

INTRODUCTION

More than Victims: Framing the History of Modern Childhood and War

Mischa Honeck and James Marten

By the dawn of the twentieth century, wars were no longer fought with sword and shield. Yet, despite their declining utility, these ancient tools of war remained potent symbols. Both figured prominently in Joseph Leyendecker's 1918 poster in support of the Third Liberty Loan Campaign, which urged Americans to buy more war bonds (Figure 0.1). What makes this piece of propaganda from World War I stand out, however, is not the association of sword and shield with a nation in arms or the towering, flag-draped Miss Liberty, bearing a shield with the seal of the United States of America. Rather, the most striking element in the scene is a kneeling Boy Scout, in full uniform, who looks up at the stern Miss Liberty and presents her with a mighty sword engraved with the words "Be prepared." Quite effectively, the poster ascribes a crucial role in war-making to this boy, and by extension to millions of other American boys. Rather than seeking shelter behind Miss Liberty's shield, the boy provides the "weapons for victory," thus serving as a metaphor for how children were not only enhancing the nation's combat readiness, but also enabling it to wage war in the first place.¹

Leyendecker's allegorical poster opens a fascinating window onto the complex and seemingly contradictory relationships between children and armed conflict in the era of the world wars. According to contemporary ideals of childhood, children should have been protected, even hidden, from conflict and danger, yet they were also called on to contribute to the

¹ Leyendecker's illustration first appeared on the front page of the March 2, 1918, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* and was reprinted in the April 15, 1918, issue of the magazine *Scouting*.

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FIGURE 0.1 Joseph Leyendecker, poster for the Third Liberty Loan Campaign (1918). Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

welfare of their families, the stability of their communities, and even the survival of their states in times of crisis. Children sold war bonds, grew victory gardens, worked in coal mines, collected rubber and scrap metal, sang patriotic songs, played war games, marched in parades, wrote letters to soldiers, made drawings, volunteered in hospitals, engaged in war relief, campaigned for peace, and fought and died in combat.

At the same time, people began to regard the determination and ability of societies to shield their young ones from the destructive forces of war as a measure of civilization.² Writing a history of war and childhood in the first half of the twentieth century thus means coming to grips with a fundamental paradox: How was it possible for modern societies to imagine childhood as a space of sheltered existence while at the same time accepting the need to mobilize children for war? How could it be, to draw on Leyendecker's imagery, that children were asked – forced, in some instances – to carry the sword when they should have been sheltered behind the shield? Unraveling and historicizing the paradox of these competing urgencies – to protect children from harm but also to integrate them into the body politic – is the purpose of this volume.

Children have been caught up in war since the dawn of humankind, but the scope of their engagement soared with the scale of the global conflicts that dominated the first half of the twentieth century. The period from 1914 to 1945, which Winston Churchill famously described as “another Thirty Years War,” witnessed dramatic and mutually reinforcing transformations in the histories of war and childhood.³ Both were shaped by converging forces, including nationalism, imperialism, capitalism, social Darwinism, and the global competition for resources and influence. First articulated by Enlightenment philosophers and developed by nineteenth-century bourgeois educators, budding ideals of a protected childhood,

² For overviews of the subject of childhood and war, see James Marten, ed., *Children and War: A Historical Anthology* (New York, 2002); and Elizabeth Goodenough and Andrea Immel, eds., *Under Fire: Childhood in the Shadow of War* (Detroit, 2008). Studies with a national or regional focus include William M. Tuttle, “Daddy’s Gone to War”: The Second World War in the Lives of America’s Children (New York, 1993); Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children’s Lives Under the Nazis* (New York, 2005); Christoph Schubert-Weller, *Hitlerjugend: Vom “Jungsturm Adolf Hitler” zur Staatsjugend des Dritten Reiches* (Weinheim, 1993); Ulrich Herrmann and Rolf-Dieter Müller, eds., *Junge Soldaten im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Kriegserfahrungen als Lebenserinnerungen* (Munich, 2010); Olga Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers: How Soviet Children Went to War, 1941–1945* (New York, 2011); and Yeeshan Chan, *Abandoned Japanese in Postwar Manchuria: The Lives of War Orphans and Wives in Two Countries* (New York, 2011).

³ Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (London, 1948), xiii.

which reinforced the romantic view that youth was endowed with precious innocence and purity, were accompanied by the socially and politically motivated institutionalization of childhood, which brought the youngest members of society into direct encounters with all kinds of civic and state institutions. Policymakers in industrialized nations proclaimed that the implementation of child labor laws, public health reforms, compulsory education, and organized leisure time, as well as calls for less authoritarian forms of parenting, would improve the lives of children and their families. Yet these reforms occurred against the backdrop of modern nation-states trying to turn children into loyal young citizens ready to share the burden of sacrifice in times of crisis. Schools, child-rearing movements, and youth organizations designed in peacetime to bring order and discipline to children – to instill proper values, loyalties, and behavior – proved easily adaptable to the task of mobilizing young people once nation-states and empires began marshaling their material and human resources to compete with their enemies over territory, resources, ideology, and influence.⁴ Just as children represented the futures of their families, they ensured the biological survival of their countries, ethnic groups, and religious denominations. Therefore, at a time when modern ways of childhood became increasingly possible for economic, social, and political reasons, it became less possible to fully protect them in the face of industrialized warfare on a massive scale.

This volume defines childhood broadly. It samples the lives of young people from elementary school age through adolescence and beyond as they struggled to survive in, adapt to, form bonds of community in, remember, and make sense of worlds torn asunder by the upheaval of war. This wide lens allows us to see how societies bent on regulating the transition from childhood to adulthood likened the process of growing up to a gradual evolution from higher to lower stages of dependency. This

⁴ The literature on child welfare and youth work at the turn of the century is vast and growing. See, for example, Paula S. Fass, *Children of a New World: Society, Culture, and, Globalization* (New York, 2007); Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Prehistory of Youth Culture, 1875–1945* (London, 2007), 64–73; and Sonya Michel and Eszter Varsa, “Children and the National Interest,” in Dirk Schumann, ed., *Raising Citizens in the Century of the Child: The United States and German Central Europe in Comparative Perspective* (New York, 2010), 27–49. On the susceptibility of organized youth to militarism and war, see David I. Macleod, “Socializing American Youth to Be Citizen-Soldiers,” in Manfred F. Boerneke, Roger Chickering, and Stig Förster, eds., *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871–1914* (Cambridge, 1999), 137–66; and Arndt Weinrich, *Der Weltkrieg als Erzieher: Jugend zwischen Weimarer Republik und Nationalsozialismus* (Essen, 2013).

meant that, with the rise of developmental psychology in the late nineteenth century, young people entering puberty were increasingly subsumed under modern conceptions of youth, commonly defined as a transitional period in which young people had ceased to be dependent children but had not yet been entrusted with all the privileges of adulthood. Adults' frequent association of youth with dynamism, flexibility, and vitality set adolescents apart from children, yet the discourse of youth also became an important tool in the hands of adult elites who promulgated the theory that nations and empires lacking in youthfulness were bound for extinction.⁵ As both an age-based social cohort and an ideological construct detached from age, youth is integral to a multigenerational and multisited study of how children and adolescents affected, and were affected by, local, national, and transnational communities radically transformed by war.

