

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Harvey J. Graff, *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. Pp. 426. Can\$89.95 cloth.

Although unmentioned in the text (and unattributed as to source), the illustration that graces the dust jacket of Harvey Graff's *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America* is a fine example of the greatest strength of this important book. A boy and a girl sit side-by-side looking at a slate on which the boy is sketching or writing. In a quick glance, however, the girl catches the illustrator's (and our) eye. She comes alive for us, as do so many other children and young people in the text.

Until recently, the history of young people has been written from the perspective of adults. Much fine work has told us about how parents looked upon their children, how social reformers proposed to improve the lives of the young, how children were treated in such institutions as schools and orphanages, and so on. We sometimes see youngsters in photographs and other illustrations in these works, but we very rarely hear their voices. Although *Conflicting Paths* has no illustration but that on the dust jacket, it makes up for this lack with its rich array of young voices.

Graff's subject is "the history of growing up." Construing "growing up as an integrated developmental process . . . [encompassing] transitions and passages between the formative stages of childhood, adolescence and youth," he examined nearly 500 first-hand accounts—256 by males, 219 by females—of these stages in the life course (p. 5). He found them in diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, journals, and letters. Since Graff is particularly interested in the connections between childhood and youth on the one hand and adult occupations on the other, he gives more attention to these stages than to earlier ones. His emphasis is natural considering his sources, which characteristically give most of their attention to the later stages of growing up.

Graff employed his rich data first to discern and then to describe "the principal paths . . . of growing up and the changes that shaped them from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries" (p. 6). Inevitably, readers will quarrel with at least some of the categories into which Graff divides these separate paths to adulthood. They may also disagree with how he has placed certain individual youngsters in a category. On the other hand, they must also applaud his effort to help us see the commonalities as well as the differences among the enormously varied youthful experiences of his subjects. The richness, and complexity, of Graff's analysis of the lives he investigated can be seen in the

array of paths he sees young people following in the second half of the nineteenth century:

- Transitional Paths
 - Rural
 - Western Migration
 - Discontinuous
- Female
 - Transitional
 - Rural Southern
 - Rural Nonsouthern
 - The West and Migration
 - Social Class Paths
 - Upper-Class Paths
 - Middle-Class Paths
 - Working-Class Paths
 - Social Class Paths for Males
 - Upper-Class Paths
 - Middle-Class Paths
 - Working-Class Paths

And even this set of paths is not complete. As Graff himself notes, included among “missing paths” are some marked by race, class, and ethnicity, and especially those of African Americans. One wonders why he did not consult the many slave narratives Thomas L. Webber investigated for his *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community 1831–1865*, published in 1978. Indeed, Webber’s book is not mentioned at all, a fact I found surprising because I learned of it from Graff’s 1987 reader, *Growing Up in America: Historical Experiences*.

Although Graff’s main purpose was to explain the central characteristics of each category, and how his subjects fitted into the one he assigned them, he usually gives us enough of each life for us to get some sense of the person writing. In opening the journal she kept for a brief time, sixteen-year-old Victoria Lodge, who appears among “rural nonsouthern” girls, noted that “I wish I could stop speaking sharply to mother.” A few days later she wrote that when her mother asked her to get a pail of water she “said I would not but I did. Why cant I do things pleasantly and with-out words?” In a later entry she records that “I promised mother I would fill and clean the lamp this noon but I did not do it. . . . I pray God to forgive me all the wrongs I have this day done and to lead me not into temptation” (p. 223). Despite evidence of contrariness,

however, Victoria worked hard at family chores and at the craft of tailoring she was learning.

When he was sixteen, "rural" lad Morris Treadwell reported in his diary that "a cud of tobacco was threw at the teacher. . . . It was laid to me, but the wrong one." Ten days later "the teacher called at noon & had an altercation about a little matter at school from which I think I shall not go to school anymore." In a later entry Morris reports going with friends "down to the river in the evening . . . & went in swimming. . . . We wrestled, tried out strength in different ways & had a bully old time." Four months later he wrote "I have been very low spirited this week, thinking over old times and other matters" (p. 197).

As these two examples suggest, Graff makes it clear that, like their modern counterparts, young people in earlier days experienced "the inescapable truth that growing up is hard to do." Contradictions, stress, and conflicts inevitably accompany a process in which a person gradually moves from complete dependence to autonomy. There was no golden age when it was easy to be a child.

Readers will find Graff's introductory chapter and notes a useful survey and commentary on the whole field of the history of childhood and youth. On each path they will meet interesting young people whose lives are told sympathetically but without sentimentality. Both for its argument and for its subjects *Conflicting Paths* joins the half-dozen or so core readings in the field.

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Daniel Murphy, *Comenius: A Critical Reassessment of His Life and Work*.
Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995. Pp. ix, 294. US\$45.00 cloth.

Daniel Murphy's study of Jan Amos Komensky, better known in North American educational literature as Comenius, provides a new interpretation of the life and work of the famous Czech educator. In eight chapters Murphy puts Comenius's ideas in their Judaeo-Christian context with particular attention to the ethical and moral dimensions of his educational thought.

Chapter 1 argues for a counterbalance to what Murphy considers to be materialist interpretations of Comenius's views evident in the writing of such western thinkers as John Dewey. Although both Comenius and Dewey are cited as advocates of experiential and learner-centred activity in education, their similarities of thought conceal fundamental differences of an ethico-religious kind. Whereas Dewey is associated with a secular perspective linked