The Biopolitics of Childhood in the Long American 19th Century

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This collection builds on scholarship in the field of critical childhood studies to explore how biopolitical theory illuminates the cultural work of the child figure in the literature and culture of the long United States nineteenth century. Theories of biopolitics have become increasingly significant in early American studies, but the figure of the child remains undertheorized. Childhood hovers everywhere and nowhere in this scholarship with the notable exception of Kyla Schuller's *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century*.[1] The essays in this collection, many of which draw directly from Schuller's theorizations, foreground representations of children in literary, popular, and scientific discourses and underscore childhood's centrality to the workings of biopolitical power.

The past two decades have seen the publication of a rich body of critical work on childhood. This scholarship has established the foundation of a thriving field that explores, among other topics, the history and construction of childhood, textual and visual representations of childhood, childhood as metaphor, and children, themselves, as agents of cultural production. The word "critical" signals a methodology that is grounded in the humanities and takes the "child" and "childhood" as overdetermined and multivalent terms. Characterized by its intersections with such fields as gender, disability, race, queer, and temporality studies, critical childhood studies offers scholars a rich interpretive methodology to explore questions related to difference, power, affect, and subjectivity. Scholars recognize childhood as a generative site of often competing or contradictory ideological commitments: while it can serve to justify and naturalize hierarchies of power, childhood is also understood as a locus of resistance, play, and queerness.

Critical childhood studies emerged as a field in its own right at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley's edited collection, *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*, sought "to bring childhood studies into the center of literary and cultural studies" (11) and it succeeded. It inspired a rich body of scholarship in the study of

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childhood in early and nineteenth-century American literature and culture. The following foundational works highlight the richness of the field: Karen Sánchez-Eppler's *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*; Holly Brewer's *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law, and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority*; Caroline Levander's *Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child, and National Belonging From Thomas Jefferson to W. E. B. Du Bois*; Sarah E. Chinn's *Inventing Modern Adolescence: The Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America*; Anna Mae Duane's *Suffering Childhood in Early America: Violence, Race, and the Making of the Child Victim*; Robin Bernstein's *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood From Slavery to Civil Rights*; Courtney Weikle-Mills's *Imaginary Citizens: Child Readers and the Limits of American Independence, 1640–1868*; Patricia Crain's *Reading Children: Literacy, Property, and the Dilemmas of Childhood in Nineteenth-Century America*; and Nazera Sadiq Wright's *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century*.[2] While this list is hardly exhaustive, it reflects how generative critical childhood studies has been, especially for the long nineteenth century. Of note is a recurring engagement with historical, political, and cultural contexts. Scholars find childhood a powerful site to explore such topics as national identity, citizenship, and political participation; Indigenous dispossession, transatlantic slavery, and forms of servitude; white supremacy, racial classification, and disability; and sex, gender, and sexuality. All of these areas are central sites of biopolitical governance.

The Biopolitics of Childhood

The biopolitics of childhood is a multi- and interdisciplinary methodology aimed at understanding how biopower works to optimize the security and productivity of the population on, in, and through children and childhood. Childhood is so essential to biopolitical projects because it brings together the two modes of biopower theorized by Michel Foucault: "an anatamo-politics of the human body" and "a bio-politics of the population." In Foucault's own writings and in academic discourse, the term biopolitics is sometimes equivalent to biopower, but biopolitics is also, and more specifically, the mode that works on the level of population or species body, focusing on reproduction, birth, maturation, longevity, mortality, health, and other biological processes. Anatamo-politics is the other mode. It disciplines and subjectifies the body through institutions that mold individuals into "docile" subjects and sources of labor. Biopower can "*foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death"—it makes live or lets die—administering and regulating human life at the level of the individual body and the population, governing which groups will flourish and which will expire ("Right of Death" 43–44).[3]

Childhood is a primary node of biopolitical control at the level of the individual and of the population. Kevin Ryan has coined the term *biosocial power* to theorize a biopolitics of childhood that involves "ways of administering life that span the disciplining of individual bodies and the regulation of populations" (1). Childhood sutures the person to the group, functioning as an interface between the individual and the collective, and thereby anchors the construction, management, and reproduction of populations. As Habiba Ibrahim writes, "As an analytic, age works like a hinge insofar as it enables flexible movement between the past and the present, the individual and the collective, the scope of a single lifespan and the scope of an entire epoch" (5). The child in the nineteenth century is understood to represent its "race" and to provide a window into the origins of the development of civilizations and the differentiation of human groups.