Of course, although the history of modern childhood and war has to be framed globally, war was never a unifying global experience. War pedagogues had to contend with peace educators over the hearts and minds of children and their parents in many industrialized societies.⁶ The engagement of children and youth with war differed according to geography, technology, class, age, race, gender, and the nature of the state in which they lived. In fact, one of the key findings of this volume is that ideological disparities often mattered less than regional outlooks, social locations, and military capacities when it comes to explaining the different levels of exposure to armed conflict that young people experienced. Take as an example Julie deGraffenried's discussion of US and Soviet alphabet books generated during World War II (Chapter 5), which anchors the higher frequency of war-related themes in Soviet primers not in simplistic democracy–dictatorship binaries but in the relative absence of the physical horrors of war in American children's lives. Whether children and youths wound up as victims, eyewitnesses, willing executioners, or subversive actors depended on local circumstances and contingent forms of socialization. In Antje Harms's chapter on the schism within the German youth movement during World

⁵ See, for example, Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York, 1977); Mischa Honeck and Gabriel Rosenberg, "Transnational Generations: Organizing Youth in the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 38(2) (2014), 233–39; and Richard Ivan Jobs and David M. Pomfret, "The Transnationality of Youth," in Jobs and Pomfret, eds., *Transnational Histories of Youth in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2015), 1–20.

⁶ See, for example, Andrew Donson, *Youth in the Fatherless Land: War Pedagogy, Nationalism, and Authority in Germany, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 59–90.

War I (Chapter 10), some young Germans can be found marching enthusiastically to the trenches, while others deplored the mass slaughter of industrialized warfare. Comparing the lives of children from North America, Europe, Turkey, and East Asia demonstrates that reconciling the practices and ideals of childhood with the idea of war became a truly transnational phenomenon, far more profound than conventional political narratives can suggest. As described in Valentina Boretti's account of war toys in China (Chapter 1) and Esbjörn Larsson's analysis of defense training in Swedish schools (Chapter 6), children may not have actually experienced war, but the cultural imaginary of war provided a nearly limitless reservoir of values, practices, and identities for young people trying to master the conflicting demands of self and society.

Historians of children and youth have brought to the field at least two methodological distinctions that are important for the task at hand. Most agree that childhood is a relational category that can be grasped, at any time or place, only if one recognizes that childhood is bound up with (though not bound by) adult expectations. Most scholars also underline the culturally and ideologically constructed character of childhood by emphasizing that the boundaries of what it means to be a child are not demarcated by biological age and thus forever fixed, but evolve out of dynamic, contested, and historically specific exchanges involving young and old people alike. Appropriately, these historians stress the need to differentiate between constructions of childhood and the lives of actual children, even as these two dimensions are interwoven.⁷ Understanding children as historical actors with their own ideas, intentions, and identity-forming experiences fulfills the critical function of refuting older approaches that treated young people as mere objects of adult design. Rejecting the idea that children are intrinsically passive and vulnerable victims of war, the chapters collected here stress the agency of children and youth in the face of adults' attempts to adjust their methods of controlling young people's behavior to wartime exigencies. At the same

⁷ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, transl. Robert Baldick (New York, 1962); Steven Mintz, "Reflections on Age as a Category of Historical Analysis," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1 (Winter 2008), 91–94; and Jay Mechling, "Children in Scouting and Other Organizations," in Paula Fass, ed., *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World* (New York, 2013), 419–33. On children as subaltern actors, see Kristine Alexander, "Can the Girl Guide Speak? The Perils and Pleasures of Looking for Children's Voices in Archival Research," *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 4 (Summer 2012), 132–45.

time, public authorities proved quite adept at sparking moral outrage by utilizing images of brutalized children in wartime propaganda, which was growing more effective due to advances in technologies of mass communication.

War obviously threatened conventional constructions of childhood and youth and introduced new ones; it also inspired an outpouring of sources unavailable to historians of peacetime childhoods, who are generally limited to one of two approaches. Some emphasize the ways that adults shape and define childhood, while others seek to provide the points of view of young people. The latter can often be difficult; children produce few documents, fewer still of which are preserved in archives. Yet wars offer an opportunity for historians to explore not only the ways in which adults considered the places of children and youth in wartime society but also the myriad responses of young people to war.

