, at the New York School of Art. Bellows once said “my life begins at this point” in reference to the mentorship of Henri.

Bellows acquired his own studio in New York City by 1906. With the oil painting *Kids*, a nightmarish image of rodent-faced children subduing an infant in an alley, Bellows overtly declared his ties to the Ashcan School. The painting was shown at the 1906 Annual Exhibition of the Society of American Artists, and it created what became the standard outrage among viewers with respect to Bellows’s work.

Bellows painted the denizens of the city, both the poor and the affluent, and the changes the urban landscape underwent: the volatile relations of immigrants, filth and pollution, and excavations for new modern architecture. He is probably best known for his Social Darwinist paintings of boxers in slashing motion with gestural musculature, such as *Stag at Sharkey’s* (1909, oil on canvas, Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio). There are interesting counter-plays between Lewis Hine’s photographs of homeless newsboys boxing while being monitored by adult social reformers, and Bellows’s paintings of boxing. Boxing was so popular at the turn of the twentieth century that in 1904 it was part of the St. Louis Olympics. It was both

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497 His mother and father earnestly hoped that he would become a Methodist cleric. These aspirations didn’t hold. George demonstrated instead his twin loves for physical exertion and art by being part of the baseball and basketball teams at the Ohio State University and by contributing illustrations to its student yearbook, *Makio*. 
an index of male virility and of immigrant leisure pursuits. But while Hine’s “The Manly Art of Self-Defense,” Cincinnati, Ohio, 1908, demonstrates uncivilized impulses in the young being correctively channeled through an organized sport, Bellows unapologetically portrays the pastime as a savage spectacle.

In his later life Bellows was a printmaker in the studio of Bolton Brown; under Brown he produced polemical lithographs about controversial foreign policy in World War I. During this time he also frequently painted his two daughters, Anna and Jean.

Bellows’s work inspired polar reactions. His critical nemesis, Henri McBride, accused his paintings, prints, and drawings of mannered sloppiness. In the other camp were those who praised this “sloppiness,” calling it a modern means of portraying American subjects with dynamism and candor. These were qualities that the nation, itself in figurative infancy, possessed.

Bellows supported American intervention in World War I and contributed a series of lithographs and paintings graphically vilifying Germany’s invasion of Belgium. His few overtly religious subjects, such as Edith Cavell, 1918, offered charged discourse on the war and lapse into a kind of symbol-heavy, universal mysticism. At the same time Bellows respected the views of anti-war dissenters and created work critical of those who persecuted them. Anything that institutionally revoked personal freedoms, desired or not, was, to Bellows, suspect. A nightmarish lithograph about a felon’s last moments on earth, Electrocution, 1917, attests to the disgust Bellows felt over this inviolable sacrament of freedom. He assimilated the critical tone and aesthetic quality of Goya, Daumier, and Manet. He illustrated numerous books, especially those by H.G. Wells. He taught using these images at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1919.

While engrossing, these portraits of Bellows’s daughters were executed during the 1920’s. They are somewhat mystical images that engage largely issues of aesthetic experimentation and are bereft of active social dialogue on the role of children in society. They are important in a study of Bellows alone, but they fall outside the scope of this dissertation.

Like Henri, though not a social crusader per se, Bellows was socially engaged. He appreciated anarchist individualism as well as Socialism, just like his mentor. Bellows contributed art to *The New Masses*, a venture precious to Socialist colleague John Sloan. He also taught at the Ferrer School.\(^501\)

Bellows died in 1925 of complications from a ruptured appendix. Henri escorted Emma Bellows to her husband’s funeral, was moved to tears, and earnestly confessed to her, “I always gave him my most severe criticism because I thought he was my best pupil. Now I am sure of it.”\(^502\)

Bellows’s paintings are almost like nightmarish parodies of his mentor’s images of children. What were his many counter-playing attitudes about underprivileged children, and how, in complicating Robert Henri’s vision of Progressive-Era childhood, did Bellows contribute to the dialogue on children’s social role?

**Bellows’s Art of Children: Counter-Playing Tensions**

**Portraiture**

Robert Henri crafted a decades-long formula of depicting underprivileged and ethnically diverse children. Bellows’s portraiture makes it abundantly obvious that he emulated his mentor. However, Henri was only a springboard; Bellows

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\(^501\) *The New Masses* was a socialist periodical launched in 1910 by Art Young and Piet Vlag and it featured art by John Sloan, Max Eastman, Henri, Alice Beach Winter, Mary Ellen Sigsbee, Cornelia Barns, Reginald Marsh, Rockwell Kent, Boardman Robinson, Robert Minor, Lydia Gibson, K.R. Chamberlain, Stuart Davis, and Maurice Becker. Writing by important radical figures such as John Reed and Sherwood Anderson and collectors such as Mabel Dodge were also featured.

consistently turned Henri's dignified, celebratory images into blunt, or even ghoulish, likenesses of street children. He used a combination of artistic tradition (through Henri), lived observation, and popular perception—a mixing of high and low visual sources—to do so. It was much like turning a politely honest written statement into indelicate slang.

Indeed, even more so than with George Luks, who merely counter-played raunchy humor and serious social dialogue, Bellows's art engages a number of more complicated visual and conceptual tensions. The first of these may be traced back to his childhood. At the Ohio State University, Bellows was a star athlete—after having been an extremely sickly little boy. This dualism characterizes the young figures that he portrayed.

For instance, Bellows often painted portraits of deformed street children, such as *Cross-Eyed Boy*, 1906, and *Frankie the Organ-Boy*, 1907. As a disciple of Henri, Bellows inherited his Progressive leanings. But also, as he was a younger artist, his depiction of the underprivileged was blunt and amoral. The children that he painted challenged older notions of tamed preciosity that accompanied Progressive reform.

Indeed, these boys are frankly ugly in the conventional sense; they sport crossed eyes, big noses, hare-lips, protruding ears, and twisted, attenuated limbs. Since Bellows, like his colleagues, preferred to paint children from the Lower East Side, a territory rife with tenement immigrants, his are also likely to be ethnic immigrant children. This is another index of off-putting foreignness to Bellows's standard gallery-going audience.
It is, therefore, tempting to become lost in the eerie, even revolting, qualities in Bellows’s paintings of children. However, it is insufficient to state that Bellows was trying to dehumanize his child subjects. Nor, like Luks, was Bellows exploiting the grotesque for laughter and good sales. Perhaps Bellows was a sensationalist, but in a subtler sense. These ugly boys are not side-show freaks, nor comical fools whose mishaps reveal biting social truths. Neither are they particularly helpless or victimized. Rather, they are valuable, self-sufficient human beings who happen to be flawed. For instance, Mary Sayre Haverstock argues that the musically precocious Frankie is what modern psychology calls a “savant”—someone who possesses a number of mental and emotional handicaps, but excels in a specific talent or ability. Henry Adams has also noted Frankie’s simultaneously attractive temperament and repulsing appearance. Adams has even suggested that Frankie may have suffered from a rare form of mental retardation called Williams-Beuren Syndrome, and that Bellows was compelled to paint him specifically because he was not an ordinary, conventionally charming child. 503

It is possible, then, that Bellows consciously selected models who were not usually chosen as mascots by Progressive reformers. Such children were usually a careful combination of wretchedness and physical appeal; not so with Bellows’s kids. In rejecting the reformist model, perhaps Bellows was challenging the sincerity of social crusaders. Perhaps doing so made Bellows the most earnest

503 “It seems possible that he suffered from Williams Syndrome, a genetic disorder whose victims have an elfin facial appearance, with a low nasal bridge, and who combine mild mental retardation with a cheerful demeanor and unusual sociability with strangers.” Henry Adams, Made in America: Ten Centuries of American Art, Hudson Hills Press, New York, 1995, entry George Bellows, Frankie, the Organ Boy, 136.
artistic champion of the early twentieth-century slum kid. No other artist attempted so often to portray unattractive children in a redeeming manner. Even Lewis Hine was more interested in tailoring his subjects, who were often either beautiful or pathetic, to a reform rhetoric that overlooked children who would not fit his mold.

*Paddy Flannigan*, 1908, is a succinct culmination of Bellow’s child portraiture. Paddy bursts out of a formless backdrop of brown-reds and gray-greens, having unbuttoned the front of his shirt. He is a buck-toothed, big-eared adolescent who brandishes a comically puny chest and bares a gangly frame. The suntanned red of his face and forearms, compared to the pallor of his chest, signify a working-class background. His name indicates his Irish nationality.

Of Paddy’s unapologetically indecent self-exposure, which is openly confrontational, Marianne Doezema writes, "The veiled look created by the boy’s half-closed eyes and his slight smile baring prominent teeth exude an impudent and disarming sexual overtness, underscored by the threadbare shirt that slips from his shoulders."504 In the age of imagery that documents Tenderloin “booster” boys, that sensationalizes crude underage public nudity, and that jokes about slum kids who make valentines a bawdy game, Paddy is a relevant figure. In fact, he poses a problem that social reformers might otherwise be afraid to face.

It is difficult for contemporary viewers to conceive of how shockingly immodest Paddy would have seemed to a genteel audience in Bellow’s era. But an interesting way to underscore this immodesty is to compare him to Robert Henri’s

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favorite Irish model, Thomas. *The Fisherman’s Son: Thomas Cafferty* (1925, oil on canvas, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.), features a small, comely child. On the other hand, Bellows’s painting portrays a gawky immigrant descended from the same native country.

The two boys, Irish and Irish-American, wear the same attire—suspenders and a half-unbuttoned shirt—and they share the same dark hair, dark eyes, and ruddy-cheeked complexion. But because of his aggressively sexual posturing and heavy lidded gaze, and because of the bright blunt yellow-white of his naked chest, Paddy alarms the viewer. Tom instead cajoles the viewer into pardoning his comparably milder moment of immodesty.

Paddy’s aesthetic awkwardness, his ugliness and his comportment, underscore that he is out-of-place, an immigrant in a land that wishes to tame him; and Bellows seems to wryly celebrate his unwillingness to submit. But Tom is a beautiful child, and a native of Ireland; there is no need to highlight his exoticism and comment upon it. Rather Henri chooses to display his universally charming childlike qualities.

Similarly, Lewis Hine occasionally photographed rural factory boys in a state of partial undress, but he did so to emphasize the inclement working conditions that children suffered—such as closed quarters and high heat. For instance, the boys who stand in front of an endless row of work buildings, unbuttoning their sweat-soaked, grease-stained shirts in *Two young carrying-in boys in Alexandria (Va.), Frank Clark….and Ashby Corbin*, 1911, are not being immodest for the sake of
eliciting shock from the viewer. They are doing so to relieve themselves of the sweltering heat, and therefore, the viewer’s response is one of cringing sympathy.

**Cityscapes**

The inglorious qualities of American slum children are also visible in Bellows’s cityscapes. *River Rats*, 1906, was a stubbornly smug response to critical indictments of the usual Ashcan School subject matter. Bellows painted the image two months after journalist Izola Forrester insisted, “It takes more than a love of art to see character and meaning and even beauty in a crowd of Lower East Side children tagging over a street piano or hanging over garbage cans.”505 The sequel to *River Rats*—*Forty-Two Kids*, 1907—was still more controversial.

