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ABSTRACT
        A teacher's observations on the marked contrast
between the development and behavior of elementary school children in
Tennessee's Cumberland plateau and their counterparts in New York
City's Greenwich Village vividly demonstrate the regional basis that
still accounts for a variety of cultural variations. And yet, place
of upbringing is just one of several determinants that help shape
children's lives in the United States. Psychologists also identify
effects beginning with the mother-child dyad, and further include the
child's relationship to parents, siblings, neighborhood, peers, and
school. Popular culture also plays a role. Another psychological
perspective examines the child's "ecology," or physical and social
surroundings. Class influences child development in many ways,
affecting children's play, sexuality, mental health, and other areas.
A child's culture and socialization are intertwined, stressing the
importance of race, ethnicity, and religion in childhood development.
Anthropologists point to significant differences among U.S. children
in such characteristics as breast feeding, sexual discipline, and
attitudes about schooling. Since World War II, diversity, not
uniformity, has marked the U.S. landscape. In the post World War II
period, considerations of group diversity gave way to generalizations
about "the American character." It was contended that childhood
socialization processes could explain the society in general, and
that a new "modal" or national personality had arrived. Analysis of
the family as an institution reflecting class differences, population
movements, and economic change was lacking. More recent waves of
immigrants have taken more obvious pride in their cultural
distinctiveness. (Contains 40 footnotes.) (LBG)

"Childhood Diversity and the Fallacy of 'The American Character':
Class, Culture, and Child Rearing during the Second World War"

by

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Organization of American Historians,
Reno, Nev, 1988.

During the Second World War Claudia Lewis moved from New York City to eastern Tennessee.[1] A preschool teacher, Lewis had been teaching three, four, and five year olds in a nursery school in Greenwich Village, but she wanted to broaden her perspective on childhood development by relocating to another part of the country. Arriving in Tennessee's Cumberland plateau, she soon discovered she had entered a world that was dramatically different from the one she had just left. The touchstone of that difference was the children themselves.

The children of the Cumberland were placid and shy. Much of the time they stayed by themselves, shunning the vigorous group play and spirited conversation that had so characterized the New York City children. Lewis had not gone to Tennessee to do research for a book, but when she "realized that there were marked differences between the mountain children and those ... in Greenwich Village," she started "to look more closely at the structure of the community. I wanted to find out what kind of

homes and upbringing made these children so unresisting and 'easy
to handle.'... Why was there so little rebellion in the
mountains?... What was the meaning of their outwardly peaceful,
placid behavior? And why were these children so shy for months
at a time?... Was there any relation between the ... talent of
the New York children and their energetic, self-assertive ways?
Between the mediocre performances of the mountain children and
their compliant, apparently untroubled behavior?"2   While
Claudia Lewis did not discover the answers to all these
questions, she did describe profound differences in the child-
rearing environments of these two societies. What startled her
was that these differences existed in a nation whose population--
with the monumental exception of nonwhites--was reportedly being
rapidly blended in the American "melting pot."

Between 1941 and 1945 the United States was at war and, with
few exceptions, its citizens rushed to the nation's defense.
America had a "man-sized" job on its hands, but "the American
people," including millions of women war workers, would unite to
conquer the enemy. According to journalists and scholars,
patriotism on the home front was not only forging national unity,
but also obliterating invidious distinctions based on social
status, religion, and ethnicity. War movies featured ethnically
diverse soldier, sailor, and air corps crews. A Jew, an Italian,

2 Claudia Lewis, Children of the Cumberland (New York:
Columbia University Press, 1946), xvii.

an Irishman, a Pole or a Swede, all fought together in Bataan,
Guadalcanal Diary, Sahara, The Purple Heart, and numerous other
films.3   And this was entirely appropriate, for the United States
was fighting a "people's war."

More important, however, practically all observers agreed
that the communications and transportation revolutions, along
with the migration of millions of people from the South to the
North and West, and from the farms to the cities, were combining
to destroy traditional regional and rural-urban distinctions.
The rapid spread in the past two decades of electricity, the
automobile, radio, the telephone, and motion pictures had
accelerated social change in most parts of the country, and had
exposed dissimilar peoples to mainstream popular culture. Sooner
or later, most commentators predicted, the dominant culture would
subsume all its variants; many argued that the new era of
cultural homogeneity was already fast settling upon the country.

The United States did undergo lasting transformation during
the era of the Second World War. But change, no matter how
profound, is seldom absolute; nor does it happen overnight.
Claudia Lewis, for example, was struck by the persistence of
certain child-rearing practices in the Cumberland region. "Small
babies are seldom out of their mother's arms, and are nursed

3 See Lewis Jacobs, "World War II and the American Film,"
Cinema Journal, VII (Winter 1967-68), 18-19.

whenever they cry. Often they are not weaned until they are well along in their second year. Children are always to be seen with their parents at buryings ... [and] at square dances. They are never left at home or put to bed early." Lewis's description of the Cumberland children was evocative of premodern Europe during which children became part of the adult world at any early age. "Parents," she wrote, "do not seem to expect their children to live on a schedule that differs very much from their own. Meals are the same for all members of the family.... Children live a life very close to that of their parents, a life involving few restrictions." At the same time, and unlike many boys and girls in other parts of the country, these children were expected to be unquestioning in their obedience to elders. "They are whipped or threatened with whipping if they do not obey. Discipline is theoretically of the old 'authoritative' kind, yet the actual routine of living is far from a strictly regulated one."4