Karen Wells argues that the modern idea of childhood is itself an effect of the technologies of biopower, enabling a Foucauldian genealogy of childhood: "Childhood was not 'discovered' in the nineteenth century; rather, it was produced through new rationalities and techniques of government that acted on children's psyches, their bodies and their minds, and in doing so produced them as particular kinds of psychic, corporeal and intellectual subjects" (18).[4] Notions of childhood and the child-like are both targeted and created in biopolitical projects. The concept of childhood is flexible, shifting to serve biopolitical ends. By the nineteenth century, the category of childhood did not exist outside of or uninflected by the workings of biopower.

Children: Real and Imagined

The majority of work on the theoretical aspects of the biopolitics of childhood has been done in the social sciences, but the methodology has relevance for the study of childhood across the disciplines. In an entry titled "Biopolitics of Childhood" in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood Studies*, Majia H. Nadesan writes that the biopolitical analysis of childhood "addresses the cultivation and administration of the vital energies of people designated as children by strategies and technologies of power." These strategies and technologies include laws, institutions, regimes of authority, fields of knowledge, and practices of intervention in families. They "elicit and channel children's energies, shaping their social identities, self-understandings, intentions, routines, and habits" (125). The biopolitics of childhood draws on both the social sciences and the humanities, often simultaneously. Children are a primary focus of the scientific gaze of the biopolitical disciplines, including

psychiatry, psychology, and psychoanalysis, and experiments on children are essential to their knowledge production. Childhood is also ubiquitous in modern literature of all genres, and the tropes of childhood have been central to the major cultural movements of the long nineteenth century including the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Realism, Modernism, and Postmodernism.

A biopolitical analysis of childhood, according to Nadesan, studies both how children are governed and how they are represented, and it is attentive to the way modes of governance both produce and are produced by forms of representation. She writes that "those studying the biopolitics of childhood seek to produce untold histories, or genealogies, of childhood governing apparatuses and representational practices, replete with descriptions of specific institutional forms, technologies, authorities, disciplines, knowledges, and points of resistance" (126). Specific representations of children—for example, as corrupt, innocent, wise, or vulnerable—inform and enable biopolitical strategies of population management whose outcomes both reinforce and challenge those representations.

The biopolitics of childhood can help bridge the gap between childhood studies scholars in the humanities and those in the sciences, between those who want to denaturalize childhood and those who study biological processes during the early stages of human life. For Nick Lee and Johanna Motzkau, the biopolitics of childhood provides a means by which "the various sociological, historical and anthropological approaches that make up childhood studies [can] meet and cross-fertilize with more biologically based psychological and neurological studies of children's development" (7). The methodology challenges the nature/culture dualism because it demonstrates that biological processes unique to young people—such as conception, gestation, birth, evolution, language acquisition, and adaptation—exist but they "cannot be considered to lie 'outside' or 'before' social action because they themselves are a principal site of social action" (9). In the case of child development, nature cannot be separated from culture.

Especially in their fetal stage and infancy, very young people are situated at the border or onset of the human and of human agency. Ryan argues that biosocial power "operates at the threshold of zoē (bare life) and bios (properly political life), and affords a way of engaging critically with the nature/culture dualism as this applies to histories of childhood" (2). It is children's positioning at the threshold of nature and culture, bare life and political life, that renders them so targeted by and susceptible to biopolitical governance. The idea that the child is a *tabula rasa* is not a descriptor of the newborn's character so much as a trope that enables and justifies biopolitical intervention into the lives of children and families.

Growing Children

Child development is a key vector of biopower. As Zlatana Knezevic writes, "The developing child is closely associated with studies of populations, the chronological course of life and stages of development into adulthood and is a central idea and figure in biopolitics" (193). Theories about how children develop have roots in ancient philosophy. According to a developmental paradigm, children develop through necessary and uniform stages. The idea of the developing child is harnessed to two related ideas that are central to biopolitical governance: "normal" development and malleability. In the eighteenth century, the new sciences of statistics and biology "converged . . . to produce a new site of knowledge: the normal developing body" (Wells 17). In the nineteenth century, the sciences invented the "normal child": "by carving that portion of human life known as childhood into developmental milestones and stages, a fictional 'normal' child was fashioned through a process of measurement, comparison and aggregation" (Ryan 5). Along with the "normal" child came the "abnormal" child and a proliferation of kinds of children whose normality and abnormality demanded and steered intervention. The perception that children are malleable beings whose life trajectories can be directed and determined has centered the child as a site for biopolitical technologies and techniques and "makes children the primary and constant targets of policies, interventions and 'investments', with the aim of shaping future adult populations" (Knezevic 197). In the nineteenth century, determinations of which children were capable of impressibility and development perpetuated social hierarchies and inequalities.