Critics called the image a mass of pale “maggoty” little boys, who are all half or fully naked.506 These boys –24 are pictured, not the titular 42—bathe, smoke and urinate off a broken-down dock in the Hudson River. Here Bellows continues to show his adaptation of Henri’s Progressive background by hybridizing “lower” visual resources. Antecedent American genre painters had depicted boys, and young men, loitering by a waterside many times.507 For instance it is established that Bellows’s painting recasts the classically beautiful bathing young men of Thomas Eakins’s bucolic *The Swimming Hole* (1884-85, oil on canvas, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth,Texas) in the form of gestural, gangly urban slum boys. But the bald and vulgar character of this image derives from Bellows’s absorption of the visual tricks

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506 The comparisons of children’s bodies to maggots in the painting are the words of a contemporaneous critic, Joseph Edgar Chamberlain, of the *New York Evening Mail*.
507 For example, Sargent’s *Neapolitan Children Bathing*, and Käsebier’s *Wharf Rats*. 
of a low art form: exposé photo-journalism, such as the University of Wisconsin economics professor Helen Stuart Campbell’s essay series *Darkness and Daylight*, which has been described as a work in the Jacob Riis tradition.508

Campbell and colleagues employ melodrama, coupling engravings and group photos of children milling around the New York City waterfront with text conveying that they are somehow equally innocent and menacing. Such children, it is implied, urgently need improved living environments—which will, in turn, resolve their behavioral problems. Bellows appropriates, and simplifies, the general pose and setting in Campbell's photographs. More selectively than the documentarian’s camera is able, he then defines only certain bodies and faces, leaving the rest a squirming, painterly mass. Brighter or paler strokes of paint highlight the children who smoke or urinate, emphasizing their delinquent conduct from the more innocent swimming and loitering of the rest. Bellows’s discerning visual editing exaggerates the rowdier aspects of juvenile slum life; melodrama is replaced by a kind of grim humor.

Like Henri’s *Willie Gee, Forty-Two Kids* faced difficulties when it was exhibited, but for different reasons. Bellows’s “maggoty” cityscape was removed

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508 Campbell was assigned to the first chapter of this book, whose full title is *Darkness and Daylight; Lights and Shadows of New York Life* and which is co-authored by Campbell, journalist Thomas Knox, and Chief of Detectives Thomas Byrnes. See Marianne Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America*. Doezema argues that Bellows implicitly engaged issues of social reform when he utilized popular media as a visual resource; popular media struggled with both forward-thinking optimism and fearful bigotry regarding the increase of immigrant children in American cities. It's important to note that Campbell acknowledged, just like Progressive reformers, that school reform was the surest way to pull children from factory work and delinquent behavior. Hyperbolically, Campbell writes, “Children of this order hate school with an inextinguishable hatred. They smash windows, pilfer from apple-stands, build fires of any stray bits of wood they can collect [Bellows drew this exact scene], and warm themselves by them, and, after a day of all the destruction they can cram in has ended, crawl under steps, into boxes or hallways, and sleep till roused by the policeman on his beat [see parodies of *Forty-Two Kids*], or by a bigger boy who drives them out.” Doezema, 102.
from a show in Boston because viewers found both the style and the topic portrayed to be too indelicate—even obscene. The painting was also intended to receive the Pennsylvania Academy's Lippincott Prize. It lost to another work. The content too frankly exposed tensions between immigrant children and mainstream America. The alarm was in the fact that it did not do so in a way that optimistically proposed a reform-based solution. Rather, unlike Riis, Campbell or Hine, all of whom wrote of or photographed slum children bathing at a riverside, Bellows does not provide us a before-and-after account of social intervention—the fate of these kids is, at best, ambiguous.

Indeed, this painting was parodied in ways that exposed the ambivalence of artist and audience toward a worrisome demographic. One satire, which rendered the children as cartoonishly ugly as those in a Luks comic, featured a police officer charging the delinquents with a club. A child fleeing from the approaching officer voiced his alarm in distinctly Irish dialect (“cheese it, fellas, der cops!”).509 Class and ethnic biases, their connotations negative, were obvious. And Bellows kept a scrapbook of these many parodies all his life.

Furthermore, the title of the painting itself hints that, while certainly not indicting their behavior, Bellows refused to gloss over the social menace slum children posed: “kids” was a pejorative slang coined in Bellows’s day for unruly, delinquent children.510 Well-to-do Anglo-Saxon children would never have been submitted to the indignity of being called “kids” or, for that matter, “rats.”

509 Marianne Doezema was the first to comment upon the ethnic caricaturing of this painting, in George Bellows and Urban America. p. 153.
510 Ibid.
It is safe to say that Bellows felt affection toward slum kids, but was pessimistic about the means by which they were being “saved”—or rather, controlled and assimilated by mainstream America into its schools, religious after-school groups, and “boys’ associations.” Bellows seems to have believed these strategies not only compromised the character of these children—it also would not work.

For instance, sometimes Bellows recasts Progressive doctrine—that is, save the underprivileged at a young age by improving their environment, edifying them, and redirecting their daily activities—in an openly pessimistic light. In *Tin Can Battle, San Juan Hill, New York, 1907*, African-American children hurl tin cans at each other and break out in brawls in a chaotic tenement street. It undeniable that Bellows’s image of violent children and loitering, slovenly adults who seemingly comprise a black ghetto is eerily reminiscent of racist writings by “reformist” contemporaries such as Upton Sinclair. A memorably lurid passage in Sinclair’s 1905 exposé *The Jungle* seamlessly mingled contemporaneous racist speculation with observed fact and convincingly explicit detail. It reads like a selectively shocking “documentary” photograph, or, as befits Bellows, a distorted “drawing from life”. It accuses,

“Any night, in the big open space in front of Brown’s, one might see brawny Negroes stripped down to the waist and pounding each other for money, while a howling throng of three or four thousand surged about, men and women...big buck Negroes with daggers in their boots, while rows of wooly heads peered down from every window in the surrounding factories. The ancestors of these black people had been
savages in Africa; and since then they had been...slaves....Now for the first time they were free—free to gratify every passion, free to wreck themselves..."

While apparently borrowing imagery from such charged writing, Bellows also makes a cynical statement about the Progressive belief in the reformative value of play. In *Tin Can Battle*, this strategy has clearly failed. These violent children at violent “play” will continue to devolve behaviorally as they age.511 A strong undercurrent of social Darwinism, a philosophy with which Bellows’s boxing paintings are imbibed, is also present, and heralds the death of a so-called animal race, derived from “savage” roots and destined to devolve back from whence it came, despite all reformist attempts otherwise.

Indeed, while Bellows borrowed references from Socialist and anarchist rhetoric, he also borrowed from popular media: exposé photography, comic serials, and, as may be visible here, racial caricature. For instance, Marianne Doezema makes explicit links between Bellows’s drawings and Edward Kemble’s *Kemble’s Coons* serial.512

Bellows similarly mocks the optimism of reformists in *Why Don’t They Go to the Country for a Vacation?* (1913, lithograph, Los Angeles County Museum of Art). Here he states, like a Progressive, that poor environment is the cause of social ill. But Bellows’s dark twist is that a bad environment is inescapable for precisely those who are worst afflicted. The poor are unable to shed their filth and squalor, as the sardonic title of the image suggests. Bellows’s *Why Don’t They* seems to directly

quote, or at least share, Lewis Hine’s use of a white clothesline as a compositional lynchpin. So does his painting, *Cliff Dwellers* (1913, oil on canvas, Los Angeles County Museum of Art). The pale line of laundry fluttering across the windows of the buildings flanking the alley is identical to that hanging above the baseball players in Hine’s photograph. Such useful marks both of compositional interest, and of the everyday social customs of the poor, demonstrate that Bellows skillfully mixed lived observation with dramatic emphasis. Notably, these scenes of New York slums also feature rowdy children at play spilling out of an alleyway.

But Bellows’s art lacks the optimism of the sociologist photographer—even though the acerbic title echoes something Hine learned in reference to the children of the rowdy poor. While photographing children in canneries and cranberry bogs, Hine uncovered that rural child labor often took place because urban tenement families could not make enough money to live sustainably in the city. They migrated to the country from late spring through mid-fall to bolster their income. Children were truant from school for the entire fall semester as a result. These were usually the children of immigrants, who, as a result, failed to learn English, and became mired in low-income, dangerous employment all their lives. Because of Hine and colleagues, this was common knowledge in Bellows’s day. Therefore, Bellows’s *Why Don’t They Go to the Country for a Vacation?* skewers the willful ignorance of the affluent, who do not realize that the only reason the poor would “go to the country” would be for still more grueling labor.

Before my study of images of children and social reform concludes, one more analysis of the axiomatic twentieth-century painter of children, Robert Henri, must
be conducted. Here I have here examined Henri’s images of urban slum children, as well as work of the same subject by his closest peers. But Henri was prolific, and portrayed many other types of children—children of the world, often not of American lineage, but conceived and executed by an American painter who was thoroughly of his time. Therefore it is important to summarize this alternate body of Henri’s work, in order to draw further conclusions about the culture that so briefly, yet so voraciously, consumed imagery of childhood.
CONCLUSION

The period between 1870 and 1915 was a unique, perhaps even strange, time in America’s history. It has long been noted that among the members of a society, it is the “poets,” that is, the writers and artists, who seem most stirred by tremors in their community. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was no exception: an abundance of art and writing arose in response to definitive cultural change.

American art abundantly featured children and fundamentally questioned their roles and rights most prevalently in the years 1870-1915. Images evolved from statements featuring children into statements about children. A series of distinct artistic movements arose. One stimulating idea that constantly emerges in my research is the manner in which literature on the subject of the child and visual images of children frequently provoked each other. A period characterized by cross-influences requires an interdisciplinary inquiry. I have conducted such a study.

The images of children that we have discussed here—by painters such as Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent, and George Bellows, and photographers such as Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine, Gertrude Käsebier, and Clarence White—still speak to us in a very direct way, but, to some extent, we have forgotten how radical they were in their time.

In fact, they all contested a rigid, orthodox view of childhood that was pervasive in the social and religious structures of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century: one that believed in “infant damnation,” and that viewed
children as imbued with original sin that could only be purged through rigid discipline and moral instruction, coupled with corporal punishment. Though today these views are generally associated simply with strict Calvinism, in reality, they were widely held by individuals of all creeds. Furthermore, there was very limited if any recognition that childhood formed a special state different from that of adults: that children had special needs. To be sure, even in the eighteenth century, more progressive ideas of permissive childrearing seem to have developed, as is suggested by family portraits from that time period. Nonetheless, a revolution occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, when new attitudes towards education and social reform changed the way children were treated.

At this exact moment, a series of gifted artists sensitively explored these changes, often bringing out issues that are only undercurrents in writings of the period. With a mixture of humor, sentimentality, and social indignation, these artists challenged this view, creating a new modern view of childhood. Winslow Homer and his peers used humor to propose that the misbehavior of childhood was not something to be deplored, but was a natural process of the child’s struggle to develop, and that the play of youth often mimicked the brutal conflicts of the adult world. Figures such as Chase, Thayer, Cassatt and Sargent explored the newly developing world of the indulged child, and somewhat paradoxically, they discovered a world of complex and troubling psychological undercurrents. Finally, figures interested in social reform, such as the photographer Jacob Riis, or painters such as Robert Henri and George Bellows, put forth the notion that a society that did not produced healthy, happy, well-motivated children could not
hope to produce viable adults. But within that general viewpoint, they presented a range of positions, from that of Robert Henri, who declared that children of all races and creeds were smiling innocents, to that of Bellows, who portrayed a world in which the children of the slums often appear as morally tainted beings outside culturally permissive forms, or even as physical mutants.