4 Lewis, Children of the Cumberland, xv-xvi. Many of the patterns observed by Lewis persisted into the 1960's; see Jack E. Weller, Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 58-86. In a helpful appendix (161-63), Weller presented "a comparative summary" of middle-class American and southern Appalachian "personal characteristics," "family life characteristics," and "relationships with others." The differences in each category were extreme. Also relevant are Harry M. Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberland: A Biography of a Depressed Area (Boston; Little, Brown, 1962); Richard A. Bell, "A Poverty Case: The Analgesic Subculture of the Southern Appalachians," American Sociological Review, 33 (December 1968), 885-95; Robert Coles, Children of Crisis, Volume II: Migrants, Sharecroppers, Mountaineers (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 75-76, 82-84, 509; John B. Stephenson, Shiloh: A Mountain Community (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968); Elmora Messer Matthews, Neighbor and Kin: Life in a Tennessee Ridge Community (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1965).

Obviously the Cumberland children and their Manhattan counterparts were very different in their development and behavior, even though reared in the same nation at the same time. In this case as in many others, geography had evinced its determinism, vividly demonstrating the localized and regionalized bases of a variety of cultural variations.5   But place of upbringing was only one of several determinants that helped shape children's lives in the United States. Psychologists of childhood socialization have identified a number of other crucial influences beginning with the mother-child dyad and expanding to include the child's relationship to her or his father, siblings, neighborhood, peers, and school. Increasingly, too, they have assessed the impact of popular culture, particularly the electronic media, on children.6

Another psychological perspective examines the child's "ecology," that is, the physical environment and "social space" in which children are reared and grow up. Small-town childhood, for example, with its smaller schools, afforded greater

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5 Cultural geographers have studied significant American regional differences in religion, folklore, personal consumption, architecture, and language, to mention just a few areas. See Wilbur Zelinsky, The Cultural Geography of the United States (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

6 See Boyd R. McCandless, "Child Socialization," in David A. Goslin, ed., Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), 791-819; Joshua Meyrowitz, No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

opportunities for student participation than did big-city

childhood. The latter offered superior academic and cultural

opportunities, but in the metropolitan schools, there simply were

not enough positions on the football team, or roles in the senior

play, for everybody.[7] Only a handful of studies have focused on

the ecology of rural-urban differences, but Alex Inkeles, a

leading scholar of comparative childhood socialization, has

ventured some generalizations: "The greater isolation and family

centeredness of rural life means a slow social awakening for the

rural children, greater fear of strangers, and slower development

of imagination and language skills. By contrast," he continued,

"both the responsibilities early assigned to them, and their

contact with animals and nature, seem to yield the rural children

early and highly developed sensory motor functioning." Moreover,

rural children enjoyed greater freedom to explore their

environment, and they did so "less under the immediate

surveillance of adults...." These children also had more

frequent contact with their fathers than did suburban children

whose commuting fathers were absent from the home most days.

Childhood was thus a differential experience depending upon the

ecology--"the real-life settings within which people behave"--

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[7] See Roger G. Barker, Ecological Psychology: Concepts and Methods for Studying the Environment of Human Behavior (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1968); Roger G. Barker and Herbert F. Wright, Midwest and Its Children (New York: Harper & Row, 1955); and Roger G. Barker and Paul V. Gump, Big School, Small School (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1964); Urie Bronfenbrenner, The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

whether on farms or in villages, suburbs, or cities.8

It is thus significant that in 1940 most of America's
children were rural, even though most of the country's adults
were urban. Demographers have pointed to 1920 as the year the
United States became an urban nation. For the first time in the
nation's history, according to that year's federal census, more
Americans lived in cities and towns than on farms and in
villages. By 1940, the urban margin was somewhat more
pronounced, but there was a major exception: while most of
America's population lived in areas defined as urban, a slight
majority of the nation's children still lived in areas defined as
rural. And this fact had stunning regional and ecological
implications.

Quick to grasp the situation were the women and men who
gathered in Washington, D.C., in 1940 for the White House
Conference on Children in a Democracy. "Numerically," the
conferees observed, "the Nation's children under 16 in 1940 were
almost equally divided between city and country (49 percent and

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[8] Alex Inkeles, "Social Structure and Socialization," in
David A. Goslin, ed., Handbook of Socialization Theory and
Research (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), 621. See also Anne
Buttimer, "Social Space in Interdisciplinary Perspective,"
Geographical Review, LIX (1969), 417-26. Likewise, farm children
in the 1940's had different experiences depending upon
such additional factors as locale, race, and ethnicity. For a
comparison of six different farm family types, see Harvey J.
Locke, "Contemporary American Farm Families," Rural Sociology,
10 (June 1945), 142-51.

51 percent), but in proportion to [the] population of all ages there were a good many more in the country than in the city." While America's children "constituted only 23 percent of the urban population," they made up "34 percent of the population on farms, and 30 percent of the population living in villages and other nonfarm rural communities." Variations in the fertility rate--and thus in family size--were major factors explaining the distribution of children across the United States. "The [fertility] rate for the rural-farm population was highest, that for the rural-nonfarm came next, and the rate for the urban population was lowest."[9]

Since farm families tended to be larger than city families, it stood to reason that agricultural states would have a larger proportion of children than industrial states. This was indeed the case, and the range separating the states was vast. States in the Deep South, for example, had a much higher percentage of children than did states in New England, the Middle Atlantic, and the West Coast. The following 1940 census figures show the number of children under 15 years of age per 1,000 adults in a sampling of these states:[10]

[9] U.S. Children's Bureau Publication 272, White House Conference on Children in a Democracy: Final Report (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942), 14, 20.

