

Review of Books

Tobias Hecht, editor. *Minor Omissions: Children in Latin American History and Society*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 2002. Pp. 304. Cloth \$45.00, paper \$21.95.

Minor Omissions: Children in Latin American History and Society is an initial, though somewhat piecemeal, attempt to address five centuries of silence about the region's children. Editor Tobias Hecht has compiled a collection of articles by scholars of history, anthropology, religion and art, as well as diary entries and short fiction, all of which seek to locate children within the larger context of Latin America's past and present.

The best essays utilize a comparative framework that links the history of specific Latin American nations with one another and the first world. Irene Rizzini takes this approach in her examination of the Brazilian "child saving movement" of the late 19th and early 20th century. She argues that Latin American social reformers, like their contemporaries in Europe and North America, sought to protect the poor and improve the moral fabric of the lower classes without altering the class relations characteristic of their society. Rizzini notes that the Latin American poor and their children remain at the margins of society and continue to be seen as a threat to "law and order."

In another well-crafted essay, Anna L. Peterson and Kay Almere Read consider the relationship between children and war in civil conflicts in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. Highlighting the role of Central American children as political actors in their societies, the authors argue that modern western notions of childhood are not universal; indeed, ideas of protected innocence, play, and learning are far from the realities of many Third World and even urban First World children. Peterson and Read's comparative analysis successfully challenges current understanding of the diverse conditions and meanings of childhood in key Central American nations.

Other essays in the collection, though interesting and well-supported, are too limited in scope to enhance the understanding of childhood in Latin America as a whole.

In "Model Children and Models for Children in Early Mexico"

Sonya Lipsett-Rivera argues that differences between Aztec and Spanish views about the ideal childhood can be seen as symbolic of a widespread process of cultural conflict and change in early colonial Mexico. She draws on a creative range of primary sources, including speeches by Aztec elders, Spanish manuals about children, and early colonial court records. Lipsett-Rivera also notes the similarities between Aztec and Spanish gendering of behavioral prescriptions in childhood. However, the essay could be more effectively located in a comparative historical context if the author included a more explicit discussion of the differences between Spanish and indigenous beliefs about childhood, as well as commentary on how these differences were negotiated in mestizo households.

Bruna Verissimo's diary entries offer compelling insight into the lives of street children in contemporary Brazil. "August" is a graphic snapshot of survival on the streets of Recife, where the author has lived since she was nine. A somewhat jarring inclusion in a scholarly collection, the diary is nonetheless a valuable primary document which would have benefited from editorial narrative to link it comparatively with the other articles.

The lack of thematic and methodological unity which plagues the entire work is most evident in LeGrace Benson's "How Haitian Artists Disclose Childhood of all Ages." She argues that the ethnocentric and racist assumptions of foreign-born or trained artists are especially evident in their portrayals of Haitian young people, whereas local folk artists possess the unique cultural and spiritual capital necessary to accurately represent the island's children. Benson meanders poetically through a series of colorful anecdotes and musings but she fails to consistently link her ruminations to the larger social and historical context which the collection aims to address. This least-justifiable inclusion stretches both the definition of what may be considered history, as well as which nations make up "Latin" America.

In his concluding essay, Hecht returns to a comparative historical approach in considering both the precarious situation of the children of Latin America's poor and the gap between their childhood and those of the sons and daughters of the region's wealthy upper-class. He thereby provides appropriate closure to this groundbreaking work, which is an important, if somewhat disjointed contribution to the field

of Latin American social and cultural history. The collection's major weakness lies precisely in its desire to cover so much. It is overly ambitious in the time periods, disciplines, and methodologies it attempts to integrate. As a result, the book lacks structural coherence, leaping dizzily between historical analysis and contemporary commentary, and anecdotal journalism and artistic criticism. The reader is left to speculate if this diversity is a deliberate feature of the work or a compromise made in order to get enough essays together for publication.

In the end, *Minor Omissions* is not the comparative historical study its title seems to suggest. While the essays provide a fascinating series of richly detailed snapshots, few speak to childhood in Latin America *per se*. Whether this was, in fact, the author's intention is unclear. Editor Hecht should be praised for moving such an important topic further to the center of attention, but this work indicates that there still is a clear need for further scholarship on the place children occupy in Latin American history and society.

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William H. Bartsch. *December 8, 1941: MacArthur's Pearl Harbor*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press. 2003. Notes, Index. Pp. 557. \$40.00 hardcover.

In this meticulously researched volume amateur historian William Bartsch explores the events leading up to and the actual destruction of the United States' Far East Air Force in the Philippine Islands on December 8, 1941. Bartsch pulls together an impressive array of American and Japanese primary and secondary sources to argue that the Japanese success in destroying the American air forces in the Philippines in a single day was a greater strategic disaster than the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Bartsch divides this lengthy tome into three chronological parts, beginning in 1940. In each part he gives an almost day to day description of the salient events. To lend a sense of how each side made its decisions and the thinking of the actors involved, Bartsch

juxtaposes the American War Department and its air forces in the Philippines with the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters and its naval and air forces in Formosa, which carried out the attack. The author accomplishes this task by interspersing the personal experiences of the constituents within the framework of narrative analysis.