What is remarkable about this entire body of images is how directly the paintings of children from this period still speak to us today. The children of Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent, and George Bellows, for example, are still figures we connect with and empathize with on an immediate level. These artists created such as convincing record of what childhood is like, that it becomes hard to imagine that stage of human development any other way. As a group they created a new image of childhood, which displaced attitudes that had been held for centuries. Interestingly, during the twentieth century, our views of childhood have changed remarkably little. Never again in the history of American art did childhood and children play such a central role, and to an astounding degree, these artists created a vision of childhood that still hold true today.

Did American artists consciously monitor these social changes? The answer to this mystery is that—as in other areas of modern life, such as mass production, mass transportation, and mass communication—Americans were slightly in advance of their contemporaries in England and France. The expanses of physical space and the less effective social controls of the American frontier seem to have fostered new approaches to childrearing. Even in the eighteenth century, Europeans commented on the permissiveness with which Americans treated their
children. For instance, John Sommerville has written well-known scholarship concerning the evolving state of children in Western society. Sommerville bemusedly reports that Englishmen visiting America during the late 1700s and early 1800s were flabbergasted by what they found. These men reputedly exclaimed, "No children exist here!" While there were plenty of youngsters in the former British colonies, none fit the English schema of how children dwelt in a larger social system, a larger national identity. American children failed to display meekness and propriety, culturally ascribed by the English as appropriate traits of childhood. By the late nineteenth century, in the hands of writers such as Henry James, this became a rich subject to explore. The American child had become quite literally a new creation, fundamentally different in mysterious ways from the European model.

Therefore, the traits exhibited by American children reflected the state (and, less transparently, the values) of the country. Rebellion and independence distinguish American images of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from those of European children. Children (usually male) who are autonomous, brave, and forthright confirm America’s faith in itself, and are rewarded, or otherwise earn the right to social aid. Children who do not possess these traits seem somehow unhealthy and maladjusted.

Why did American images of children dwindle after 1915, even in the careers of the artists who most often portrayed youth? Several reasons may be proposed. World War One refocused artists’ socially conscious energies. The Armory Show

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began the art world’s shift to abstraction and damned the artists who portrayed the human figure as anachronisms. Education and child psychology, now encapsulating Freud and the Behavioral Sciences, moved far beyond the theories of John Dewey. A rebirth of Freudian psychoanalysis combined with the humanism of the early twentieth century yielded a return to the debates of the past, but not until the 1950’s, with the work of sociologists such as Erik Erikson. And most importantly, by 1915 the notion that childhood was a special state was no longer controversial. There was no longer a need to make paintings arguing this point.

So despite the words of those aghast English tourists, childhood always existed, even in uncouth America, and was a developmentally distinct phase. But the degree to which children fit in a larger social, cultural, and political schema—the degree to which art and social policy honored children’s worth—fluctuated. In America, the relationship between children, social reform, and artistic response was particularly abundant—indeed uniquely so at the turn of the twentieth century.

In social history, the debate over children’s roles and rights, based on the debate over the qualities that define childhood, has never ceased: but art history has lagged significantly behind its sister discipline. Since the nineteenth century, we have had the luxury of hindsight. While American society has remained obsessed with the appropriate place and treatment of children in our society, we now better understand that during the period when America relentlessly depicted children (1870-1915), the many tropes that arose spoke more about the values of the period than about the “nature” of children. The definition of being a child was, is, and will be flexible, constantly subject to revision and reinterpretation. But the fervor to
protect and defend childhood “innocence” has never been as fierce and all-encompassing as it was at the turn of the twentieth century. It is, regardless, surely no coincidence that art of children flourished in a time when the role of the child in American society was fundamentally reexamined, in an intertwining manner, by pedagogues, psychologists, social reformers, writers, and, most definitely, artists.
DISSERTATION TIMELINE:
AN APPENDIX OF HISTORICAL EVENTS PERTINENT TO THE
SOCIAL ROLE OF CHILDREN IN AMERICAN ART

1693—

John Locke publishes *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, which is a major foundation for new child pedagogy and the new conceptualization of children in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (including by Pestalozzi, Froebel, Dewey, and Montessori).

1762—

May, Jean-Jacques Rousseau publishes *Emile (On Education)*, which is a major foundation for new child pedagogy and the new conceptualization of children in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (including by Pestalozzi, Froebel, Dewey, and Montessori).

1782—

Friedrich Froebel, founder of kindergarten, is born.

1811—

Kindergarten founder Friedrich Froebel finishes his studies under revolutionary pedagogue Heinrich Pestalozzi and enters university for study of natural sciences.

1821—

New England minister Lyman Beecher publishes sermons in which he speaks for Lancasterian (traditional, punitive, Puritanical applied in America) and against Pestalozzian (radical, nurturing, Evangelical applied in America) childrearing. A schism in the Protestant church between Unitarians and Evangelicals exacerbates the tensions between Lancasterian and Pestalozzian proponents. Amos Bronson Alcott is the voice for Pestalozzian education. Others involved in the debate include William Ellery Channing (a Pestalozzian) and Charles Grandison Finney, both also ministers. Later in the century Beecher will protest the surge in Irish immigrant populations for their “laziness and superstition,” many of the children of these target populations will be the subject of social reform as well as painting.

1824—

July 29, Eastman Johnson is born in Lovell, Maine.

1825—
National Academy of Design, New York City, founded.

The Massachusetts Committee on Education is formed in response to evidence that child labor is interfering with child schooling.

1827—

May, Reverend Samuel Joseph May and Amos Bronson Alcott are partly responsible for a convention held in Brooklyn, New York, to “discuss the defects of our Common Schools, the causes of those defects, and the expedients by which they may be corrected.” Over one hundred people representing more than twenty towns and five countries attend.

1828—

Amos Bronson Alcott, a student of Pestalozzi like Friedrich Froebel, founds the Temple School in Boston, which emphasizes an unstructured and nurturing learning environment in the spirit of Transcendentalism and Evangelical, rather than Puritanical, Protestantism. On June 23, Alcott also opened Salem Street School. Henry David Thoreau is so inspired by Alcott’s work that he resigns from Concord Public Schools in refusal to use physical punishment against one of his students.

Alcott also writes his masterpiece “Observations on the Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction.” This text has been described by Alcott’s biographer Madelon Bedell as “a minor masterpiece...Lucid, intelligent, and highly original, it....clearly forecasts a while body of educational theory and child psychology in America.” In it Alcott details such necessities as “the avoidance of any ‘formal precepts, abstract reasons, and unintelligible instructions’; the substitution for these of concrete child-related imagery and experience to impart knowledge; the institution of special playrooms, fully equipped with objects for pleasure-learning, such as wooden bricks, wheel-barrows, cubes, slates, pencils, chalk...musical instruments and natural objects, so as to employ both nature and art as tools of learning.”

1831—

November 11, John George Brown is born in Durham, England.

1832—

November 29, children’s book author, Transcendentalist, and ambivalent feminist Louisa May Alcott is born. Her father Amos Bronson Alcott, born on the same day, is the founder of the Temple School in Boston, a prototype for radical American pedagogical advances on behalf of children.

1835—
Massachusetts passes a law stating that children under fifteen cannot be employed unless they have attended school for at least three months the preceding year.

William Sidney Mount paints *The Truant Gamblers.* It is an early prototype for the genre paintings of children by Eastman Johnson, Winslow Homer, and John George Brown.

1836—

February 24, Winslow Homer is born.

1840—

June 28, Friedrich Froebel opens his kindergarten, the first infant school of its sort outside of Hungary. The school is located in Thuringia, Germany. Its tenets are based on the principles of Rousseau, Hegel, Kant, and Pestalozzi. Self-sufficiency, learning by doing, mastery of concrete principles before abstract principles, individuated curriculum, female-only teachers, nurturance over punishment, lessons of synthesis/variation using incremental “learning gifts,” with principles drawn from German folk tradition and natural sciences. Child=nature. Children of the poor are as welcome as middle-class and privileged children to be educated. The concept of “original sin” is utterly discarded. “Deep meaning often lies in childish play” (Schiller).

Eastman Johnson’s father apprentices him to a Boston lithographer, a training that Winslow Homer will mimic.

1843—

Bronson Alcott attempts to found a Utopian community, complete with pedagogical advances in children’s learning, in Harvard, Massachusetts, called “Fruitlands.” The project is short-lived.

1844—

May 22, Mary Cassatt is born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania.

1848—

A failed socialist revolution in Europe renders Prussia hostile to Friedrich Froebel’s populist-oriented kindergarten, and Prussian government bans kindergarten. This contributes to Froebel and followers moving kindergarten to the United States.

In Pennsylvania laws are passed instating a minimum age of 12 for child laborers in cotton, woolen, and silk mills.
1849—

November 1, William Merritt Chase is born.

Lilly Martin Spencer paints *Domestic Happiness*. Like Mount, Spencer is a prototype for the late nineteenth-century genre painters of children. Spencer brings explicit domestic sentimentalism, contemporarily thought the especial talent of female painters, into the tradition.

Eastman Johnson trains in Dusseldorf, Germany, under Emmanuel Leutze. This begins his travels in Europe to the Hague and to Paris.

1850—

Rhode Island and Pennsylvania pass laws stating that children under fifteen cannot be employed unless they have attended school for at least three months the preceding year.

1851—

August 7, the Prussian government officially bans kindergartens. Then other German governments follow suit.

1852—

June, Friedrich Froebel dies.

1853—

After studying at Newcastle-on-Tyne at Edinburgh Academy under a miniaturist, John George Brown immigrates to the United States and moves to New York City. He enrolls in the National Academy of Design and studies under Thomas Seir Cummings.

Charles Loring Brace opens the Children’s Aid Society.

1855—

Winslow Homer begins apprenticeship under a lithographer in Boston.

Eastman Johnson enters training under Thomas Couture in Paris. He shortly returns home due to the death of his mother.

1856—

January 12, John Singer Sargent is born.
The first kindergarten in the United States opens, headed by Margarethe Meyer Schurz, in Watertown, Wisconsin. It is private and only German-speaking.

1857—

While turning down an official position at Harper's, Winslow Homer begins a lucrative 20-year career as a professional illustrator, and begins freelancing for Harper’s and Ballou’s Pictorial.

The first English-speaking kindergarten in the United States opens, founded by Elizabeth Peabody, in Boston. Peabody was a student of Friedrich Froebel and Maria von Marenholz-Bulow in Germany.

1858—

North Carolina law allows courts to put African-American children into forced apprenticeships if they are born out of wedlock and if their parents are not employed in “some honest, industrious occupation,” without parental consent.

John George Brown moves into the Tenth Street Studio, New York City, future home of William Merritt Chase.

Catherine-Louise Frankenburg, one of Froebel’s German students, forms a kindergarten in Columbus, Ohio.

1859—

At early age of 15, Mary Cassatt begins to study at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

Winslow Homer moves into the Tenth Street Studio, home of John George Brown and future home of William Merritt Chase. Homer also begins attending the National Academy of Design (until 1863).

Eastman Johnson also establishes a studio in New York City and exhibits Negro Life in the South, which solidifies his reputation as a painter.

1860—

Eastman Johnson paints The Barefoot Boy.

