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Young America: Childhood in 19th-Century Art and Culture

Claire Perry

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In an era of both optimism and anxiety about the nation's future, Americans in the nineteenth century focused attention on the cultivation and education of children as future citizens. Contemporary portrayals of children—in fine paintings, popular prints, illustrated primers, and advertisements—helped to shape cultural expectations: pictures of hardy country boys, intent schoolchildren, and little girls practicing embroidery were examples of the ways model Americans should look and behave. At the same time, images showing street urchins, young slaves, or children at work in factories reflected troubling conflicts in society.
This appealing book explores representations of children in relation to the currents of American culture, including urbanization, immigration, separate spheres of the genders, and the nation's professed devotion to egalitarianism. A generous selection of illustrations includes well-loved works by such artists as Winslow Homer and Eastman Johnson, as well as fascinating archival images. With engaging depictions of children from varied economic, racial, and geographic backgrounds, *Young America* opens a new window on the life and culture of the United States during a century of vast change and growth.

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