[10] Congressional Record, 91 (July 26, 1945), 8056. See also U.S. Children's Bureau Publication 294, Facts about Child Health 1946 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1946), 1-2.

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Highest Ratios		Lowest Ratios	
678	New Mexico	260	District of Columbia
672	South Carolina	308	California
633	Mississippi	321	New York
628	North Carolina	332	New Jersey
619	Alabama	340	Washington
599	Utah	341	Connecticut

Families with large numbers of children tended to be poorer than smaller families, as well as more poorly educated and less healthy. As the 1940 White Conference reported: "Not only do more children live in the poorer sections of the country, but they are also concentrated in households at the lower income levels."[11] Health surveys published by the Social Security Administration in 1939 concluded that "the economic status of the family varies inversely with the number of children under 16 years of age in the family."[12] Many large families waged an ongoing battle to make ends meet. John A. Clausen, the sociologist, has written that, at the very least, the large family struggled harder to achieve a higher standard of living and to provide children with opportunities to become upwardly mobile. At worst, large size militated against the prospect of family success in either of these areas. In contrast, children

[11] U.S. Children's Bureau, White House Conference on Children in a Democracy, 17.

[12] Ibid., 18.

from smaller families generally enjoyed greater economic

resources and parental interest in school progress, and showed

"higher achievement motivation and academic performance" as well

as greater "occupational success" later on. Family size also

increased the possibility that the parents would be autocratic

and authoritarian. Having babies closely one after another was a

financial, physical, and emotional burden. Parents in such

families were more likely to use physical punishment instead of

rewards to control behavior. In fact, Clausen noted in his

research that "differences in frequency of physical punishment

associated with number of children were in general greater than

differences between working-class and middle-class families of

the same size."13

Although no one in the 1940's made the effort to try to

understand the full importance of such regional and ecological

differences in children's lives, various social scientists at the

time did explore other aspects of the variety of childhood

experiences then available to America's children. During the

decade, for example, they studied social-class differences in

American communities. Sociologists and psychologists, such as

Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst, searched for answers to a

number of interrelated questions. "Whom does the child associate

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13 Clausen, "Family Structure, Socialization, and
Personality," in Lois W. Hoffman and Martin L. Hoffman, eds.,
Review of Child Development Research, volume 2 (New York: Russell
Sage Foundation, 1966), 2-3, 9-15.

with?" they asked. They wanted to know whether children were born into the town's "best families," or whether they came from "loud, ignorant, common people," or whether their origins lay somewhere in between, for example, with the "good families" of the middle class. These social scientists concluded that class not only dictated one's status in the community; more important, it also deeply influenced the type of child-rearing practices followed by parents. The only stumbling block--and it was formidable--was that in the 1940's these investigators disagreed over whether it was the middle classes, or the lower classes, which were "warmer, more accepting, and permissive" in their attitudes.14

But if there were disagreement about the effects of social class on child-rearing practices, there was little disputing that from the very beginning of a child's life, class influenced his or her development in many basic ways. In the 1940's, while middle-class mothers and children enjoyed prenatal and pediatric care, such was not the case for many lower-class children who were delivered not in hospitals, but in their homes by midwives or relatives. From birth on, the middle class's ability to pay usually resulted in superior nutrition, clothing, housing, health care, and education for their children. Years later, in

14 Allison Davis and John Dollard, Children of Bondage (Washington: American Council on Education, 1940), 260-61; William M. Tuttle, Jr., "Inquiries into Social-Class Variations in Child Rearing during the Era of the Second World War" (unpublished paper, 1988).

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discussing the gross inequities that existed among American children, the historian John Demos wrote of "the reality of the 'stacked deck' versus the myth of equal opportunity."15

Another example of social class's differentiating influence is ordinality or birth order. Every first-born child was for a while an only child, but then class exerted itself. In the middle classes the first-born, especially if a son, was the heir apparent, the one of whom the parents expected the greatest academic achievements. And, indeed, the first-born tended not only to perform better in the classroom, but to go farther in school than his later-born siblings. But as John Clausen has written: "Among the less well-to-do... especially in larger families, the first-born child is likely to have to leave school and go to work, since his parents will have several younger children to support and will frequently expect the oldest child to contribute to the family income as early as possible."16

Social class also influenced children's play, sexuality, and mental health, among other important areas of life. Child's play, for example, depends on role models; and as Gregory P.

15 Demos, Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and The Life Course in American History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 197.

16 Clausen, "Family Structure, Socialization, and Personality," in Lois W. Hoffman and Martin L. Hoffman, eds., Review of Child Development Research, volume 2 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1966), 21-22.