The shift from sovereign to biopolitical modes of governance was as central to modern representations of childhood as it was to modern regimes of race and sex/sexuality. For example, the child is a key site for naturalizing, demonstrating, and managing race/sex difference. Normative behavior in children and child development schemas is intimately imbricated in conceptualizations of racial difference as it coexists with sex difference, and normalcy is strongly associated with whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality. Biopolitical strategies subdivide children into child populations that are differentially valued according to "race," which is understood as a hereditary and innate characteristic whose expression in children varies according to sex/sexuality. Operating together at the site of childhood, race and sex are dominant technologies of biopolitical governance and are central to dividing the population up into those who will be allowed to live and those who will be forced to die, those who will be nurtured and those who will be abandoned.

The child as a site of biopolitical governance is especially connected to racial difference through the analogy between children, "primitive" races,

and "lower" stages of civilization. In the nineteenth century, biopolitical strategies deployed developmental schemas that embedded teleologies of child development into evolutionary and national histories. Within these schemas, the child, predominantly the non-white child, came to represent non-white populations—their origins, capacities, and fates. Racialized theories of child development, institutional interventions into children's lives, and scientific experiments on children's bodies were shaped by and shapers of theories of race/sex difference that resonated on the levels of individual and population. Children are persistently assigned racial belonging that renders them less blank slates than dense books of accrued histories and meanings.

From a biopolitical perspective, children are natural resources, a form of human capital to be deployed to fashion a secure and productive population. Biopolitical technologies are often justified through iterations of children's "best interests." Related ideas about normative development are characterized by the sciences as optimal for children themselves. Yet, just as a child does not exist separate from its environment, from a biopolitical perspective, what is optimal for a child cannot be considered in isolation from what is optimal for the child's society. Biopolitical governance is tied to the future of the national and sometimes global population. As Knezevic writes, "The figure of the child has long represented what is at the heart of biopolitics: the future" (196). This future is deeply embedded in capitalist notions of economic health and prosperity at the level of the nation and the world.

The Essays

We have organized this collection into three sections titled "Heredity," "Death," and "Family," following key concepts in biopolitical theory. Each section contains four essays that variously engage the heading topic. In addition, the four essays are divided into pairs of essays that are in conversation with each other. Each pairing thus offers a rich opportunity, especially in the classroom, to explore deeply their particular engagements with the biopolitics of childhood.

Section 1: Heredity

The four essays in this section all variously explore the ways that theories of heredity shape biopolitical projects. The notion that children inherit biological material from their progenitors that shapes how they look and behave is central to the working of biopower. Theories of heredity seek to determine which aspects of character are inherited and which are shaped by habitat, which are innate and which are acquired, which are inescapable and can't be avoided and which are lacking and can be attained. Biopolitical

technologies deploy theories of heredity to act on individuals in order to shape populations. As Schuller writes, "Heredity marks a key interface that differentiates and conjoins the milieu, individual, and population" (29). Infants and young children are central to theories of heredity because they are understood as vehicles for the intergenerational transmission of biological material. The belief that children inherit biological traits from their parents emerged in the 1830s along with the theory proposed by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and other evolutionary scientists that heritable biological material could be altered over the course of a lifetime. By the turn of the twentieth century, scientists believed that heritable material was inalterable and reformers sought instead to prevent certain groups from giving birth in the first place (21–22).