The chapters in this volume sample the many ways in which the documents produced during wars enable us to see into the lives of children and youth. They range from government reports to school curricula, textbooks to alphabets, letters from absent fathers to commercially produced war toys, from school essays to art projects, and from stories and novels explaining children's responsibilities in wartime to newspaper articles that for the first time recognized children's role in public life. These documents, which might not have been produced if war had not exploded into the lives of twentieth-century families and communities, provide extraordinary insights not just into the ways in which adults constructed young people's roles on the home front, or worried about their futures when confronted with the sharp end of war. They also shed light on how children and youth eagerly sought to participate in – or resignedly submitted to participating in – what might be the most awful or most thrilling event of their time.

Taking advantage of this abundance of evidence, this book integrates and expands on at least five bodies of scholarship. First, it joins what Dominic Sachsenmaier has summarized as “the global history trend,” in particular the move toward privileging larger scales of analysis and embedding local findings in broader spatial and temporal horizons.⁸ The individual chapters mostly revolve around a group of people, a region, a nation, or a certain cultural space, and only a few, such as Karl Qualls's essay on child refugees from Civil War Spain in Russia (Chapter 4) or Nazan Maksudyan's essay on Ottoman orphans in

⁸ Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 3.

Germany during World War I (Chapter 11), are explicitly devoted to probing cross-border interactions. Taken together, however, the chapters presented here offer a mosaic of experiences that invites reflection on global interdependencies and regional particularities as they pertain to the nexus of childhood, youth, and war in the age of the world wars.

Second, focusing on children and youth allows for a reevaluation of the total war paradigm so prominent in twentieth-century military, political, and social history. Scholars of total war have crafted typologies of total warfare that usually encompass the following key elements: the ability of states to mobilize all available resources for the purpose of war-making, the belligerents' disregard for morality and international law, the erosion of boundaries between soldiers and civilians, and the magnitude of destruction.⁹ Despite its implicit acknowledgement of the increased vulnerability of noncombatants – women, children, and the elderly – the concept of total war hardly conveys the multiple ways in which war affected children and youth in the first half of the twentieth century. This is not to deny that under conditions of total warfare more and more children were asked to take on adult responsibilities, from joining the workforce to assuming military and paramilitary duties. But not all the wars in the period from 1914 to 1945 were total wars, nor were the total wars total to the same degree. Furthermore, children's militarization in times of peace and their centrality to postwar reconciliation, as Robert Jacobs documents in his chapter on child survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Chapter 14), suggest that the potentials that lie in a global-comparative history of war and childhood exceed total war framings.

Third, this volume builds on works that treat the social spaces where politics and play intersect with the seriousness they deserve. One of the ways that children integrate war into their lives is, naturally enough, through play. All children “practice” for adulthood by reenacting grown-ups' behavior, and war play is no different. Play allows children to process their fears and their burgeoning patriotism, and it helps them reduce the terror and excitement of war into manageable scenarios. Children can be

⁹ See, for example, Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds., *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, 2000); Chickering, Förster, and Bernd Greiner, eds., *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction* (Cambridge, 2005); Alan Kramer, *Dynamics of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (New York, 2007); and Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West* (New York, 2007).

absolutely unflinching in what they choose to act out. Even in concentration camps, Jewish children played war games, taking on the roles of guards and prisoners, while children in Northern Ireland played “soldiers and terrorists” with street patrols and fake blood. A comprehensive analysis of play and modern warfare, however, cannot be confined to the activities of children alone but needs to investigate how adults sought to manipulate the play impulse of their young ones to prepare them for war. As part of their effort to participate in war and to absorb as much information about it as possible, children eagerly consumed war culture in the era of the world wars. They read books and stories about war, crowded movie theaters, avidly followed military campaigns in newspapers, and cheered at political and fundraising rallies. Indeed, educators, publishers, and other creators of the cultures of children and youth – inspired by pedagogical innovations and aided by technological changes – produced lessons, books, and toys that, with little subtlety, tried to shape the political opinions and attitudes of young students and consumers. Among other things, they showed children supporting their families, joining the home front war efforts, and accepting the hardships thrust upon them by war.¹⁰