Stone, the sociologist, has written, "we ought to acknowledge
that one child's fantasy is another child's reality. The
probability that the roles children enact in their dramas will be
assumed or encountered in adult life is very much restricted by
their position in the various orders of stratification--income,
prestige, ... their rural or urban residence, their 'race' or
ethnicity, or their sex."[17] Likewise, Alfred C. Kinsey and his
associates identified class differences in childhood attitudes
toward sexuality. The distinctions were already discernible in
children as young or three or four, and they involved such sexual
topics as "the ease or embarrassment with which such a child
discusses genitalia, excretory functions, anatomical distinctions
between males and females, ... the origin of babies, ... and
kindred items...." By ages seven or eight, the differences were
even greater. While the lower-class boy at that age "knows that
intercourse is one of the activities in which most of his
companions, at least his slightly older companions, are
engaging," the ten-year-old boy "from the upper level home is
likely to confine his pre-adolescent sex play to the exhibition
and manual manipulation of genitalia, and he does not attempt
intercourse because, in many instances, he has not yet learned
that there is such a possibility."[18]

[17] Stone, "The Play of Little Children," in R. E. Herron and
Brian Sutton-Smith, eds., Child's Play (New York: Wiley, 1971),
11.

[18] Kinsey et al., Sexual Behavior in the Human Male
(Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1948), 440-47.

Social class was indeed central to people's lives.
"Remarkable though it seems," Melvin L. Kohn, the sociologist,
has written, "one aspect of social structure, hierarchical
position, is related to almost everything about men's [and
women's] lives--their political party preferences, their sexual
behavior, their church membership, even their rates of ill health
and death. Moreover," Kohn continued, "these correlations are
not trivial; class is substantially related to all these
phenomena."19

As for mental health, the effects of social class were both
obvious and poignant. For men and women treated for psychiatric
disorders, most of the poor suffered from psychotic illnesses
while the preponderance of the middle classes and the well-to-do
received treatment for neuroses. One survey done after the war
described the clients from the "low social economic status" as
being "rigid, suspicious," lacking in "trust of others," and
having "a fatalistic outlook on life," "feelings of futility,"
and a "lack of belonging." One can speculate that the effects
were harsh on the lower-class children whose parents were
dissociated from reality and so unhappy.

Although none of the studies on social class and mental
illness was conducted during the Second World War, but in the
1950's, there does seem to be significant constancy in the
relationship between these factors over time. See August B.
Hollingshead and Frederick C. Redlich, "Schizophrenia and Social
Structure," American Journal of Psychiatry, 110 (March 1954),
695-701; John A. Clausen and Melvin L. Kohn, "The Ecological
Approach in Social Psychiatry," American Journal of Sociology, 60
(September 1954), 140-51; Hollingshead and Redlich, Social Class
and Mental Illness (New York: Wiley, 1958); Jerome K. Myers and
Bertram H. Roberts, Family and Class Dynamics in Mental Health
(New York: Wiley, 1959); Jerome K. Myers and Lee L. Bean, A
Decade Later: A Follow-Up of Social Class and Mental Illness (New
York: Wiley, 1968).

19 Kohn, Class and Conformity: A Study in Values (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, second edition, 1977), 3. For a
study published on the eve of the Second World War which related
poverty to children's health, housing, and education, see Justin

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Similarly in the 1940's, anthropologists sought to identify

significant cultural influences in childhood and child rearing.

Having explored the connections among culture, socialization, and

personality, these anthropologists discovered that the child's

culture and her socialization were intertwined, and they thus

stressed the importance of ethnicity, race, and religion in

American childhood development. Since the child's first

meaningful relationships are with her or his mother, father, and

the other members of the family, these people become the child's

primary socializing agents. Of central importance, of course, is

the mother, who normally feeds and cares for the baby.

Anthropologists identified significant group differences in

breast feeding and weaning, toilet training, and sexual

discipline, as well as in play patterns, the carrying out of

chores, initiation rites, and attitudes about formal

schooling.[20]

Wise Polier, Everyone's Child, Nobody's Child: A Judge Looks at
Underprivileged Children in the United States (New York:
Scribner's, 1941), especially 269-77.

[20] Victor Barnouw, Culture and Personality (Homewood, Ill.:
Dorsey, third edition, 1979), 33. Among the most studied child-
rearing differences were those existing among Native Americans.
While the Hopis, for example, encouraged their boys to be
cooperative and mild-mannered, the Cheyenne Indian boys were
taught to be warriors--brave and assertive. See also Erik H.
Erikson's comparison of child training among the Sioux and the
Yurok Indians: "Childhood and Tradition in Two American Indian
Tribes," in Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry A. Murray, eds.,
Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture (New York: Knopf,
1949), 176-203.

A fascinating study of socialization differences done after
the war compared several ethnic groups--Zuni Indians, white Texas
"homesteaders," Mormons, and others--occupying a single physical
environment, the town of Rimrock, New Mexico. "F-milies
influenced by different religious and political value systems,"
Robert A. LeVine, the anthropologist, has written, "differ
significantly in how they see fit to train their children, and
some of these value systems involve tighter and more conscious
control over the details of socialization than others." The
groups in Rimrock emphasized distinctly different dominant values
and types of behavior as important to socialize; the Zuni paid
special attention to regulating aggression and promoting
"harmony," while the homesteaders focused on individualism and
emphasized "success," and the Mormons epmhasized "virtue" and
"rigid sex impulse control." "Thus, "LeVine concluded, "what is
relatively unregulated and unplanned in one group is the object
of intensely deliberate socialization in another."21