John George Brown begins a long and lucrative career as a genre painter, primarily of children.

1861—
The American Civil War begins.

1862—

John George Brown paints Pay Toll.

1863—

John George Brown becomes a full member of the National Academy of Design.

John George Brown paints The Beggars, possibly the earliest portrait of newsboys and street sweepers in America after Henry Inman's Newsboy, 1841.

Winslow Homer is hired by Harper’s to go to the Civil War frontlines and sketch battles sense and camp life. He makes drawings and paintings based on his sketches and wood engravers transfer his images for the magazine.

Elizabeth Peabody publishes her first Kindergarten Guide.

1864—

Eastman Johnson has work shown in the New York Metropolitan Fair: The Wounded Drummer Boy, The Young Sweep, the Post Boy, three of the four, are of children.

Eastman Johnson paints Christmas Time: The Blodgett Family.

1865—

June 24, Robert Henry Cozad (Robert Henri) born in Cincinnati, OH

The American Civil War ends. Social, economic, cultural changes during the Restoration that follows are irrevocable, but American artists will continue to paint children in rural pre-industrialized antebellum scenarios through the end of the nineteenth century.

Winslow Homer shows Home Sweet Home at the National Academy of Design and his national reputation as a painter is secured. He obtains the position of full academician.

Lewis Carroll, also a Pictorialist photographer of children, publishes Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland in England.

William N. Hailmann adds a kindergarten to the German-American Academy that he directs in Louisville, Kentucky.
1866—

George Luks is born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, to progressive Eastern European immigrant parents (Emil, a public health doctor, and Bertha, a Bavarian noblewoman) who sympathize with the Molly Maguires (Pennsylvania coalmining political extremists).

Mary Cassatt moves to Paris to study privately under Jean-Leon Gerome.

The American Water Color Society is formed and John George Brown is a charter member.

John George Brown paints The Teacher, an obvious parody on the rise of female schoolteachers rendered cute and innocuous by substituting children in the roles of the female schoolmistress and the unruly protesting male students.

Lilly Martin Spencer paints War Spirit At Home, featuring children being both patriotic and unruly in the absence of their patriarchs—an increasing trend both in wartime and general American culture toward the primacy of women rearers and elementary educators.

1867—

John George Brown’s first wife dies. This leaves the artist alone to care for his two daughters, ages three and six. This is when he begins to focus on paintings of American children, particularly those featuring small girls.

John George Brown’s friend George Walter Vincent Smith becomes his chief patron, purchasing four of his paintings.

Horatio Alger’s Ragged Dick is serialized in magazines and set for a book publication the following year.

Winslow Homer goes to Paris, France to view his most praised early painting Prisoners At the Front exhibited in the Exposition Universelle. He is somewhat influenced by the Barbizon School, Manet, Courbet, and Millet. He remains in Paris for a year.

1868—

Mary Cassatt studies painting urban themes under Thomas Couture. Her Mandolin Player is accepted to the Paris Salon.

Louisa May Alcott publishes the first volume of Little Women.
Currier & Ives releases the print series *The Four Seasons* which emphatically depicts the Romantic ideal of children isolated from culture and equated with nature.

For the National Academy of Design exhibition, Eastman Johnson paints *The Boy Lincoln*.

**1869—**

Louisa May Alcott publishes the second volume of *Little Women*.

Boston native Thomas Bailey Aldrich publishes *The Story of a Bad Boy*.

Milton Bradley, a veteran kindergartener, publishes Edward Wiebe's *Paradise of Childhood*, discussing kindergarten principles.

Knights of Labor labor union founded. This is the first organization to legislate labor restriction in the south and is an important precedent for child labor restriction law.

Eastman Johnson paints *The Brown Family*.

Eastman Johnson paints *Mother and Child*.

**1870—**

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, founded.

The German General Education Union is formed to disseminate kindergarten values to other nations.

Conrad Poppenhusen, a German industrialist and philanthropist, opens the first free American kindergarten, in College Point, New York.

Eastman Johnson moves to live with his family in Nantucket, Maine and begins painting resident children.

(Ca.) Winslow Homer begins annual visits to Houghton Farm, Mountainville, New York, to visit and experience the changes going on in the American country schoolhouse.

**1871—**

William Merritt Chase exhibits his first painting at the National Academy of Design, New York.

Mary Cassatt’s career advances significantly when she copies Correggio paintings in Parma, Italy, for the Archbishop of Pittsburgh.
Louisa May Alcott publishes *Little Men: Life at Plumfield With Jo’s Boys*. The central assertion of this novel is “children are more tamed by kindness than by whippings.”

Walter Smith of Boston publishes his Smith Theory of Drawing to be implemented as a compulsory learning method in Massachusetts schools.

The German-American Teachers Union hosts a convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, where kindergarten presentations are featured. This prompts a similar convention in Hoboken, New Jersey.

Eastman Johnson paints *The Old Stagecoach* and it is the height of the National Academy of Design exhibition. It is also shown this year at the Union Club and Brooklyn Museum.

Eastman Johnson paints *The Hatch Family*.

Winslow Homer paints *Crossing the Pasture*.

Winslow Homer paints *The Country School*.

1872—

Charles Loring Brace publishes *The Dangerous Classes of New York*, which devotes an entire section to child labor and the factory system and their demoralizing qualities, but also establishes the tone of combined charity and hysteria toward a growing foreign, ethnic, poor class of child laborers.

Susan Blow opens the first publicly-funded kindergarten in the United States, in St. Louis.

The Prohibition Party includes a clause in its national platform condemning child labor.

Winslow Homer paints *Snap the Whip*.

Winslow Homer paints *The Morning Bell (The Old Mill)*.

Winslow Homer paints *The Nooning*.

1873—

John George Brown paints *The Tomboy*.

Winslow Homer visits Gloucester, Massachusetts, for a summer, and begins his famous series of Gloucester Harbor watercolors, almost entirely of local children.
Winslow Homer watercolors *The Blackboard.*

Winslow Homer watercolors *Basket of Clams.*

Winslow Homer watercolors *Boy with Anchor.*

Winslow Homer watercolors *In Charge of Baby.* If placed in an urban slum context, this image would deeply alarm contemporary middle-class audiences who had formed “Little Mother's Aid” societies in response to its real-life equivalent. But because it is rural, the image remains quaint and nostalgic.

Winslow Homer paints *Waiting For Dad/Dad's Coming!*

Winslow Homer paints *The Boat Builders.*

Winslow Homer's painting becomes the woodcut *The Noon Recess.*

October 11, Winslow Homer's watercolor *Four Boys on a Beach* becomes the woodcut engraving *Shipbuilding, Gloucester Harbor* for Harper’s.

1874—

Lewis Wickes Hine is born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

John Singer Sargent passes the Ecole des Beaux-Arts entry exam in Paris and enters the tutelage of Carolus-Duran and Leon Bonnat.

John George Brown paints *Crossing the Brook.*

John George Brown paints *Hiding in the Old Oak.*

Winslow Homer exhibits at John George Brown's American Water Color Society.

Winslow Homer paints *School Time.*

Winslow Homer's paintings *How Many Eggs/Raid on a Sand-Swallow Colony* and *Waiting For a Bite* become wood engravings in Harper’s.

Winslow Homer watercolors *The Sick Chicken.*

1875—

Art Students League, New York City, is founded.

John George Brown paints *The Anxious Moment,* which, in his oeuvre, is an uncharacteristically tense and unpleasant image of rural childhood.
Winslow Homer paints *Three Boys in a Dory with Lobster Pots*.

Winslow Homer paints *The Unruly Calf*.

Winslow Homer paints *Milking Time*.

Winslow Homer watercolors *The Busy Bee*.

**1876—**

Mark Twain publishes *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

Eastman Johnson paints *Husking Bee, Island of Nantucket*.

John George Brown paints *The Country Gallants*.

Winslow Homer paints *Breezing Up (A Fair Wind)*.

The Philadelphia Centennial Exposition is held. There is a kindergarten display there by Anna Coe. Winslow Homer (*Snap the Whip* and *Breezing Up*), Eastman Johnson, John George Brown, William Merritt Chase, among many other American artists, all have paintings represented. Chase wins a medal for *Keying Up: The Court Jester*.

**1877—**

The Society of American Artists is formed by artists unsatisfied with the excessive conservatism and academic vehemence of the National Academy of Design, New York.

William Merritt Chase visits Venice, Italy, with Frank Duveneck and John Henry Twachtmann.

Both of Mary Cassatt’s entries to the Paris Salon are rejected.

Ernst Steiger publishes John Krauss’s 2-volume *Kindergarten Guide*.

Eastman Johnson paints *Girl in Barn (Sarah May)* and *In the Hayloft*.

John George Brown paints *A Passing Show*.

John George Brown paints *The Berry Boy*.

Winslow Homer watercolors *The New Novel (Book)*.
Winslow Homer exhibits for the first time with the Boston Arts Club, showing the painting *An Afternoon Sun*. He continues to exhibit there until 1909.

Winslow Homer becomes a full member of John George Brown’s American Water Color Society.

(Ca.) Winslow Homer becomes a member of the Tile Club in which William Merritt Chase is a member.

Jacob Riis takes a job at the *New York Tribune*.

1878—

Felix Adler, founder of the New York Society for Ethical Culture, founds the Workingman’s School, which emphasizes moral education, psychological development, teacher training, and the integration of “manual arts” with academics. The Progressive curriculum is hands-on and includes geography, history, nature study, creative writing, arts and crafts, wood working, singing, field trips and drama. The school hosts a free kindergarten for (initially) eight children of the working poor.

William Merritt Chase returns to the USA from studying abroad in Munich, and begins to teach at the Art Students League of New York, through 1896, and again 1907-1911. He has become famous for exhibiting *Ready for the Ride* at the Society of American Artists in the same year.

Mary Cassatt paints *Girl in a Blue Armchair*. It is rejected from the Paris Salon.

John George Brown paints *The Bootblack*, one of an extensive series within the genre.

John George Brown paints *Eating the Profits*.

Winslow Homer watercolors *Scene on Houghton Farm*.

Winslow Homer watercolors *Spring*.

Winslow Homer watercolors *Apple Picking*.

Winslow Homer watercolors *Girl with Hay Rake*.

John Singer Sargent paints *Oyster Gatherers of Cancale*.

Winslow Homer shows in the next Paris Exposition Universelle: *Snap the Whip, Country School, A Visit from the Old Mistress*, and *Sunday Morning in Virginia*. 
1879—

John Singer Sargent paints *Neapolitan Children Bathing*, an unusual selection of subject matter for a debut piece in the American National Academy of Design. It features an airy warm image of three boys posed in surprisingly naked candor on a beach and, though no scholars have said so, could almost be a precursor to George Bellows’s seedier urban variant, *42 Kids*.

Eastman Johnson paints *Watering Flowers*.

Eastman Johnson paints *Winter: Portrait of a Child* of his daughter Ethel.

John Singer Sargent paints *Robert de Cervieux*.

John Singer Sargent paints *Portrait of Edward and Marie-Louise Pailleron*.

Mary Cassatt exhibits for the first time with the French Impressionists, who had been courting her since 1875 through Edgar Degas and Berthe Morisot.

John Dewey, future kindergartener and author of authoritative books on the subject of modern functional child psychology and education, graduates from the University of Vermont.

1880—

The Workingman’s School of New York adopts elementary school grades into its progam.