Fourth, writing a history of modern war and childhood means paying attention to how children acted on the home front as well as on the battlefield. An extension of mobilizing children politically is mobilizing them for combat. Boys as young as ten or twelve often served in early modern armies, and the use of “boy soldiers” in the modern period, particularly in revolutionary and civil wars, has been well documented.¹¹ The nineteenth century saw the average age of soldiers in most armies rise significantly. Yet the world wars also saw significant mobilizations of youthful soldiers, especially in Germany and the countries it occupied, where Hitler Youth-style organizations proved easily adaptable to paramilitary purposes, and in the Soviet Union. By the last year of the war, for instance, 70 percent of German sixteen-year-olds had enlisted. Even in countries where youth did not serve on the front lines, many were formed into paramilitary units, and some took over home guard

¹⁰ George Eisen, *Children and Play in the Holocaust* (Amherst, 1990); Morris Fraser, *Children in Conflict* (New York, 1973), 105. Tuttle’s “Daddy’s Gone to War” is still the most useful account of the war culture experienced by American children.

¹¹ See, for instance, Caroline Cox, *Boy Soldiers of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2016). UNICEF tracks the sobering fact that the use of child soldiers remains a significant facet of modern warfare. See more at www.unicef.org/media/media_pr_childsoldiers.html (accessed February 15, 2017).

duties.¹² Many scholars have studied the deployment of underage soldiers in dictatorial regimes; what is less well known, however, is that this practice was not foreign to Western nations, as Kate James demonstrates in her chapter on boy soldiers in the British Army and Royal Navy (Chapter 8). Studying the ways in which the wartime youth mobilization of liberal states resembled fascist youth organizations points to a much more complex, even sinister, interpretation of those states and their methods of militarizing children.

Fifth, in heeding the calls of scholars to prioritize the voices of children when writing about childhood, the chapters featured here do not simply add another social group to an already existing canvas of past events but repaint that canvas altogether. Considering children the “true missing link” for understanding modern warfare, they disprove the notion that adulthood is the requirement of meaningful historical action.¹³ They follow in the footsteps of other historians who have shown how children exerted “agency” in choosing how to engage war on both the home front and the battle front. Many children, to be sure, were drawn into conflict against their will, but many also sought to be involved in war on their own terms.¹⁴ As much as political leaders and educators might have commended young people’s enthusiasm and held them up as models of self-sacrifice for their elders to emulate, the desire of elites to channel youthful behavior frequently clashed with the desire of children and youth to exercise as much autonomy as possible. As Mischa Honeck’s essay on the Boy Scouts of America reveals (Chapter 7), youths’ war fervor, which adult organizers had hoped to incite, often proved difficult to control. A similar story emerges from Kara Ritzheimer’s essay (Chapter 2), which details the efforts of state censors in Wilhelmine Germany to curtail youths’ consumption of wartime “trash” literature. A devastating trial and locus of socialization, modern war disrupted the lives of young people, sometimes with devastating consequences, at the same time that it empowered them. Acknowledging that children were struggling to

¹² Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 114, 242. For recent accounts of Soviet children’s experiences during the war, see Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers*; and Julie K. deGraffenried, *Sacrificing Childhood: Children and the Soviet State in the Great Patriotic War* (Lawrence, 2014).

¹³ For the quote, see Steven Mintz, “Why the History of Childhood Matters,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 5(1) (January 2012), 15.

¹⁴ Among the historians who pioneered the study of children’s agency in wartime are Tuttle, “Daddy’s Gone to War” (1993), James Marten, *The Children’s Civil War* (Chapel Hill, 1998); David M. Rosen, *Armies of the Youth: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism* (New Brunswick, 2005); Stargardt, *Witnesses of War* (2005).