    Furthermore, were all of these variables of the 1940's to

    21 LeVine, "Culture, Personality, and Socialization: An
Evolutionary View," in David A. Goslin, ed., Handbook of
Socialization Theory and Research (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969),
518; Evon Z. Vogt, Modern Homesteaders: The Life of a Twentieth-
Century Frontier Community (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
1955); Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn and Fred L. Strodtbeck,
Variations in Value Orientations (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson,
1961); John W. M. Whiting et al., "The Learning of Values," in
Evon Z. Vogt and Ethel M. Albert, eds., People of Rimrock: A
Study of Values in Five Cultures (Cambridge: Harvard University
Press, 1966), 29-30, 83-125; William M. Tuttle, Jr., "'Old Ways
Die Hard': Cultural Variations in American Child Rearing during
Wartime" (unpublished paper, 1988).

be held constant, there would still remain the crucial

differentiating factor of gender. In recent years, scholars--

notably, Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan--have contrasted

mother-daughter bonds with mother-son bonds. Girls derive their

basic sense of identity from experiencing themselves as like

their mothers. Consciously and unconsciously, they emulate

their mothers' behavior, and throughout childhood they continue

to identify with the same-sex parent who was their first love

object. Boys, on the other hand, develop a male-gender identity

that depends upon seeing themselves as different from their

mothers, and requiring separation from them. Following the

thesis that the girl child experiences herself relationally,

Chodorow has written: "The basic feminine sense of self is

connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is

separate." Accordingly, through the life course, males tend to

base their identity on ideals of autonomy and individual

success, while females tend to base theirs on attachment,

intimacy in personal relationships, and on subordinating their

success to the care of others.22

22 Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis
and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley: University of California
Press, 1978), 169; Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological
Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Harvard University
Press, 1982); Linda K. Kerber et al., "On In a Different Voice:
An Interdisciplinary Forum," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture
and Society, 11 (Winter 1986), 304-33; Mary Field Belensky et
al., Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and
Mind (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A
Useful Category of Historical Analysis," American Historical
Review, 91 (December 1986), 1061-63, 1065.

But "object relations," as developed by feminist scholars, is not the only psychological window onto crucial differences of gender. Urie Bronfenbrenner, the developmental psychologist, has discovered that, in child rearing, "girls are exposed to more affection and less punishment than boys, but at the same time are more likely to be subjected to 'love-oriented' discipline of the type which encourages the development of internalized controls." One short-term result was that girls were more obedient and "in general better socialized than boys at comparable age levels." Another result reported by Bronfenbrenner was that "girls tend to be more anxious, timid, dependent, and sentitive to rejection."23

In the United States during wartime, there was thus a great array of childhood situations, whether based on race, social class, ethnicity, religion, region, physical and social ecology, or gender—or any number of combinations of these factors. For many of America's children—indeed, one would hope, for most of them—child rearing provided warmth and a positive environment for growth and development. Other children—(here, too,

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23 Bronfenbrenner, "The Changing American Child—A Speculative Analysis," Journal of Social Issues, 17 (1961), 9-10. Bronfenbrenner has also analogized that girls—in whichever order born into the family—were likely to be treated as first-born children because girls, "receive more attention, are more likely to be exposed to 'psychological' discipline, and end up more anxious and dependent, whereas later children, like boys, are more aggressive and self-confident." See also Stanley Schachter, The Psychology of Affiliation (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1959).

meaningful statistics are nonexistent)--suffered grievously, the victims of myriad forms of insult and abuse. But what was undeniable during the era of the Second World War was that diversity, not uniformity, marked the American landscape.

Claudia Lewis understood this fact. After the Second World War she returned to New York City to finish her book, Children of the Cumberland. Continuing to be intensely curious about the differences she had observed, she pondered whether "one could picture a map of the United States in terms of its children--not necessarily a flat map on a page with black dots for the Negro children in the South, yellow for the Orientals in California, and brown for the Indians of the Southwest." No, she had in mind a developmental map that would probe "the various influences at work in molding small children." The "East," she mused, might appear "as a great city of brick and concrete, with a small child playing in canyonlike streets. Quite a contrast would be the 'Southwest' with the little Navajo girl spending her entire time out on the arid plain, in the shadow of high blue mountains...." Lewis's map also included "the Southern mountain children" along with the "children of the Northwest, who can look up daily to snow-capped peaks; children of the corn country, whose familiar 'woods' are waving seas of corn; children who live beside the real seas...; to say nothing of the children of our thousands of 'towns,' with their back-yard, house-close-to-house, main-street

surroundings."24

Such a map, Lewis continued, would have to feature children and not just their physical surroundings. Indeed, "a psychologist's map would probably teem with the children themselves--eating, playing, obeying and disobeying, fighting, laughing, teasing; shy children and aggressive children; the maladjusted, and the happy and secure." Still, the "imaginary map" would be incomplete without also distributing representations of the child-rearing practices followed in the various regions and locales as "one way of getting a grasp of what the [childhood] differences are, and more especially why they exist." For example, the psychologist would point out that in the Southern mountains the children of that map "are going to bed without any fuss (because the whole family goes at the same time), while up North in a well regulated modern city home the battle against bedtime may go on night after night." Similarly, the map could identify child-rearing differences in breast feeding and weaning, toilet training, discipline, tolerance of sexual curiosity, and other topics. Finally, the "map would include children in school as well as at home," for here, too, certain behavioral characteristics seemed to follow regional and cultural patterns.25

24 Lewis, Children of the Cumberland, xii.
25 Ibid., xii-xiii.

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While not denying that people continue to change throughout
the life course, few people--whether psychologists, parents, or
casual observers--would disagree that childhood is the most
important formative period of a person's life. In fact, it is
because childhood experiences have lifespan consequences that it
is instructive--and even fascinating--to take a fresh look at
the great variety of situations in which children found
themselves in the 1930's and 1940's. These girls and boys, born
between 1933 and 1945, are now in their forties and fifties. And
they, in turn, have reared another generation of Americans--
namely, t. eir own children who are now young women and men in
their teens and twenties.