Christa Holm Vogelius's essay treats two thinkers who worked in the midst of this shift from a belief in the ability of the environment to change the heritable material of impressible bodies to the idea of hereditary material as fixed, and she shows how both these beliefs were present in their reform agendas. She reads reformer Jacob Riis's *Children of the Poor* in relation to botanist Luther Burbank's parenting manual *The Training of the Human Plant* (1907), attending to their theories of heredity and species evolution. She argues that both thinkers believed that changing the environments in which children developed could change populations across generations, but they did not extend this belief to all child bodies. Vogelius coins the term "multiculturalist eugenics" to describe their biopolitical agenda to create a stronger national population by reforming and incorporating immigrant children of diverse ethnic origins. But, as Vogelius points out,

> Uniquely excluded from this multicultural nationalism were children with disabilities, whose physical or mental limitations placed them outside of the purview of "training" or adaptability, but whose omission as a category—or even, arguably, a race—was part of what allowed for the apparently progressive vision of a multiethnic nation.
>
> (21)

Riis's and Burbank's promotion of the particular biological advantages of different ethnicities along with their exclusion of disabled children from their reform efforts prefigured and contributed to early twentieth-century programs and policies aimed at eliminating certain bodies from the national population altogether.

Elisabeth McClanahan Harris's essay describes a biopolitical project that fully embraced the prevention of reproduction as the most appropriate mode of treatment. Drawing on overlooked archival records from the first decade of North Carolina's Epileptic Colony (1910–1920), Harris argues that the institution had abandoned a belief in the impressibility

and potential rehabilitation of children with epilepsy for a more explicitly eugenic program of segregation and prevention of reproduction. Harris offers a rich history of the ways in which the category "epileptic" emerged at the turn of the century, understood specifically as a threat to the healthy body politic. She illustrates how once diagnosed as epileptic and institutionalized, the child inmates were excluded from a child identity: "children with epilepsy at this time were essentially recategorized, seen primarily as 'epileptics,' and 'children' secondarily, if at all" (35). Because of the dearth of children's own voices in institutional records, Harris turns to the diary of Jean Clemens, Mark Twain's daughter, for a firsthand account of a young person with epilepsy to provide insight into how epileptic children experienced the physical manifestations and social stigma of their condition. Read together, Vogelius's and Harris's essays contribute to a mapping of the genealogy of eugenic logic, specifically as it impacts child bodies.

While the first two essays in this section focus on heredity as it is construed through a shifting eugenic logic at the turn of the century, the second two essays turn to the antebellum period and explore heredity, attending to fictions of racial genealogies. That is, they explore racialized theories of heredity that designate white children as representatives of a "race" that is "civilized" and able to evolve and that mark children of color as embodiments of "races" that are static and fixed in a "primitive" state. Lucia Hodgson's essay contrasts two seduction stories by Lydia Maria Child: "The Quadroons," an anti-slavery story which features a Black heroine, and "Rosenglory," an anti-prostitution story which features a white heroine. Hodgson asserts that while Child sought to bring to light "the oppressive circumstances that drove enslaved and poor girls to consent to illicit sexual activity," she also "developed biological explanations for why her heroines were susceptible to seduction" (55). These explanations racialized the capacity to withhold sexual consent outside the bounds of marriage. In Child's stories, Black girls inherit an inability to control their sexual impulses or resist sexual overtures. White girls are born sexually innocent with a strong biological capacity to withhold sexual consent, but exposure to illicit sex and illicit relations erodes that capacity. As a result, Black girls and sexually experienced white girls are presented as incapable of being sexually violated and well-suited to sexual exploitation. As Hodgson argues, Child's anti-seduction stories limited later reforms in seduction law.

In her essay, Laura Soderberg also considers how racialized genealogies imbue young bodies with social meaning and fit them for specific roles in society. She focuses on two sets of children—Máximo and Bartola, the performers in the "Aztec Children" show that toured the United States and Europe in the 1850s and 1860s, and the white child characters in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Greek myths for children in *A Wonder-Book for Boys and Girls* (1851) and its sequel, *Tanglewood Tales* (1853)—to illustrate how

childhood could operate as a site that proliferated white supremacist histories of the ancient world. Soderberg uses the term "polygenetic innocence" to describe "the fantasy of children as both pre-social and socially legible" (73). Children were portrayed as representing the people of the ancient world and providing insight into the character of ancient human civilizations. The "Aztec Children" show aligns Máximo and Bartola with Aztec history and interprets them as proof that Indigenous American cultures have no place in the developing United States. By contrast, Hawthorne's children are cast as living embodiments of Greek antiquity who provide evidence that whiteness is the source and manifestation of American civilization and modernity. By the logic of "polygenetic innocence," white children are positioned to explore the past and determine the nation's future; children of color must perform the role of relics without national belonging or agency.