Alice Putnam, student of Susan Blow, who was a student of Froebel, works at Hull House in Chicago and helps found the Free Kindergarten Association and Chicago Froebel Association. With the formation of such types of free charity kindergartens, the ideology of this educational system disseminates wholly into all classes of mainstream America and becomes accessible to all children.

Mary Cassatt paints *Mother About To Wash Her Sleepy Child*.

Eastman Johnson paints *Cranberry Harvest: Isle of Nantucket*.

Winslow Homer enters a yearlong seclusion in Gloucester’s Eastern Point Lighthouse while he paints.

Winslow Homer watercolors *Four Boys Bathing*. Again this is a more innocuous antecedent to a George Bellows image.

1881—
The Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (FOTLU) is founded. Its members call for the abolition of child labor, specifically the barring of all children under fourteen from all gainful employment.

Winslow Homer moves to a fishing village in Cullercoats, near Tynemouth, England, and adopts a “man and the sea” subject matter with increasingly monumental and static figures.

In Philadelphia, Frederick Ives patents the first successful commercial half-tone printing method, based on the discovery of Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot. This is the beginning of photography’s encroachment on the newspaper and magazine industry. The development is of vital importance to the symbiotic and sometimes competitive relationship between documentary photographers and urban realist painters/draftsmen of social reform (often involving children).

1882—

Robert Henri’s father shoots an employee in October and in December an arrest warrant is issued.

John Singer Sargent paints *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (at the time *Portraits d’enfants*).

Winslow Homer returns to the United States from England and exhibits his English watercolors.

John George Brown paints *The Lost Child*.

August 12 (or 19), George Bellows is born.

1883—

Cozad family (Robert Henri’s family) assume new names and Robert enrolls in a New York boarding school.

The Senate sends out a probe investigating relations between capital and labor, including child labor.

North Carolina lawmakers pass a measure allowing widows to contest for guardianship of their children for the first time, rather than condemn them to forced apprenticeships.

Cecilia Beaux paints *Les Derniers Jours D’Enfance*.

1884—
George Luks enrolls in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine arts but remains only for a month. He leaves and travels with his brother Will as the minstrel show duo “Buzzy and Anstock.” Controlling what one does with one’s leisure time is a mark of social control. Working-class Americans turn to the vaudeville that Luks and his brother so love. The vaudeville tradition which he maintains throughout his artistic career is a populist alternative to refined entertainment and is implicitly audience-inclusive. “The hyphenation of self-identity.” Luks acquires an artistic voice that incorporates many exaggerated ethnic quotations. This will show up a lot in his comic serials. Within ca. a few years Luks will study at the Staatliche, Kunstkademie, in Dusseldorf, Germany.


John Singer Sargent paints *Garden Study of the Vickers Children*.

John Dewey receives his PhD from Johns Hopkins University after studying under Charles Sanders Pierce, Herbert Baxter Adams, and G. Stanley Hall. He accepts a teaching position at the University of Michigan.

John George Brown paints *Eyeing the Fruit Stand*.

Winslow Homer moves to Prout’s Neck, to live at his family’s estate and care for his ailing father. As always, Homer’s brother Charles supports and assists him.

The Industrial Education Association is formed out of Emily Huntington’s “Kitchen Garden,” which is an attempt to teach slum children the rudiments of domestic management. Frobelian learning gifts substituted with actual dishes to wash, etc.

1885—

Winter, Winslow Homer visits the Bahamas and completes watercolors for *Century Magazine*.

February, Mark Twain publishes *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the United States.

August, John Singer Sargent paints the “damn queer” portrait *Robert Louis Stevenson* which reflects aspects of *Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (lighting, use of lots of empty large space around the figure). During sessions Stevenson has Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which vastly informs and reflects popular concepts of American childhood at the time, read to himself and Sargent.

William Merritt Chase becomes President of the Society of American Artists.
John Singer Sargent meets Claude Monet at Giverny, France, and takes up plein-air painting.

John Singer Sargent paints *The Birthday Party (Fete Familiale).*

John George Brown paints *A Jolly Lot.*

John George Brown watercolors *Perfectly Happy.*

John George Brown paints *Paddy's Valentine.*

1886—

The Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, explicitly against child labor, becomes the American Federation of Labor. Its new constitution retains a child labor restriction platform. The ulterior motive of labor unions in abolishing child labor is that child laborers are dangerous to unskilled industrialized employment, because they will work for any wage and thus the minimum wage is significantly decreased if adult laborers wish to compete for the same jobs. This is especially true in the South where mill owners believe that stopping child labor is just the “entering wedge” of self-interested workers.

The National College of Education opens and is based on the treatises of Elizabeth Harrison, a scholar of kindergarten education.


Mary Cassatt paints *Child in a Straw Hat.*

John Singer Sargent completes painting *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose,* which is surprisingly successful at the conservative British Royal Academy.

Louisa May Alcott publishes *Jo’s Boys.*

1887—

Anna Bryan opens a kindergarten for indigent children in Louisville, Kentucky, sponsored by the Union Gospel Mission. The kindergarten lasts for six years. Bryan breaks with Froebelian German-centric dogma after recognizing the ill effects of alcoholism, abuse, and poverty in the families of her students. She substitutes everyday themes centered around the children’s often problematic homes for play gifts and activities, with focus on sparking individual interests. Bryan’s efforts are fundamental to the kindergartens which will be founded by Progressive pedagogue John Dewey while he is at the University of Chicago.
William Merritt Chase begins teaching at the Brooklyn Art Association for one year, then again in 1891-1896.

William Merritt Chase paints *The Open Air Breakfast*.

John Singer Sargent paints *Caspar Goodrich*.

In Italy, Alfred Stieglitz photographs *The Last Joke, Bellagio (A Good Joke)*.

In Italy, Alfred Stieglitz photographs *Leone, Bellagio*.

In Italy, Alfred Stieglitz photographs *A Venetian Gamin*. The likeness to the work of Jacob Riis in the exact same year (published one year later in *How the Other Half Lives*) and even more so to Lewis Hine, who built on Riis's work in later decades, is uncanny. Stieglitz has not yet become too much a Modernist purist for gristy documentary images so long as he can situate them in an extant artistic tradition, and here the subject matter linking tradition with the photograph is children.

Alfred Stieglitz photographs *Kettle Cleaner, Lake Como* consciously in a washerwoman tradition of Millet, Daumier, Degas, and Boudin. It features a young girl stooping to get water from a lake. It is not difficult to see similarities in this subject matter to any painter of the age who has trained abroad.

Alfred Stieglitz photographs *The Unwilling Bath* about a boy trying to wash a cow.

William Merritt Chase's first daughter, Alice Dieudonnée, is born.

John Singer Sargent visits New York and Boston and has his first solo exhibition in Boston.

John George Brown becomes president of the American Water Color Society (until 1904).

1888—

Progressive photographer and police commissioner Jacob Riis publishes his album of New York tenament-dwelling immigrants, *How the Other Half Lives*, featuring exclusively half-tone illustrations, a feat without precedent in photo-journalism. His intent is to urge the American Anglo-American middle-class to intercede fiscally on behalf of the poor, whom he pits as depraved not innately, but based on a negative environment of filth, crowding, and malnourishment.

Winslow Homer buys a camera and begins to use it to secure bases for seascape and landscape paintings.
William Merritt Chase’s second daughter, Koto Robertine, is born.

William Merritt Chase paints *Hide and Seek*.

William Merritt Chase paints *The Lake for Miniature Yachts*.

John Singer Sargent paints *Alice Vanderbilt Shepard*.

1889—

William Merritt Chase’s first son, William Merrit, Jr., is born.

William Merritt Chase paints *Elsie Lyde as Little Lord Fauntelroy*.

The New York Free Kindergarten Association is founded.

1890—

The Workingman’s School of New York is renamed the Ethical Culture School of New York.

John Singer Sargent paints *Beatrice Goelet*.

John Singer Sargent paints *Mrs. Edward L. Davis and Her Son Livingston Davis*.

John Singer Sargent paints *Homer Saint-Gaudens and His Mother*.

Alfred Stieglitz photographs *Weary* in Vienna, where he also becomes a member of the Wiener Club der Amateur Photographen. The image is a peasant girl in a picturesque pose lying in a fuzzy-focused field against her labor, a pile of timber. He also photographs *Peasant*, of a young girl picking flowers in a field.

1891—

February, Robert Henri finally gains admission to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts after a failed attempt in 1889.

September, Robert Henri returns to the USA to live with his brother and sister-in-law in Philadelphia.

William Merritt Chase opens his Shinnecock Hills Summer School of Art on Long Island, New York.

The National Consumers League is founded. Along with a host of “charity organization societies” (COS) run largely by emancipated Protestant women, the NCL is an important precursor to the National Child Labor Committee. Florence
Kelley, an American Socialist educated at Cornell and the University of Zurich, is the general secretary of the NCL.

Richard Watson Gilder, editor of *The Century*, becomes president of the New York Free Kindergarten Association. Gilder is close friends with Jacob Riis, as the two work together for the adoption of public kindergartens in New York City.

Winslow Homer paints and watercolors *Huntsman and Dogs*.

George Luks has work published in *Puck*.

1892—


September, Henri begins teaching at the Pennsylvania School of Design for Women, through 1895. Awarded a scholarship to continue his studies at the Academy. Moves into studio at 806 Walnut Street. December, Henri meets John Sloan.

Lewis Hine’s father dies in an accident and Lewis works to support his family 13 hours a day in a furniture factory, for four dollars a week.

The Democratic Party officially states, “We are in favor of the enactment by the states of laws for abolishing the notorious sweating system, for abolishing contract convict labor, and for prohibiting the employment in factories of children under fifteen years of age.”

The International Kindergarten Union is founded.

Winslow Homer paints and watercolors *Hound and Hunter*.

George Luks has work published in *Truth*. The use of comical poses and caricatures, and street urchins as central characters, presages his work for *The New York World*.

1893—

March, Robert Henri becomes founding member of Charcoal Club and elected its president. Here Henri becomes close with the “Philadelphia Five” and many follow him to New York City to become the “Eight” and “Ash Can School”: John Sloan, William Glackens, George Luks, Everett Shinn among them.

May, Henri begins his own summer school at Darby Creek Pennsylvania.

Summer, the Chicago World’s Fair (World’s Columbian Exposition) is held. Vast event featuring America’s best Beaux-Arts architects, and a vast array of painters,
sculptors. Mary Cassatt includes a mural called “Modern Woman,” involving young girls.

A free kindergartens exhibition is held at the Chicago World's Fair.

Robert Henri has two murals shown in Chicago World's Fair.

George Luks becomes a member of the Philadelphia Press where he meets Glackens, Sloan, Shinn, and through them Robert Henri.

Mary Cassatt paints The Child's Bath.

Mary Cassatt paints The Boating Party.

1894—

Summer, Alfred Stieglitz and first wife Emmy visit Gutach, Germany to see friend Wilhelm Hasemann. There Stieglitz photographs young peasant girls again, such as Gutach and Gutach Peasant Girl, The Letter Box, and Farm Scene in Gutach.

September, after teaching at Fisher’s Station, and going to Concarneau, Robert Henri shares living space with John Sloan, and then William Glackens.