A rapidly emerging field in both psychology and sociology is
that of lifespan studies. Today there is an appreciation of the
importance of, and the unique challenges represented by, all
stages of the life course ranging from infancy to old age.
Historians' most popular explanation of these stages is still
Erik Erikson's "Eight Ages of Man," published in 1951 in
Childhood and Society.[26] Strict Freudians adhere to the

[26] For insightful discussions of historians' use of the
Eriksonian model, see David Hunt, Parents and Children in
History: The Psychology of Family Life in Early Modern France
(New York: Basic Books, 1970), 11-25, 191-96; John Demos,
"Developmental Perspectives on the History of Childhood,"
Journal of Interdisciplinary History, II (Autumn 1971), 315-27.

childhood psychosexual sequence of oral, anal, phallic, and latency stages. Piagetians have demonstrated that children progress through cognitive stages of development, each of which results in a radical reorientation of the child's worldview. Even some committed behavioral psychologists, who formerly posited an "age-irrelevant" view of human development, now concede that cognition springs from biological maturation and proceeds in recognizable stages. Women and men who missed an encounter with Erikson's "Eight Ages of Man" in college or graduate school had another opportunity to read about developmental stages when Gail Sheehy's Passages: Predictable Crises in Adult Life was published in 1978. People who wanted to read more deeply about "passages" could pick up The Seasons of a Man's Life (1978) by Daniel Levinson and others. And the literature on lifespan development continues to appear at a healthy rate.27

This growing recognition of stages also reinforced the belief that if each developmental stage was significant, the most formative of all were those of childhood. This seemed true whether the domain was physical, social, or emotional growth, or

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27 For a full discussion of this topic, see See William M. Tuttle, Jr., "A Historian's Exploration of Psychology: An Approach to a New Psychohistorical Synthesis" (unpublished paper, 1985).

the development of intelligence.[28]   Keeping this in mind, it is
instructive to return a final time to Claudia Lewis's "imaginary
map" of American childhood and child-rearing practices.
Reflecting differences based on region, "social space," the
physical environment, race, ethnicity, social class, and other
factors, her map highlighted America's diversity during the first
half of the 1940's. Beyond that, it identified the developmental

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[28] Regarding the growth of intelligence, psychologists today
tend to conceptualize intelligence as a convergent stream,
beginning with "fluid intelligence" (defined as "a capacity to
perceive relationships and integrate them mentally") but
crystallizing over time "when fluid intelligence is mixed with
formal education and other raw materials of the culture." The
fact that 50 percent of the variance in intelligence is
predictable at a certain age does not mean that half of
intelligence has been acquired by then. The issue for
contemporary psychologists is one of prediction, not one of
calculating the amount of intelligence acquired at developmental
mileposts along the way. (Jack Fincher, Human Intelligence [New
York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976], 179-80; and the essays in
Orville G. Brim, Jr., and Jerome Kagan, eds., Constancy and
Change in Human Development [Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
1980]. I am thankful to Michael E. Lamb, National Institute of
Child Health and Human Development, and John C. Wright,
University of Kansas, for clarifying this issue for me.)

     Older perspectives on the measurement of intelligence did
try to measure actual growth. Benjamin Bloom, an educational
psychologist at the University of Chicago, plotted the
developmental pattern of intelligence. Bloom judged that half of
all growth in human intelligence occurs between birth and age
four, and another 30 percent between the ages of four and eight.
Thus, half of a child's intellectual development is completed
before he or she enters school, and 80 percent is done by the
time the student finishes the second grade. Characteristics in
other domains--for example, the biological, social, and
emotional--were also fundamentally shaped at an early age.
Moreover, Bloom concluded, "At late stages in the development of
a characteristic, only the most powerful and consistent
environments are likely to produce marked changes in the
individual." (Bloom, Stability and Change in Human
Characteristics (New York: Wiley, 1964); the quotation appeared
in Saturday Review of Literature (June 15, 1968), 59.)

consequences that accompanied these differences; it was clear
that American childhood varied widely across the map. And based
on childhood's variations in the United States at this time, and
on the recognized persistence of characteristics acquired during
childhood, it was natural to expect that such behavioral
diversity would persist as these children became adolescents in
the later 1940's and 1950's, and as they entered young adulthood
in the 1950's and 1960's.

In the eyes of postwar American scholars, however, such was
not the case. When they looked at American society, they saw at
work the "melting pot," shared values, and peaceful social change
through economic growth. In 1950, for example, just four years
after the publication of Children of the Cumberland, a very
different kind of book appeared, one that would serve as a
landmark analysis of modern American society in the postwar
period. In David Riesman's The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the
Changing American Character, considerations of group diversity
gave way to generalizations about "the American character."
Riesman contended that the childhood socialization processes at
work in America could explain the society in general,
particularly the behavioral characteristics of that "ideal type"
composed of the urban, middle class. "Thus," he wrote, "the link
between character and society--certainly not the only [link], but
one of the most significant ...--is to be found in the way in
which society ensures some degree of conformity from the

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individuals who make it up. In each society, such a mode of
ensuring conformity is built into the child, and then either
encouraged or frustrated in later adult experience."[29]

Furthermore, Riesman wrote, the American character had
changed from what it once was. The "inner-directed" Americans of
the Victorian age had responded to their internal "gyroscopes."
"Self-willed" and "aggressive," not to mention sexually
inhibited, they practiced such "production values" as hard work
and self-denial. Their personalities were perfectly congruent
with America's era of industrial expansion and rapid population
growth. By the mid-twentieth century, however, the society
demanded a new personality type, the "other-directed" man or
woman who could conform to new bureaucratic structures, who was
"shallower, freer with his money, friendlier, more uncertain of
himself and his values, more demanding of approval...."[30]
Moreover, in the modern evolution toward other-directedness, the
parents had lost some of their authority as agents of

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[29] Riesman, with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, The Lonely
Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character (New Haven:
Yale University Press, 1961 edition), 5-6.