Section 2: Death

As the essays in the previous section suggest, theories of heredity are essential to biopolitical projects that determine what kinds of children will be born and what kinds of adults will be allowed to give birth. The four essays in this section illustrate how theories of heredity work in conjunction with racial ideologies to determine which children will be forced to die young and which will be consigned to a living death. They grapple with representations of children that perpetuate, and sometimes challenge, biopolitical technologies that target certain populations for exploitation and disposability. As the essays show, race, specifically Blackness, is a central vector of these technologies. Children, especially those deemed to be not white, are often denied the capacity (and possibility) for development into maturity that enables a future life.

Both Rebecca M. Rosen and Allison Giffen examine the political work that representations of Black boyhood perform. Their essays attend to the ways that such representations mark Black boys as frozen in time, a strategy that justifies white supremacist anti-Black projects including slavery and the Jim Crow regime. Taking as her topic anatomical study from the 1780s to the 1830s, Rosen examines daguerreotypes and texts that present two disabled Black boys as scientific specimens: Prince, labeled "the boy with no arms," and John Richards "Primrose" Bobey, an Afro-Caribbean boy with vitiligo. These representations "used the figure of the *lusus naturae*, or joke of nature, to justify and popularize anatomical study and to justify the anatomical seizure and enslavement of Black children, deceased and living" (92). Rosen argues that these child representations constituted a new category of anatomical display she calls "innocent specimens" whose youth signaled their compliance. Fixed in time, subject to perpetual objectification, and consigned to "a purgatorial, liminal state free from

aging, but caught between life and death," the representations vacated the subjectivity of these disabled Black boys, offering them up, instead, as "pliable objects of utility, education, and entertainment," which contributed significantly to proslavery scientific discourse (94).

Giffen examines representations of Black boyhood in two stories by Irwin Russell published in *St. Nicholas Magazine*: "Sam's Four Bits" (1876) and "Sam's Birthday" (1878). She argues that these "Lost Cause" stories, like so many published in the same periodical in the later nineteenth century, "identify the Black boy as fungible and feebleminded, an interchangeable child who does not participate in linear development, but instead is fixed in the iterated cycles of agricultural labor" (110). Their "arrested development" contrasts sharply with the "normal" development accorded to white boys in other *St. Nicholas* stories. This racialized model of child development naturalizes the post-Reconstruction biopolitical project of targeting Black men for exclusion from political participation and socioeconomic mobility. Although Russell offers Black boys as figures of pathos and humor, as Giffen shows, his stories contain a submerged narrative of racial violence that gestures toward the threat of death awaiting those Black boys who attempt to grow into the privileges of adulthood.

Rosen's and Giffen's essays, together, demonstrate how representations of Black boyhood across the long nineteenth century perform the biopolitical project of subjecting the Black population to white power. Manuel Herrero-Puertas and Maude Hines offer variations on this theme: Herrero-Puertas explores how the Black boy becomes a useful tool for abjecting certain kinds of white boys, specifically poor newsboys, while Hines examines Black anti-lynching literature to track the ways white and Black childhood offers a powerful tool for Black resistance. Herrero-Puertas turns to the popular genre of antebellum newsboy stories, focusing on an overlooked archive within it of narratives that celebrate newsboy death, particularly two popular narratives about disabled newsboys, both published in 1860—John Morrow's memoir *A Voice From the Newsboys* and Frederick Starr's *John Ellard: The Newsboy*. He argues that this genre helped to rationalize the debility and death of newsboys whose growing numbers were seen as a threat to the health of the national body. Riffing on Achille Mbembe, he coins the phrase "newsboy necropolitics," which he defines as "a confluence of ideologies, institutions, and writings that rendered newsboys' deaths their optimal contribution to society" (127). Significantly, Herrero-Puertas finds that disability racializes white newsboys: stories of disabled newsboys' deaths thrust "all newsboys—disabled or not—into a racialized zone of exclusion they shared with decrepit Indians and disenfranchised Blacks" (136). Such a move represents all newsboys as ready for death and demonstrates, more broadly, that when child populations are racialized as non-white, they are more easily targeted for death.

