

Children in Changing Worlds

Children live in rapidly changing times that require them to constantly adapt to new economic, social, and cultural conditions. In this book, a distinguished, interdisciplinary group of scholars explores the issues faced by children in contemporary societies, such as discrimination in school and neighborhoods, the emergence of new family forms, the availability of new communication technologies, and economic hardship, as well as the stresses associated with immigration, war, and famine. The book applies a historical, cultural, and life-course developmental framework for understanding the factors that affect how children adjust to these challenges, and offers a new perspective on how changing historical circumstances alter children's developmental outcomes. It is ideal for researchers and graduate students in developmental and educational psychology or the sociology and anthropology of childhood.

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Children in Changing Worlds

Sociocultural and Temporal Perspectives

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Preface

All books have historical roots and antecedents, and the current volume is no different. Over a quarter of a century ago, *Children in Time and Place: Developmental and Historical Insights* (1993) was published under the editorship of an interdisciplinary trio of scholars. Glen H. Elder, Jr., a sociologist, John Modell, a historian, and Ross D. Parke, a developmental psychologist, led a group of scholars who in this volume argued that an interdisciplinary approach to the study of children's development would broaden and enrich our understanding of children's lives. This first volume sought to promote a view of human development in social-historical context by urging co-authors from development science and history to join their distinctive perspectives in their respective chapters.

At that time, we argued that developmentalists neglected social-historical temporality, whereas historians seldom viewed historical effects across the lives of people. It was recognized that the life course theoretical perspective, in which the lives of children and their family patterns are traced over time and place, provided an often neglected temporal perspective on changes in children's lives. The earlier volume highlighted how these issues were being addressed by different sets of scholars. The assembled group of historians, sociologists, and psychologists collectively argued for and illustrated these principles of historical change, and the need for a contextualized view of development. Our goal was to bring these viewpoints together in a coherent theoretical argument within a single volume.

While our initial effort was partially successful, as the collaborative chapters and commentaries suggest, this earlier volume is best viewed as a promissory note and an invitation to surmount the obstacles to serious interdisciplinary dialogue. As Zuckerman (1993) observed, it was not enough to treat context "merely as an appeal for the provision of a prologue," in which the historical antecedents of a current issue are outlined without a serious effort to probe the meaning of the historical context in shaping the lives of the individuals and families. The earlier volume

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should be viewed as an opening salvo in the effort to achieve a true appreciation of the role of historically informed contextual analysis, but it is by no means a definitive statement of this position. At the same time, there was reason for optimism since there were examples that showed the path to achieving this goal. Social historian John Modell (1989) explored the transition from adolescence to adulthood. In his volume *Into One's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920–1975*, Modell revealed the ways that the changing work and educational norms and advances in the availability of cars together altered the experience of adolescence across time. Similarly, historian Tamara Hareven (1982) in *Family Time and Industrial Time* showed how historically based shifts in the means of industrial production transformed work as well as family patterns for both adults and children.

In the ensuing years, on the social science side this argument gained wide recognition in part through the writings of Urie Bronfenbrenner, who argued for a contextual theoretical approach to child development research in his 1979 volume *The Ecology of Human Development by Nature and Design*. In this book and in later writings he outlined an ecological theory of development that focuses on the multiple systems, from the most immediate (the family or peer group) to the most remote (culture and society's values and laws), in which children are embedded and how these systems are linked. Guided in part by this social ecological perspective, over the past 25 years there has been remarkable progress in achieving the goal of a contextualized and historically informed view of development that was imagined in the earlier volume.

The current volume can best be viewed as a progress report that documents the changing lives of children in changing worlds by providing examples of the ways in which context and history shape child and adult developmental trajectories. As a whole, this volume reflects advances in both theory and methodology that have been achieved over the past several decades.