[30] Ibid., 19. See also the insightful discussion in Daniel
Miller and Guy E. Swanson's The Changing American Parent: A Study
in the Detroit Area (New York: Wiley, 1958), 55, 57-58, 109-14.
Miller and Swanson found that child rearing also depended on the
kind of employment held by the head of the household and whether
that employment was "entrepreneurial" or "bureaucratic."
Entrepreneurial parents, for example, tended to train their
children for self-control and independence, while bureaucratic
parents encouraged their children to be spontaneous and work well
with others.

socialization, being replaced by the peer group, the mass media, and more permissive canons of child rearing.31

Considering that the goal of Riesman and his colleagues was to analyze the American character as manifested in personality formation, they paid surprisingly little attention to the contemporary changes in child-rearing philosophies. Indeed, they disdained what they saw as "a tendency in current social research, influenced as it is by psychoanalysis, to overemphasize and overgeneralize the importance of very early childhood in character formation," and they decried the "almost techological attention ... focused on what might be called the tricks of the child-rearing trade: feeding and toilet-training schedules."32 Another shortcoming of their analysis was that it concerned itself only with the middle classes, not the lower classes, and

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31 Ibid., 47-48.

32 Ibid., 38. It is interesting that Riesman slighted child rearing, since a persuasive argument can be made that the American middle-class's emphasis on permissiveness, sociability, and democratic cooperation, especially during the Second World War, was instrumental in the development of "other-directed" Americans. Moreover, large-scale business and governmental organizations required the "other-directed" bureaucrat who emphasized "loyalty, morale, and interpersonal adjustment," and who was very unlike unlike the "inner-directed" self-made man, the entrepreneur and builder who was aggressive and took risks. See Michael Zuckerman, "Dr. Spock: The Confidence Man," in Charles E. Rosenberg, ed., The Family in History (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 192-207; William M. Tuttle, Jr., "'Then and Now': American Child-Rearing Advice in Transition" (unpublished paper, 1988).

only with city people, not rural people.[33]

In 1954, another important statement of the American character was published, David Potter's People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character. Affluence, Potter wrote, had altered socialization processes in modern America. Wanting for very little, American children enjoyed abundance in their housing, feeding, and clothing. Moreover, the comforts and technological advances available hastened the shift from child rearing that was parent-centered to forms that were child-centered. "Today," Potter wrote, "... the disposable diaper, the diaper service, and most of all the washing machine... make it far easier for the mother to indulge the child in a regime under which he will impose his own toilet controls in his own good time." Henceforth, fewer parents pursued the practice of placing their child on the potty at the same time every day, leaving her or him there until the child produced a bowel movement. Another household improvement, central heating, made it possible for children to wear fewer and lighter clothes indoors, thus enhancing physical freedom and comfort. Abundance also produced labor-saving devices and service industries that freed parents to "give an unprecedented share of their time" to their children. In a variety of ways, then, abundance encouraged permissiveness in child development and thus shaped the American character at

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[33] Carl N. Degler, "The Sociologist as Historian: Riesman's The Lonely Crowd," American Quarterly, 15 (Winter 1963), 483-97.

Riesman and Potter were not alone in asserting that a new
"modal" or national personality had arrived on the American
scene. During the Cold War years of the 1950's psychologists,
sociologists, and other social scientists also began to discover
"the American character."35 Some historians did not stop at mere
description; in self-congratulatory fashion, they heralded the
American character as evidence of the country's uniqueness and
greatness among nations. One historian, however, John Higham,
criticized what he termed "the cult of the 'American
consensus,'" or "homogenizing our history."36 Earlier
generations of historians, following trails blazed by Charles
Beard, Frederick Jackson Turner, and others, had focused on
societal tensions and conflicts in which class was arrayed
against class, section

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34 David Potter, People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and
the American Character (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1954), 198, 201.

35 One widely-cited study has been Alex Inkeles and Daniel
J. Levinson, "National Character: The Study of Modal Personality
and Sociocultural Systems," in Gardner Lindzey, ed., Handbook of
Social Psychology (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1954), II,
977-1020. Some scholars, however, went well beyond Inkeles and
Levinson, who issued this caution: "The reliance on collective
documents or data on child-rearing methods probably contributes
in significant degree to the fact that national character studies
ordinarily designate only one modal personality pattern for any
given population. Unimodal analysis seems hardly justified,
particularly in the case of large-scale, heterogeneous national
populations such as that in the United States [998]."