Hines's essay is also centrally concerned with the biopolitical targeting of Black boys and men for death, but she explores texts that work against rather than in the service of extermination, including anti-lynching literature written by Paul Laurence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, Angelina Weld Grimké, and others during the height of Jim Crow (roughly 1890–1939). She argues that these texts "demonstrate the centrality of children and childhood to both perpetuating and exposing the ways the extrajudicial practice of lynching worked alongside sanctioned government segregation to maintain white supremacy." She finds that this literature directs attention away from the victim of lynching to the effect of lynchings on populations, particularly its manifestation in "corrupted white childhood and blighted Black childhood" (148). Hines asserts that childhood's significance to lynching lies, in part, in its relation to futurity: white children become corrupted, racist adults, and Black children are so traumatized that some choose not to become parents. As the literature attests, lynching can transform motherhood into monstrosity so that infanticide becomes a comprehensible choice despite its contribution to Black death.

Section 3: Family

As Hines's essay suggests, parents in the long nineteenth century were implicated in biopolitical projects targeting their children. As transmitters of heritable material, parents were recognized as having a profound influence on the adults their children would or would not become. Their proximity to their children was also thought to shape their children's characters. Some projects sought to separate parents from their children and others sought to influence the ways in which parents interacted with their children. Some parents internalized biopolitical mandates. Others resisted, although often without success. The four essays in this section consider how childrearing functions as a biopolitical technology and the parent-child bond operates as a site of biopolitical intervention. Given its centrality to biopolitical governance, parenting also offers opportunities for resistance and alternate futures beyond biopolitical imperatives. The essays focus on texts that try in various ways and with various degrees of success to interrupt the influence of biopolitical projects on the futures of children and populations.

Gabrielle Owen's essay traces the emergence of what she calls the "logic of developmentalism" in the first half of the nineteenth century in order to situate the less harmful, more egalitarian models of child development that she finds in two early child-rearing works. Owen argues that developmentalism posits a biopolitical model of adult-child relationality in which children are raised for the benefit of the national population and construes non-normative children as incapable of successful development.

Developmentalism's logic "constructs minoritized populations including those who are women, people of color, queer, trans, neurodiverse, and/or adaptive as 'less developed' or as failing to develop 'properly' " and thereby "allows existing prejudices and social hierarchies to be naturalized as biological" (167). Owen proposes a "queer reading practice" of two texts produced before the "logic of developmentalism" dominated the conceptual landscape—*An Address to Those Who Have Care of Children* (1819) produced by the Society of Friends and *The Duties of Parents* (1823), a sermon by Aaron Bancroft—in order to excavate new possibilities for thinking about child development. While acknowledging the patriarchal, authoritarian elements in these works, Owen suggests that they nonetheless offer opportunities for thinking about how to foreground ethical relationality between child and adult and for emphasizing the beingness and the now of the child, work that she asserts "is urgent for minoritized identities who have been dehumanized by the logic of developmentalism" (177–178). Her essay reiterates how central childhood is to the control and management of minoritized populations.

While Owen "reads against the grain" in her texts to find alternatives to biopolitical control, Sarah Ruffing Robbins investigates literature that more readily offers counter-narratives of resistance. She turns to two turn-of-the-century narratives about child border-crossings, "In the Land of the Free" (1890) by Sui Sin Far (Edith Maud Eaton) and *Indian Boyhood* (1902) by Charles Eastman (Ohiyesa), both of which offer "children's cross-nation migration narratives as records of contested biopolitical power" (183). Robbins argues that these texts represent a form of cultural resistance against state intervention into marginalized families, particularly the separation of parents from their children. Robbins's reading of Sui Sin Far's tale in which customs officials seize the child of Chinese American parents and relocate him to a missionary builds on Schuller's ideas about sentimentalism and "biophilanthropy" to show how state intervention into immigrant families "cast as 'helping' minorities in need of regulation—could, in fact, exercise control and containment of marginalized groups by claiming management of child bodies" (274–275). In her analysis of Eastman's autobiography, Robbins finds that the multiple Canadian border-crossings constitute a rejection of white national borders and highlight "Native nations' alternative mappings of American lands" (191). While noting important distinctions between the two works, Robbins nonetheless argues that in both narratives we find "calls to reconfigure social relations and remap borders and border-crossing into more humane models" (200). Owen's and Robbins's essays foreground the power of literature to thwart and redirect biopolitical imperatives.