Theodore Roosevelt becomes a friend of Jacob Riis when visiting Riis at The Evening Sun to discuss How the Other Half Lives. The exposed plight of the impoverished, including children, leaves a lasting impression on Roosevelt. At the same time he is cautious of the presence of alien customs on the Anglo-American continent, stating in an 1894 article, “We must Americanize in every way, in speech, in political ideas and principles, and in their way of looking at relations between church and state. We welcome the German and the Irishman who becomes an American. We have no use for the German or Irishman who remains such... He must revere only our flag, not only must it come first, but no other flag should even come second.” Additionally throughout his presidency and afterward he makes pro-eugenics public statements.

William Merritt Chase paints Idle Hours.

John Dewey joins the faculty of the University of Chicago and holds a kindergarten based on the tenets of Progressivism and Pragmatic philosophy.

1895—

Theodore Roosevelt becomes New York City Police Commissioner.

Summer, Robert Henri goes to Paris with William Glackens, bicycles through Holland and Belgium, also with Glackens and Elmer Schofield, and sees Frans Hals’s paintings, deeply impressed.
1896—

February, Robert Henri attends a London exhibition of Diego Velazquez’s work, and is deeply impressed.

December, Robert Henri views a Manet retrospective exhibition at the Durand-Rouel Galleries.

William Merritt Chase opens the Chase School of Art, which will become the New York School of Art.

William Merritt Chase begins teaching at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, through 1909.

William Merritt Chase paints *Ring Toss*.

George Luks moves to New York City and with the urging of Arthur Brisbane, joins the staff of Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*. He begins to serialize “The Yellow Kid,” or “Hogan’s Alley,” a comic strip he inherits from Richard Outcault, who has moved to William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal*. In the ensuing several years, the two versions of The Yellow Kid become subjects of lawsuits and copyright disputes which the *Journal* and Outcault ultimately lose. Outcault names the Yellow Kid Mick Dugan in an attempt to appropriate him as his image alone, but only manages to copyright the title “Yellow Kid”: as a result Luks begins to name the serial “Hogan’s Alley.” This proves that popular art can become a commodity, like a brand-name, and that using child characters is a successful strategy to do so. Luks’s Hogan’s Alley is also significant for early experiments in color comics on Sundays.

George Luks lands roommate William Glackens a job drawing comics at the *New York World*.

December 6, George Luks publishes *The Great Prize Fight in Hogan’s Alley*.

December 13, George Luks publishes *Santa Claus Held Up in Hogan’s Alley*.

1897—

February 14, George Luks publishes *Valentine’s Day in Hogan’s Alley*.

March 7, George Luks publishes *Ghost Séance in Hogan’s Alley*.

May 30, George Luks publishes *Hogan’s Alley Kids at Hogan’s Baths*.

June 27, George Luks begins illustrating “Mose the Trained Chicken,” his original serial for the *New York World*. He ceased to produce “The Yellow Kid” at this point.
September, Robert Henri returns to Philadelphia, and has his first one-man show in October at the Pennsylvania Academy, with a second in November organized by William Merritt Chase at the Chase School of Art, New York. Finally a December exhibition at the Macbeth Galleries, New York.

William Merritt Chase paints *Did You Speak To Me?*, of daughter Alice.

Mary Cassatt paints *Breakfast in Bed*.

The American Federation of Labor endorses a constitutional amendment for a federal ban on child labor, subsequently revokes its support, then endorses again.

In New York City, crime-ridden Mulberry Bend is razed due to Jacob Riis’s publicizing of slum life.

1898—
January 28, George Luks publishes *A Street Parade to Advertise Mose’s Incubator Show*.

Spring, Robert Henri gets his first exhibit at the National Academy of Design Annual Exhibition, New York. Henri marries Linda Craige, and has honeymoon in Paris.

September 27, Alfred Stieglitz’s only daughter, Katherine (“Kitty”) is born. Like Sargent’s Boit children, Kitty will grow up to develop significant mental health problems. Like Sargent, Stieglitz will capture this, if inadvertently, in his art.

December, George Luks goes to Cuba with writer Maurice O’Leary of the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, on commission as a sketch reporter of the Cuban revolt against the Spanish. He is eventually fired for untimely completion of work. Luks becomes friends with writer Stephen Crane, who also writes about American slum life in a way analogous to the photographs of Jacob Riis.

At its fourth biennial convention, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs condemns child labor.

1899—
January 2, George Luks leaves *The New York World* and joins the staff of *The Verdict*. He stays only until October 30.

Robert Henri’s *La Neige* is purchased by the Musee Nationale de Luxembourg. Henri and wife move to a suburb of Paris.

Alfred Stieglitz photographs *Baby Being Fed by Emmy*. 
Alfred Stieglitz photographs *Katherine, Lake George*.

George Luks paints *The Amateurs*.

(Ca.) George Luks paints *The Pawnbroker’s Daughter*.

New York’s newsboys orchestrate a strike against Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*. Their victory is meager: Pulitzer agrees not to have his vendors raise the price newsboys have to pay for papers that they in turn resell.

John Dewey becomes President of the American Psychological Association.

John Dewey publishes *The School and Society (The School and Social Progress)*, which Robert Henri reads.

John George Brown becomes vice president of the National Academy of Design (until 1904).

Helen Campbell and Thomas W. Knox publish their illustrated text *Darkness and Daylight, or Lights and Shadows of New York Life*, intended as a guidebook to New York’s high and seedy sides, frequently reflecting anxiety toward immigrant tenement children.

**1900—**

The United States Census records 1,750,178 working children between 10 and 15 years of age.

All Northern states achieve a status of banned child labor in mining and manufacturing.

Massachusetts ceases to be the number one state in restricting child labor due to changes in the textile manufacturing business. States in the Midwest (especially Ohio and Illinois) take the lead in this Progressive trend.

G. Stanley Hall’s student Frederick Burk opens a free play kindergarten in Santa Barbara, California.

Robert Henri has private art classes in Paris and copies the work of Velazquez at the Prado in Madrid.

August, Robert Henri returns to the USA and moves to New York City. He begins paintings of the East River. He begins teaching at the Veltin School through 1902.
Alfred Stieglitz begins compulsive photographic documentation of the everyday activities of his daughter Kitty for the album *Photographic Journal of a Baby*.

Richard Outcault, the ousted Yellow Kid artist, begins to serialize “Poor Lil Mose,” in the *New York Herald*. It is based on his earlier work “Possumville” of a cast of black characters lifted from the minstrel show genre, using “zip coon” humor. Mose is a young African-American boy. A comparable serial is “Sambo and His Happy Noises” by William Marriner of T.C. McClure’s newspaper syndicate. Marriner is also a veteran of *Truth, Puck, Life, New York Journal, New York World,* and *Philadelphia Enquirer*.

Mary Cassatt paints *Young Mother Sewing*.

John Singer Sargent paints *Dorothy*.

Lewis Hine enrolls in college at the University of Chicago. Until this point he has worked odd jobs and been himself a child laborer to support his widowed mother and family.

**1901—**

Edgar Gardner Murphy, a moderate Republican, forms the Alabama Child Labor Committee. It is an important precursor to the National Child Labor Committee, which he also will found.

Robert Henri is shown at the Allan Gallery alongside now close friends Glackens, Alfred Maurer, and three others.

George Bellows begins attending Ohio State University (until 1905).

Francisco Ferrer founds the Escuela Moderna for the working children of Barcelona, Spain. As a future martyr, he will be a guiding influence for radical American child education.

June, Robert Henri rents a studio in Sherwood Building on Fifty-Seventh Street and Sixth Avenue, NYC. This is where he will paint his New York child subjects.

Summer, Robert Henri is awarded his first prize, a silver meal at the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo.

Sociologist Lewis Hine enrolls as a professor of nature study and geography at the Ethical Culture School of New York. The superintendent, Frank Manny, urges Hine to take up the camera for educational purposes. He uses a 5’ X 7’ box camera.

Republican President William McKinley is assassinated from complications to a gunshot wound at the hands of an anarchist extremist whom Emma Goldman had
condemned as too radical even for her social circle. Republican and Progressive Party zealot, and American vice president, Theodore Roosevelt becomes president of the United States (through 1909).

(Ca.) Mary Cassatt aquatints *Nude Child.*

Alfred Stieglitz photographs *Spring.*

**1902—**

October, Robert Henri begins teaching at the New York School of Art, the former Chase School, and continues teaching there through 1908.


May, President Theodore Roosevelt intercedes on behalf of striking miners in the United Mine Workers union and wins the miners higher pay for fewer hours. Among these miners are child laborers called “Breaker Boys.”

Alfred Stieglitz photographs *Kitty with Mother.*

**1903—**

April, Robert Henri is elected to the Society of American Artists.

John Singer Sargent paints *Portrait of President Theodore Roosevelt.*

In New York, newsboys are banned from working under age 10, children ages 10-14 are required to wear badges, obtain a work permit, and not work after 10 pm. Most major cities follow suit, but enforcement of these rules is nonexistent.

In response to a petition by Florence Kelley and Lillian Wald, President Theodore Roosevelt agrees to endorse a bill written by the National Child Labor Committee petitioning a federal bureau.

George Luks returns to America from a stay in Paris in which he has abandoned his first of three wives and their unborn son. This is his only child, with whom he never regains contact.

George Luks shows for the first time with the Society of American Artists, in its 25th Annual Exhibition. His work is skylined. Newspaper reporter Charles Fitzgerald writes of his work, “Here is the painter of corner-boys and ‘toughs,’ street urchins,
ragamuffins and all kinds of low types employed as a subject that cannot by any possibility be called low...”

The Kindergarten Committee of the Nineteen is formed to incorporate conservative, moderate, and liberal sects of the movement toward a more applicable contemporary pedagogy.

1904—

January, Robert Henri's *Girl in White Waist* is purchased by the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, his first sale to a USA museum. He organizes a group show at the National Arts Club featuring himself, John Sloan, William Glackens, George Luks, Arthur Davies, and Maurice Prendergast.

The Ethical Culture School moves to a new building at 33 Central Park West, and graduates its first high school class of nine students.

Robert Henri Paints *Portrait of Willie Gee*.

John George Brown paints *Extra, Extra*.

Alfred Stieglitz photographs *Kitty Holding a Book*.

Lewis Hine begins to photograph immigrant families on Ellis Island at the urging of his employers at the Ethical Culture School of New York, just after being married to Sarah Ann Rich.

The National Child Labor Committee is founded as a nonprofit organization by were Edgar Gardner Murphy of the Alabama Child Labor Committee and Felix Adler, member of the New York Child Labor Committee and founder of the American Ethical Culture Movement. Florence Kelley and Jane Addams, both of Chicago, are delegates.

The American Socialist Party platform releases the statement, “We will watch and work, in both the economic and political struggles...for the complete education of children and their freedom from the workshop.” Socialism is markedly on the rise at this time and Socialists often lead key social reform movements.

G. Stanley Hall, the mentor of John Dewey, publishes *Adolescence*, which for the first time systematically and scientifically acknowledges that adolescence is a state of physical, mental, and emotional development distinct both from childhood and from adulthood, and alongside the popularization of Sigmund Freud’s work, suggests that “children” after a certain age possess sexual desires and pathologies. Hall purports that to control their “moodiness, self-absorption, uncertainty, and foolishness,” young men especially should engage in “insular activities” that control and
culturally condition them while isolating them from the adult world, such as Christian youth organizations.

John Dewey joins the philosophy department faculty of Teachers College of Columbia University (until 1930 when he retires).

1905—

April, Robert Henri is elected as associate member of National Academy of Design.