36 John Higham, "The Cult of the American Consensus,"
Commentary, 27 (February 1959), 93-100.

against section, farmers versus business people, and human rights versus property rights. But the historiographical themes of the 1950's were consensus, homogeneiety, stability; the new scholarship emphasized the national character and the American experience, that is, similarities rather than differences. Brilliant historical studies were published on these themes, among them Louis Hartz's The Liberal Tradition in America (1955) and Daniel Boorstin's The Americans: The Colonial Experience (1958). These scholars, while not denying the existence of conflict in the American past, ascribed it less to societal divisions than to psychologically disturbed personalities. "A psychological approach to conflict," Higham explained, "enables historians to substitute a schism in the soul for a schism in society." In other words, the United States was fundamentally a good society, one in which most people shared in the "consensus" of attitudes and beliefs. If a citizen did find fault with American society, it did not necessarily mean that America was in need of correction; it usually meant that the person was "irrational." Certainly this affirmation of the status quo was profoundly conservative, but it was consonant not only with the Cold War ideology of the 1950's, but also with a Freudian perspective that equated the "norm" with the "good" and "biology" with "destiny."[37]

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[37] Ibid.

It was perhaps inevitable during the nationalistic,
conformist years of the "silent fifties" that scholars from a
variety of disciplines would trumpet the virtues of "the American
character." But not all of them joined in the applause. In
1954, Irving Howe, the literary historian and critic, wrote an
essay entitled "This Age of Conformity" in which he lamented that
intellectuals' attitudes toward American society had shifted from
alientation to acceptance.[38] More than that, however, such a
perspective, when applied to the study of individual development
and family life in America, distorted reality by portraying the
United States as a culturally homogeneous society in which the
"ideal type" was the white American family living comfortably in
suburbia.

Tamara K. Hareven, a leading historian of the American
family, has criticized scholars of the national character for
picturing "the 'typical' family as representative of the [entire]
social order...." For one thing, she wrote, "they lack an
analysis of the family as an institution reflecting class
differences, population movements, and economic change." By
focusing on "the family as the microscopic representation of the
social order, they fail to focus on the dynamics shaping family
life and organization. The result," she continued, "is a study
of cultural attitudes rather than social conditions. The

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[38] Irving Howe, "This Age of Conformity," Partisan Review,
21 (January-March 1954), 7-33, 238-40.

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typology of a national character represents only the dominant
culture, and leaves out the varieties of family experience among
other groups in society."39

The experiences of American children at this time, in all of
their diversity, support Hareven. And in order to understand
this cohort of Americans--and the postwar society of which they
were an evolving part--the scholar must return to the earlier era
in which they were in infancy, early childhood, play age, or
school age. The clues to their adolescent and adult behavior lie
in the experiences they had as children on the American home
front during the Second World War. And in order to appreciate
America's cultural diversity, it is also necessary to return to
this generation's childhood experiences, particularly to the
child-rearing practices followed by the parents, whether those
practices were articulated in child-rearing advice columns or
passed on from mother to daughter and father to son. For the
basic fact is that child rearing, however formulated and
articulated, is the main vehicle for cultural transmission from
one generation to the next.

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39 Tamara K. Hareven, "The History of the Family as an
Interdisciplinary Field," Journal of Interdisciplinary History,
II (Autumn 1971), 402. Another scholar, Manford Hinshaw Kuhn,
has made the same point, for the 1940's, by studying "five
divergent American family types": see "American Families Today:
Development and Differentiation of Types," in Howard Becker and
Reuben Hill, eds., Family Marriage and Parenthood (Boston: Heath,
1946), 131-68.

Any helpful, empathetic understanding of children's lives on the home front would necessarily be dichotomous, since children lived on two essentially different levels. Such an understanding would not only reveal what American children had in common as they experienced life on the home front during the Second World War, but also illuminate the widespread cultural diversity that distinguished the United States's population during the war.

Perhaps, too, such an understanding would contain lessons for Americans who today are living during the third greatest wave of immigation in their nation's history. This immigration has been underway since the early 1970's. Indochinese, Mexicans, Central and South Americans, and people from various Caribbean islands are entering the country in record numbers; many are political refugees from civil wars in which the United States backed the losing side, usually an unpopular dictator. For three years in a row--1977, 1978, 1979--the numbers admitted to the United States surpassed those for any year since 1924. In the ten years between 1975 and 1985, the United States received 4.7 million Asian, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic black people. Were one to add in the number of uncounted immigrants, the total would increase considerably. Contrary to some earlier patterns, which saw a heavy influx of young, working-age men seeking economic opportunity, the current immigration consists largely of families. Women and children account for two-thirds of all legal immigration to the United States today. While some of the

better-educated newcomers have settled in the suburbs, most live in neighborhoods populated largely by other people like themselves.40   These people from far-flung countries take pride in their cultural distinctiveness. Like earlier immigrants, they have their own businesses, churches, benevolent and mutual aid societies, and foreign-language newspapers, as well as a diversity of attitudes about the rearing of their children. With this constant infusion of new arrivals, the United States is once again a nation of many immigrants.

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40 "Lands of Our Fathers," Newsweek (January 17, 1983), 22; New York Times, September 9, 1985, December 14, 1986. Another factor heightening cultural separation has been racial segregation, which continues to be pronounced in America's inner cities. For example, the level of segregation of black students remained essentially unchanged between 1972 and 1984, with nearly two-thirds of blacks attending predominantly minority schools. For Hispanics, school segregation has increased in the 1980's, especially in schools in which 9 of 10 students were from racial minorities (New York Times, July 26, 1987).

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