Both Stephanie Peebles Tavera and Kristen Proehl interrogate the work of Louisa May Alcott, and both seek to untangle Alcott's complex, often

contradictory, engagement with biopolitical power, especially as it relates to gender and reform. Tavera reads Alcott's novel *Eight Cousins; or, the Aunt Hill* (1875) in the context of sexual hygiene advice manuals of the period, particularly the work of Eliza Bisbee Duffey, one of the more progressive contributors to the field, whom she argues deeply influenced Alcott. Tavera maps out the "ought to know" tradition of these manuals, clarifying both progressive and conservative inclinations. She reads the genre's commitment to greater access to medical information for girls as a challenge to the Comstock law (1873), which, she explains, emerged out of the conviction that girls were vulnerable "to external influences that might adversely shape their mental and physical health, especially access to medical knowledge or birth control and abortion services." Yet, these writers of advice manuals, like conservative writer Mary Wood-Allen, also "worked from within a Christian framework and identified a woman's primary calling as reproduction" (204). Tavera suggests that *Eight Cousins* reflects this complexity: while Alcott challenges some of the more repressive elements of the sexual hygiene movement, such as "the need to protect a girl's reproductive health by curtailing physical and intellectual activity" (209), she continues to center the importance of marriage and motherhood for white girls. In her reading of Alcott's novel, Tavera calls attention to perhaps one the novel's most interesting moves: the orphaned main character is mothered by her Uncle Alec, an effeminate doctor, offering a gender-bending "experiment in parenting" (209).

Kristen Proehl explores Alcott's sometimes problematic engagement with charitable work through a biopolitical lens, comparing two central story arcs in *Little Women*: Beth's work with the Hummel family and Jo's management of Plumfield School. In both storylines, one of the March sisters intervenes into the lives of the immigrant poor. Beth ministers to the children of the impoverished German immigrant family, the Hummels, in their disease-ridden environment, while Jo cares for boys in need on the grounds of Plumfield, where she offers them fresh air, exercise, and wholesome food. Proehl argues that Alcott presents Plumfield as a more successful enterprise because it relocates children to a "clean" middle-class domestic setting rather than simply attending to their immediate physical needs. Proehl develops this argument by way of Schuller's elaboration of "biophilanthropy" as an essentially regressive intervention into the lives of the poor. She demonstrates the way that the biophilanthropy exhibited in both storylines is largely motivated by the self-interest of the middle and upper classes and predicated on classifying the poor, especially immigrants, as "vectors of disease" (226) who pose a biological threat to the health of the community or as "crops" (228) in need of cultivation. Such dehumanizing classifications enable the biophilanthropic goal of extracting labor from the poor. Proehl deepens her analysis by attending to Alcott's often

contradictory deployment of gender expectations, as well as her treatment of sentimental conventions, noting that Alcott's reliance on sentimental narratives of individual transformation is key to her presentation of Plumfield as successful.

The essays by Tavera and Proehl, like all the essays in this collection, iterate how children's development over time, bookended by their emergence as infants marked by heredity and by their successful or unsuccessful attainment of adulthood, is the ground upon which nations stake the health of their aggregate population. Whether deemed white or non-white, able-bodied or disabled, children in the nineteenth century cannot escape the symbolic and material burden of their role in managing populations. Whether the subjects of benevolent reform or mortal aggression, they endure strategic treatments designed to acclimate them to adult goals and desires. Even efforts to liberate them from harmful ideologies and environments reinscribe them in alternate knowledge systems with alternate aspirations for them and the adults they represent and may become. Given that children cannot grow up without adult caregiving, they cannot easily escape what adults regard as their best interests. We hope that this collection of essays will inspire more careful attention to how we define those interests and to the use and abuse of children in the biopolitical management of populations, and that the essays will pave the way for alternative visions of childhood that promote happier children and more just societies.

Notes

1 See LaFleur and Schuller's important introduction to a special issue in *American Quarterly*, "Toward a Biopolitics of Early America." Glick observes that there has been "little to no interest . . . directed toward the particularities of the infant as a biopolitical formation" (881).
2 This list barely scratches the surface of the rich and exciting essays, collections, and monographs published in the first two decades of the century. See our bibliography "Further Reading."
3 For another useful source on Foucault and biopolitics see, especially, the section "Bio-Power" in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Rabinow.
4 Wells is, of course, riffing here on Philippe Ariès's famous assertion about the invention of childhood.

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