Mona Gleason, Tamara Myers, Leslie Paris, and Veronica Strong-Boag, eds.
Lost Kids: Vulnerable Children and Youth in Twentieth-Century Canada and the United States

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010. 258 pp.

Loren Lerner, ed.
Depicting Canada's Children.

Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009. 438 pp.

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Scholarship on childhood and youth has grappled with the tension between the idealization of childhood and the actual experiences of children. Since the emergence of "the sentimental child" in the eighteenth century, children have served as a politically powerful symbol for the greatest hopes and fears not only for nation, but also for the marginalized groups within it. The essentialization of childhood as a period of innocence has produced ambiguous results for children, particularly those made even more vulnerable by unequal social relations. There is consensus within the literature that the available sources reflect adult concerns better than those of young people. But can we know how children made sense of their world and how they responded to adult decisions about their lives?

The books under review have different approaches to this question. *Lost Kids* includes work by historians and social scientists interested in understanding children as "social actors often *made additionally vulnerable* through the action and inaction of adults" (2). The authors read historical sources for evidence of children's agency or have conducted interviews to understand young people's actions and decisions.

Depicting Canada's Children is a collection of work by scholars from a broader range of disciplines, including history, art history, architecture and design, literary studies, anthropology, film, and sociology. The contributors to this book analyze representations of the child as a "historically changeable social construction that can inform our learning about actual children" (xvi). Most of the contributions are more concerned with how the complex cultural meanings associated with childhood influenced the agency of the producer of images of children.

Lost Kids focuses on children who have been left behind by programs and policies that were designed to grant children, regardless of their social and economic background, opportunities to succeed. The authors share the political conviction that the problems that "at risk youth" face today are the consequence of decisions made by adults in the past. Exploring how changing conceptions of childhood affected "troubled children" should, according to the editors, remind practitioners today that their efforts to help young people cannot be understood outside of contemporary anxieties about citizenship, the nation, class conflict, and cultural identity. Understanding how "the symbolic child" informs social policy and marginalizes certain children and their families is the unifying theme of the book. Children, Dubinsky explains in her contribution, "are the bearers but not makers of social meaning" (15). She borrows this insight from feminist historiography about women as historical actors, and argues that age further disadvantages young people from responding to overgeneralizations about them. Historians of children and youth, the editors assert, must bear in mind that even though race, class, and gender relations create better opportunities for some young people, all children are disadvantaged in their power relationship to adults. The essays are divided into five thematic sections: fostering and adoption; legal interventions targeting misbehaving youth; medical care; social policy; and current policy about recreation and labour. Transnationalism, children's agency, and the embodied mediation of social identity run through each of these sections.

The emergence, in the late twentieth century, of a global meaning for childhood as a trope to instill international commitment to the welfare of children regardless of their national background has shifted historians' attention from national to transnational histories of childhood. Each article explains how concerns about young people's behaviour and health reflected specific national anxieties about the future, but the authors also consider the movement of ideas about childhood and adolescent development across borders. Strong-Boag and Ladd Taylor use the insights of disability studies to explain how past conceptions of disabled children as "forgotten" (in Canada) or "hopeless" (in the United-States) continues to shape attitudes about people with disabilities, and to serve as a barrier to the development of policy that will enable them to become productive adults on their own terms.

Articles focusing on teenagers in trouble with the law explain how international discourses about dangerous adolescence informed policy at the national and local level. G. Stanley-Hall's contention that adolescence was a barometer for modern dangers, Comacchio explains, resonated for Canadians who adopted inter-generational conflict to express their worries about the international conflicts and economic instability that shaped modern Canada. Bush and Myers examine interventions to prevent

children from becoming delinquent in the American south and Canada respectively. Juvenile detention centres and curfew laws criminalized activities that might put youth at risk; specific race and class politics determined which children became the targets of adult surveillance. Baillargeon's work on leisure and educational programs for sick children shows that the ascendency of the emergence of a model for proper childhood development put hospitalized children under surveillance, too. By the late twentieth century, the international community drew on a universalized notion of childhood in policy development. Critics of the UN directive that "the best interests of the child" must be the foundation of social policy argue that in practice adult decisions do not adequately consider the specific cultural context of children's lives. Baldassi, Boyd, and Kelly examine how this principle informs laws and policies pertaining to child custody, lesbian parenting, and parenting through reproductive technology, and argue that children are too often lost in child-centred policies. Rather than considering the specific relationships of each child, court decisions and policy still reflect the belief that the patriarchal family based on blood ties remains the ideal home for children.

Children and youth have not passively accepted adult interventions in their lives, and many of the articles include discussions of what Mona Gleason calls "knee high agency" (137). She uses adult narratives about children's responses health interventions as well as interviews with adults about their childhood sickness to explain how marginalized children embodied normative discourses about health in order to understand their role in the production of social norms. Pal uses children's testimonies and the development of peer groups to explain how young people made sense of the culture of divorce in the 1970s. McBride and Johnson interview young people about recent changes to BC labour legislation that discriminates against young people. Their findings should remind policymakers that young workers are astute critics of unfair legislation who have the critical skills to contribute to the development of policy that affects them.

While the contributors to *Lost Kids* use varied sources, all of the authors in *Depicting Canada's Children* base their studies primarily on images of children. The book includes representations of Canadian children from New France to the late twentieth century, and includes paintings, photographs, film, political cartoons, monuments, architectural plans, and children's drawings. The interdisciplinary approach seeks to promote comparative discussions of what the cultural meanings behind images of childhood can reveal about changes and continuities in the lives of children. Explorations of how depictions of childhood influence the creative process of artists may introduce historians to new methodologies for interpreting images. Readers of this journal will be most interested in the essays that use images as historical evidence.

Representations of aboriginality in seventeenth-century Quebec art, residential schools and promotional materials for mid-twentieth century summer camps demonstrate how Aboriginal people were central to concerns about the modern world. Farrell Racette's discussion of residential school photography is based on images that will be familiar to many readers, but her instruction to look carefully at the sad

and lonely expressions in the children's eyes makes it possible to imagine children's thoughts in these staged photographs. Walsh compares illustrations for Junior Red Cross public health literature produced by the agency and Okanagan children. Like Gleason, she concludes that historians should consider children's role in the development of the modern nation-state.

National and imperial discourses motivated many of the photographers of images in this collection. Promotional literature of British home children sent to work throughout the empire used fact and fiction to marshal financial and moral support for emigration schemes. Buis reads images of transformed children alongside stories about them to explain how the cultural imperative to promote the strength of the empire erased the harsh experiences of these children. The poignancy of this erasure is captured in McNay's discussion of how her father kept secret the fact that he had been a home child. After learning about her family's connection to the program, she decided to study the program so that she could better understand how this history forms part of her own identity.

The range of topics in these volumes reflects the vitality of childhood studies. Both of these books expose the discrepancies between the symbolic meanings associated with childhood and the lives of children, and explain how children found ways to assert their independence and to negotiate their way through programs that tended to present more barriers than opportunities. This knowledge ought to make clear the urgency of including children in discussions about the policies that govern their lives.