October, Robert Henri’s *Lady in Black* wins Norman W. Harris Prize at the Art Institute of Chicago.

November, Robert Henri’s first wife Linda dies.

Lewis Hine completes his degree at New York University.

Mary Cassatt paints *Mother and Child*.

Alfred Stieglitz photographs *Katherine*.

(Ca.) Alfred Stieglitz photographs *Kitty and Emmeline*.

George Bellows draws *Children Playing in a Park*.

George Luks paints *The Spielers*.

John Dewey becomes president of the American Philosophical Association and a member of the American Federation of Teachers.

John George Brown, an explicit opponent of compulsory education laws, paints the curiously anachronistic, pre-industrialized subject matter of *The Industrious Family*. The work could illustrate one of David Clark’s or White Cranberry Bog’s strategically manipulative anti-child-labor-reform court testimonies.

1906—


March, Robert Henri serves on Society of American Artists jury.

April 5, Eastman Johnson dies.

December, Robert Henri serves on the National Academy of Design jury. Henri’s father dies.
Polemical Socialist John Spargo writes *Bitter Cry of the Children*.

The Beveridge Child Labor Bill is proposed, banning interstate commerce of goods produced by child labor, but fails.

Edwin Markham writes “Children At the Loom” for *Cosmopolitan*. Alfred Stieglitz photographs *The Swimming Lesson*.

George Bellows paints *River Rats*.

George Bellows paints *Kids*.

George Bellows paints *Cross-Eyed Boy*.

George Bellows draws *Watermelon Man*.

George Bellows draws *Meeting of the “Daffyfdil” Athletic Club*.

1907—

March, Robert Henri serves on the National Academy of Design spring jury and withdraws two of his submissions during the judging when George Luks is rejected. He, Sloan, and Glackens discuss a split exhibition from the Academy. In May “The Eight” are formed.

June-August, Robert Henri and a class of students go to Holland to paint. Here Henri paints his series of Cori and Martche, two favorite Dutch child sitters. They paint in Haarlem, Volendam, and Amsterdam. Henri is impressed by Rembrandt van Rijn.

(Ca.) George Luks paints *The Little Madonna*.

Robert Henri paints *Portrait of Eva Green*.

George Bellows paints *Frankie the Organ Boy*.

George Bellows paints *Portrait of a Laughing Boy*.

George Bellows draws *Tin Can Battle, San Juan Hill, New York*.

George Bellows paints *Forty-Two Kids*.

George Bellows paints *Little Girl in White (Queenie Burnette)*.

George Bellows draws *Street Fight*.
George Bellows draws *On the East Side*.

Alfred Stieglitz photographs the color image *Kitty Stieglitz*.

William Merritt Chase ceases to teach at the New York School of Art. By now a rift has developed between Chase and Robert Henri, who compete for students’ loyalties.

Lewis Hine has been given his first assignment by the National Child Labor Committee, though he is not yet officially employed with the organization. This assignment is of New York tenement homework.

Lewis Hine enrolls in graduate school at Columbia University and becomes friends with Paul U. Kellogg who assigns him to the Pittsburgh Survey in sociology.

The National Child Labor Committee becomes a recognized federal institution with a headquarters in Washington, D.C.

The Newsboys Club of New York is founded as an effort to both discipline and reform delinquent child laborers. Other major cities such as Cincinnati follow suit.

The United States Census records that 1,750,178 children are still laboring. Over 1 million of these are engaged in agricultural employment.

Maria Montessori founds the first Montessori School in Rome.

1908—

February, Robert Henri exhibits with “The Eight” at Macbeth Galleries. The Eight include Henri, Glackens, Luks, Davies, Lawson, Shinn, and Prendergast. They show again at the Pennsylvania Academy in May and the Art Institute of Chicago through June 1909.

William Sergeant Kendall paints *An Interlude*, which is the most representative, common type of academic child imagery in its day.

June, Robert Henri and class paint in Madrid. Henri paints child images such as *Mary y Consuelo (Mother and Child)*.

George Bellows paints *Paddy Flannigan*.

Lewis Hine is hired by the National Child Labor Committee to document child labor across the United States for the next eight years. He leaves his teaching post at the Ethical Culture School.
Alfred Stieglitz photographs Kitty. The image displays a remarkably seductive expression on Kitty's face.

February, Lewis Hine photographs newsboys, messenger boys, and bootblacks in New York (NCLC).

August, Lewis Hine photographs newsboys, bootblacks, and “little mothers” in Cincinnati (NCLC). He also photographs newsboys’ associations and their Progressive-oriented proactive reform tactics.

August, Lewis Hine photographs newsboys in Indianapolis (NCLC).

October, Lewis Hine photographs glassworks boys in West Virginia (NCLC).


Lewis Hine publishes Charities and the Commons, a magazine documenting sweatshop and tenement labor conditions.

(Ca.) Western Union Messenger Services removes all call boxes from red light districts as the result of Lewis Hine and NCLC colleagues discovering that messenger boys in its employ serve as “boosters” (child pimps) for prostitutes and contract venereal disease, a publicity nightmare.

(Ca.) Alfred Stieglitz's 291 hosts “A Special Exhibition of Contemporary Art” which, aside putting photographs and paintings on equal artistic footing, includes Mary Cassatt and William Glackens, painters of children from the previous and current generation. Many of Cassatt's works and those of a fellow showman, Gertrude Kasebier, have interchangeable subject matter of mothers and children in closed-off domestic spaces. Kasebier in turn photographs Robert Henri and the Eight (including Glackens) for their secessionist show at the Macbeth Galleries.

1909—

January 11, Robert Henri’s Henri School opens.

George Bellows teaches at the Art Students League of New York.

February, Lewis Hine photographs women and children tenement homeworkers in New York (NCLC).

Lewis Hine photographs city beautification and municipal playground activities in Boston (NCLC).

July, Lewis Hine photographs child berry pickers in Rock Creek, Maryland (NCLC).
August, Robert Henri begins experimenting with Hardesty Maratta’s color theories.

October 18 (some circles say October 13), Francisco Ferrer y Guardia, an anarchist pedagogue, is assassinated in Barcelona’s Monjuich Fortress. This spurs American followers to found anarchist and libertarian schools for children, which incorporate Froebelian kindergarten tenets with women’s liberation and the work of Freud, Nietzsche and Ibsen.

Lewis Hine attends the annual National Child Labor Committee conference in Chicago and goes to Jane Addams’s Hull House, exchanging ideas with her and photographing the premises.

Lewis Hine publishes the albums Child Labour in the Carolinas and Day Labourers Before Their Time as a result of his photographic documentations of rural child labor in Southern mills, canneries, and fields.

The National Kindergarten Association is founded with John Dewey as its president.

G. Stanley Hall invites Sigmund Freud to speak at a conference at Clark University. Surprisingly Susan Blow embraces Freud, whereas Alice Putnam rejects him.

Elizabeth Harrison and Patty Smith Hill go to Italy to investigate Maria Montessori’s pedagogical method, listening to her lectures in Rome. They learn that Montessoti wants to provide a rich sensory environment for the child since the child is unable to grasp even concrete symbols without sense impressions first being mastered. Like Dewey, Montessori wants less rigid classroom orientation and individual self-discovery.

1910—

Robert Henri’s paintings Salome and Lady in Yellow are rejected from National Academy of Design. Thus in April, Henri shows Exhibition of Independent Artists at 29-31 West 35th Street, New York; 103 artists exhibit 631 works.

May, Lewis Hine photographs newsboys and glassworks boys in St. Louis (NCLC).

June, Robert Henri’s Willie Gee wins a Silver Medal at the International Fine Arts Exhibition, Buenos Aires. Henri secretly relinquishes ownership of the Henri School to student Homer Boss.

George Bellows completes painting Beach at Coney Island (begun 1908).

The NCLC begins conducting photographic surveys of agricultural child labor. This proves the most difficult of all forms of child labor to abolish, as it is closely linked to a pre-industrial antebellum economic lifestyle held dear to the rural North and the
entire South: in which a child is expected to contribute to a pooled family income, and the home and workplace are not divorced. The padrone system additionally contributes to the difficulty abolishing rural child labor. The biggest contender against abolishing rural child labor is John G. Ruge of Herman Ruge and Sons, Florida, and White’s Bog, with its padrone Gus Donato. The investigation continues until 1915 and is revived during 1923.

June, Lewis Hine photographs newsboys in Philadelphia (NCLC).


August, Lewis Hine photographs cotton mill girls in North Pownal, Vermont (NCLC).

Summer, Robert Henri visits Holland and Spain and paints child pieces such as *La Madrilenita*.

September 29, Winslow Homer dies.

September, Lewis Hine photographs child cranberry bog workers in Philadelphia’s infamous White’s Bog, Brown Mills, New Jersey (NCLC). Hine’s battle with White’s Bog and its infamous padrone, Gus Donato, were particularly fierce. Jane Addams of Hull House was even involved to mediate letters between the boss’s daughter and an NCLC assistant secretary, Owen Lovejoy. The fight emerged from an NCLC poster strategically released in November 1910, at the peak of cranberry purchasing for the holidays Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Maria Montessori’s Montessori Schools are established in the United States.

(Ca.) Romanticism and its accordant notion of developing and nurturing an inner child are defunct as functionalism, pragmatism, and new developments in the social sciences take the forefront of pedagogy. Montessori and the Ferrer School are two examples of the newer method that arise in 1910 and 1911. Montessori, Dewey, and Freud are now the intellectual heavyweights.

1911—

The Modern School of New York (Ferrer School) in honor of the martyred Francisco Ferrer is founded by Russian Jewish immigrant Emma Goldman, women’s liberation (birth control) and anarchist activist.

Robert Henri reads Emma Goldman’s magazine *Mother Earth* and is so impressed that he begins to attend her lectures. Henri and George Bellows are invited to teach at the Modern School of New York and Stelton (the Ferrer School) by Goldman. They teach evening art classes for adults twice a week, and day art classes for children.
George Bellows joins the editorial staff of the Socialist journal *The Masses*.

George Bellows's first daughter, Anne, is born.

Lewis Hine photographs breaker boys (child miners) in Pennsylvania and Tennessee (NCLC).

February, Lewis Hine photographs child shrimp-pickers in Biloxi, Mississippi (NCLC).

March, Lewis Hine photographs child oyster-shuckers and shrimp-pickers in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi (NCLC).

March, Robert Henri shows in Union League Club exhibition in New York.

May, Robert Henri presents a year-round, jury-free exhibition at the Macdowell Club of New York.

June, Lewis Hine photographs newsboys in Richmond, Virginia (NCLC).

June, Lewis Hine photographs glassworks boys in Alexandria, Virginia (NCLC).

August, Robert Henri goes to Monhegan Island, Maine, with favored pupil George Bellows and Randall Davey.

August, Lewis Hine photographs child sardine-cutters in Eastport, Maine (NCLC).

October, Lewis Hine photographs child cotton mill workers in Bessemer City, North Carolina (NCLC).

December, Robert Henri is invited to join the Association of American Painters and Sculptors.

The Mother's Aid Movement is founded in Illinois and is the first organization of its kind in the United States.

William Howe Downes publishes Winslow Homer's first biography.

George Luks begins the painting *Jackson and Russell Burke*, which he will completely rework in 1923.

William Glacken draws *Far From the Fresh-Air Farm*.