In so doing, Bartsch traces the original hesitancy of Washington to reinforce the Far East Air Force with the limited amount modern bombers, fighters and radar equipment possessed by the United States. America's war production was to be earmarked for a defeat Germany first approach should the U.S. become engulfed in World War II, as most military and political leaders believed would happen. As war became eminent, however, influential strategists, such as Hoyt Vandenberg for one, convinced his political and military superiors that a strong air force in the Philippines would deter any aggressive moves into the south Pacific by the Japanese. Similarly, he shows that Japanese leaders understood the dangers of a strong U.S. air defense to their plans to capture the mineral and petroleum rich areas. Unlike earlier histories, and Hollywood movies such as "Tora, Tora, Tora," that exonerates Emperor Hirohito, Bartsch provides strong evidence that Japan's national leader was intimately involved from the beginning in the decisions to bomb Pearl Harbor and attack the Philippines.

Bartsch makes a convincing argument, with documentary support, that by December 8, 1941 the U.S. Far East Air Force had the capability of not only defending the Philippines but of carrying out offensive actions against the Japanese staging areas and airfields in Formosa. He concludes that had MacArthur approved General Louis Brereton's request to attack the Formosa targets in the morning of December 8, the disaster in the Philippines could have been avoided. Indeed, Bartsch blames MacArthur for the destruction of the American air forces and subsequent loss of the Philippines. Especially galling to the author was MacArthur's later attempt to exonerate himself from the debacle. Moreover, he claims that MacArthur's later success in the war and his appointment as Supreme Commander of occupied Japan made it politically impossible to hold the general accountable for his Philippine Pearl Harbor.

Rarely does an amateur historian produce viable analysis

of history. William Bartsch joins a minority of those who succeed. While an epilogue detailing the fate of the men, especially the pilots, not killed on December 8 would have added flavor to the volume, the lack of one does not take away from the value of the body of the work. Bartsch may well have provided what could become a standard source from which professional historians can benefit.

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Arnold J. Bauer. *Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2001. Pp. xx, 245, \$53.00 hardcover, \$19.00 paperback.

On one level *Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture* is about the history of consumption of products in the Americas from pre-Columbian to modern times. The author, Arnold J. Bauer, professor of history at the University of California, Davis, states as much: "The present book emphasizes the core items of material life—food, clothing, shelter, and the organization of public space—in both their rudimentary and elaborate manifestations" (pp. xv-xvi). On a much more sophisticated and integrative level, this book is a *tour de force* or compendium of Dr. Bauer's distinguished body of work concerning the asymmetrical relationship between people, things and power in Latin America.

Goods, Power, History is presented in seven chapters. The introduction (first chapter) deftly defines the critical elements of material culture and discusses the "why" of product acquisition. This includes an exposition of material life, material regimes, material (and civilizing) goods, material abundance, material value and symbolism, and the function of material things. Professor Bauer rightly notes a structural imbalance of trade favoring colonial, neo-colonial, and neo-liberal powers where "[i]n the realm of material culture... the people of Latin America have been presented... with a more abundant and a far wider range of goods from abroad, particularly manufactures, than those present in their own territories" (p. 8). This overall discussion is necessary not only as a means to set the stage for the text that follows but also as a way to "fill in the gap" for those readers without

much formal training in economics or business.

The remaining chapters are offered chronologically—The Material Landscape of Pre-Columbian America (chapter two, the pre-European Americas); Contact Goods (chapter three, roughly the sixteenth century); Civilizing Goods (chapter four, the late sixteenth century through the eighteenth century); Modernizing Goods: Material Culture at the Crest of the First Liberalism (chapter five, the nineteenth century); Developing Goods (chapter six, the first three-quarters of the twentieth century); and Global Goods: Liberalism Redux (chapter 7, the last quarter of the twentieth century and beyond)—with “four interwoven explanatory themes... supply and demand, or relative price; the relationship between consumption and identity; the importance of ritual, both ancient and modern, in consumption; and the idea of ‘civilized goods’” (p. xvi) binding the chapters together under the rubric of material life.

Though Professor Bauer provides a yeoman’s overview of pre-contact clothing, food, housing, consumption (including luxury goods), and gendered occupations, he is at his best describing, analyzing, and putting into perspective for the contemporary reader the enormous challenges and changes to material life from the contact period through the middle of the twentieth century. For this reviewer, the true value and majesty of this text falls between chapters two and six where the author adroitly discusses the transformations associated with each wave of “new and improved” consumption patterns within Latin America. Selected scholarly highlights include a discussion of the movement toward European style urbanization and food during the contact period; the state monopoly of ice in order to replicate the European “civilized” order, particularly in a tropical environment; the trade, influence and establishment of modern goods (e.g., bicycles, beer, plows, hardware) for many made widely accessible by improvements in transportation and modern luxury goods for the few (e.g., French wines, European travel and education, pianos) during the age of liberalism; the consumer development of two middling towns in Mexico and Peru in the first half of the twentieth century under inward-looking economic policies; and a discussion of clothing, fashion, and etiquette as continuing markers of social standing throughout the entire period.

More journalist than historian, the last chapter repudiates globalism and consumerism in Latin American in the contemporary era. In particular, the author picks on Coke and burgers as negative icons of the latest wave of “civilizing goods.” Though entertaining, this chapter is somewhat out of place in a work of otherwise supreme historical scholarship. And though not terribly distracting throughout the text, the author’s anti-globalization tone set forth and unabashedly acknowledged in the preface paints an unambiguous picture of consumption. Nonetheless, this book is a must read for historians and social scientists alike who are interested in the material development of Latin America. For students, this book should find its place as a supplemental text in introductory courses in Latin American history and economics.

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