1912—
After failing to win Republican presidential nomination from William Howard Taft, Theodore Roosevelt founds the Progressive “Bull Moose” Party and runs on its platform. He becomes the only American third-party candidate in history to come in second place in an election. Woodrow Wilson wins the election.

Lewis Hine, his wife, and his newborn son Corydon move into Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. He photographs newsboys in Washington, D.C. in April (NCLC).

The United States Children’s Bureau is formed.

April 11-May 10, at the urging of Abraham Walkowitz, Alfred Stieglitz’s 291 hosts a show of pastels, paintings, and drawings by local school children ages 2-11. Results are used to justify the bifurcation of male artists and female artists along traditional roles of emphatic vs impressionistic.

November, Lewis Hine photographs newsboys in Jersey City (NCLC).

George Luks’s niece Lore begins to visit him in his New York home, where he uses her as an artistic subject.

1913—

February, The iconic Armory Show, which baffles American viewers and redefines American avant-garde art, is held in New York City. Organized by Association of American Painters and Sculptors.

April, Lewis Hine photographs rural domestic child laborers in Columbus, Georgia (NCLC).

June, Robert Henri and second wife Marjorie sail to Achill Island, Ireland, where he paints children such as

June, George Bellows draws Philosopher-on-the-Rock: “Gosh, But Little Kids is Happy When They’s Young!” reproduced in The Masses.

September, Lewis Hine photographs newsboys in Waco, Texas (NCLC).

George Luks has a one-man show at the Kraushaar Galleries, New York, the first of many. Critics write he is “a poet on canvas who has dropped his boisterous manner to depict the hearts of children.”

William Glackens draws One Boy After Another Started Off with a Bundle under His Arm. They Ran As IF for Their Life; As if a Kettleful of Boiling Water Had Been Emptied over Them, from E. R. Lipsett, “Denny the Jew from Ballintemple,” Everybody’s Magazine 29.
George Bellows paints *A Day in June*.

George Bellows prints and draws *Why Don’t They Go to the Country for a Vacation?* which is published in John Sloan’s *The Masses*.

George Bellows paints *Cliff Dwellers*.

George Bellows draws *Splinter Beach*.

Alexander McKelway of the National Child Labor Committee writes the “Declaration of Dependence.” McKelway is a Presbyterian minister from North Carolina.

Cora Bennett of the Ferrer School staff introduces Maria Montessori’s teaching methods into her classroom.

**1914—**

February 18-March 11, Alfred Stieglitz hosts a second show of children’s work.

Summer, the Modern School/Ferrer School begins its “Free Theater” which features work written, staged, and acted by children.

Lewis Hine produces many of his iconic NCLC posters, photomontages based on his own photographs, such as *Moral Dangers, Wise and Foolish Employers (Alabama Law), Some Questions Answered*, and *Making Human Junk*.

Robert Henri wins the Carol Beck Gold Medal at the Pennsylvania Academy for Herself.

George Luks begins to work for *Vanity Fair*, a 20-year career.

Robert Henri goes to San Diego, California, and La Jolla, California, where he paints child images such as *Failure of Sylvester*, and helps plan the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego.

In this year alone, Lewis Hine’s photographs are the subject of 11 exhibits in 50 cities and 20 states, as well as 16 different locations in New York City.

**1915—**

February 13, the Palmer-Owen Bill passes in the House of Representatives 237 to 45, attempting to ban goods by child laborers from interstate commerce. The instigator is A. Mitchell Palmer, a Pennsylvania Democrat. Senate kills the bill due to the blocking of Senator Overman, a Republican of North Carolina, and the opposition of the Carolinas, Mississippi, and Georgia. However the bill sets the precedent for the landmark Keating-Owen Act.
October, Robert Henri begins teaching at the Art Students League, New York, through 1927.

Lewis Hine becomes the director of information for the National Child Labor Committee.

The Ferrer School moves to rural Stelton, New York.

George Bellows's second daughter, Jean, is born.

George Bellows paints *Riverfront, No. 1*.

Robert Henri's niece, Jane Southern, dies at age 22 of leukemia; Jane is the closest thing Henri ever has to a child of his own.

**1916—**

March, Alfred Stieglitz, Robert Henri, and others form the Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters.

June, Lewis Hine photographs doffers in Massachusetts (NCLC).

November 22-December 20, Alfred Stieglitz’s 291 hosts a show of watercolors and drawings by Georgia S. Engelhard of New York, a child of 10, alongside work by Hartley, Walkowitz, Marin, O'Keefe, Wright.

William Merritt Chase dies.

The two first federal child labor laws, the most famous being the Keating-Owen Act, are passed by Congress and signed by President Woodrow Wilson. The law establishes fourteen as the minimum age for children to work in industries and limits the workday to eight hours for children ages fourteen to sixteen. No protection is given to children who work in street trades and agriculture.

David Clark begins his campaign to declare the Keating-Owen Act unconstitutional, hiring high-power attorneys to call former child laborers to the Supreme Court stand, in the “Dagenhart Case.” Clark’s efforts are successful, despite the later misgivings of the former child laborer witnesses in testifying against the KOA.

George Bellows paints *The Newsboy*.

(Ca.) George Luks paints *Innocence* and *Child and Wagon (Snow Kid)*, likely of the same model.
John Dewey writes *Democracy and Education*.

1917—

January, Lewis Hine photographs physical deformities in girl factory workers in Boston (NCLC).

Robert Henri crusades for the city of Philadelphia to make a permanent gallery for the works of Thomas Eakins.

Summer, Robert Henri paints children in Santa Fe such as

Winter, Robert Henri begins to study Jay Hambige’s theory of Dynamic Symmetry alongside George Bellows.

Lewis Hine’s National Child Labor Committee salary is reduced so much that he is forced to take another job, with the American Red Cross, and go to Europe to photograph the conditions of World War I.

George Bellows stops teaching at the Ferrer School and virtually abandons subject matter of children when he goes to war (WWI).

Congress passes the Smith-Hughes Act. This reform bill demonstrates the continued union of labor restriction and compulsory education enforcement. It allots $1 million to states that agree to improve their public schools by providing vocational education programs. This is a child’s halfway meeting point between labor and school.

1918—

The Keating-Owen Act, restricting the hours and age of child labor, is declared unconstitutional due to the machinations of Southern laissez-faire lobbyist David Clark. The Supreme Court ruled that the federal government did not have the authority to enact federal over state laws.


1919—

Lewis Hine publishes the album *Children’s Burden in the Balkans*.

The Child Labor Tax Act, also known as the Pomerene Amendment to the Revenue Bill of 1919, becomes law. Instead of banning interstate goods produced by child labor (the Keating-Owen Act), this law imposes a 10% excise tax on goods made by children, or where children do work ancillary to production.
George Bellows teaches at the Art Institute of Chicago.

George Bellows paints *Boy and Calf: Coming Storm*.

George Bellows paints *Children on the Porch (On the Porch)*.

George Luks begins painting adult and child miners from the Pennsylvania coal region where he grew up. His work is analogous to the earlier albums of coalmining children by Lewis Hine.

(Ca.) George Luks paints *The Breaker Boys*.

1920—

George Bellows paints *Anne in White*.

George Bellows paints *Elinor, Jean, and Anna*.

George Luks begins teaching at the Art Students League. It doesn’t last long and he founds a George Luks School of Painting, which also doesn’t last long.

George Luks watercolors *The Clinic*.

1921—

Robert Henri summers in Woodstock, New York, with his second wife Marjorie, and with George and Emma Bellows and their children, Eugene and Elsie Speicher, and Leon Kroll. Henri paints such child imagery as the portraits of the Schleicher children.

George Bellows lithographs *My Family (Second Stone)*.

George Bellows paints *Jean in a Pink Dress*.

1922—

The partner act to the Keating-Owen act is likewise declared unconstitutional and revoked.

1923—

January, George Luks has his retrospective exhibition at the Kraushaar Galleries. Guy Pene du Bois writes of the show, “He records the pathos as well as the joy in children.”
George Luks wins the William A. Clark Prize and the Corcoran Gold Medal at the Thirteenth Exhibition of Contemporary American Oil Paintings in Washington, D.C. for *Woman with a Black Cat*.

Robert Henri publishes *The Art Spirit* with the editing of Margery Ryerson.

**1924—**

A child labor amendment to the Constitution is proposed. The amendment would grant Congress the power to “limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of persons under eighteen years of age.” The amendment does not provide for educational standards or physical fitness restrictions. Opponents criticize the amendment, saying that an age limit of sixteen is high enough and that “labor” is not defined. The 1925 Child Labor Amendment is not ratified.

Spring and Summer, Robert Henri and wife Marjorie go to Ireland where he paints children such as

Lewis Hine receives the Art Directors Club of New York award for his commercial photography.

George Bellows paints *Lady Jean*. It is the clearest testimony to his color experimentation.

George Luks has his last show with the Kraushaar Galleries. The *New York American* writes, “Perhaps Luks likes youth and age because they seem to be what they actually are. In middle age we wear masks, but the child has nothing to conceal...”

**1925—**

January 8, George Bellows dies tragically young of complications from appendicitis.

June-October, Robert Henri and wife Marjorie go to Ireland where he paints children such as

George Luks joins the Frank Rehn Gallery and shows his anthracite coal miner breaker boy paintings.

(Ca.) George Luks paints *Boy with Dice (Shoeshine Boy)*.

**1926—**

July-November, Robert Henri and wife Marjorie go to Ireland where he paints children such as

Mary Cassatt, who has been diabetic since the mid-teens, dies.
George Luks paints *Jenny McKeen as Infanta*, of the daughter of the Boston couple who house Luks after his stay in a sanitorium. Like the works of Henri and Sargent, this is based on Velazquez.

1927—

May-October, Robert Henri and wife Marjorie go to Ireland where he paints children such as

1928—


1929—

June, Robert Henri’s *The Wee Woman* is awarded the Temple Gold Medal at the Pennsylvania Academy.

July 12, Robert Henri dies of cancer at St. Luke’s Hospital, New York.

The Ethical Culture School moves its high school to an 18-acre campus in the Riverdale Section of the Bronx. “The Fieldston Plan” maps a curriculum of older children connecting knowledge and space. The building is eight interlocking buildings and a central quadrangle designed to move children physically and mentally through interlocking disciplines of learning.

Intro.2, George Bellows, *Forty-Two Kids*, 1907. Oil on canvas. 42 x 60 ¼ in. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Intro.5, John Singer Sargent, *Caspar Goodrich*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 26 ¼ x 19 ¼ in. Private Collection.
Intro. 7, Mary Cassatt, *Young Mother Sewing*, ca. 1900. Oil on canvas, 36 ⅜ x 29 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Intro.9, William Merritt Chase, *Children Playing Parlor Croquet (sketch)*, ca.1888. Oil on canvas. Private Collection.


Intro.14, Winslow Homer, *Dad's Coming!*, 1873. Oil on panel, 9 x 13 ¼ in. National Gallery
of Art, Washington, D.C.

Intro.15, John George Brown, *The Teacher*, ca. 1866-68. Oil on canvas, 16 x 26 in. Private Collection.

Intro.25, Lewis Hine, Incorrect sitting position for postural deformity and dorsal curvature cases... Work in this position is harmful. Boston, Massachusetts, 1917. Photographic print. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Intro.29, George Bellows, *Paddy Flannigan*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 30¼ x 25¼ in. Private Collection.
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