

This item was submitted to [Loughborough's Research Repository](#) by the author.
Items in Figshare are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated.

Children, childhood and youth in the British world [Book Review]

PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2016.05.011>

PUBLISHER

Academic Press Ltd- Elsevier Science Ltd

VERSION

AM (Accepted Manuscript)

PUBLISHER STATEMENT

This work is made available according to the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Full details of this licence are available at:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

LICENCE

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

REPOSITORY RECORD

Mills, Sarah. 2019. "Children, Childhood and Youth in the British World [book Review]". figshare.
<https://hdl.handle.net/2134/26411>.

Shirleene Robinson and Simon Sleight (Eds), *Children, Childhood and Youth in the British World*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, xiii + 328 pages, £63 hardcover.

This edited collection aims to bring together a historiography of the British world and of childhood and youth. These two distinct areas have, as the editors highlight, received unequal attention in historical studies, with the substantial body of work on colonial and imperial history dwarfing that on children and young people. The same could be said for historical geography: a wealth of literature has now interrogated imperial cultures and networks of empire, yet studies of young people's imperial experiences and the role of children in imperial projects have often been marginalised. This volume, co-edited by Shirleene Robinson and Simon Sleight, is therefore a welcome addition to interdisciplinary debates on the history of childhood and youth, notwithstanding the fact that, with the exception of thought-provoking insights from art history and archaeology, the majority of contributions are from historians.

A number of the themes within the collection will be familiar to geographers: power, knowledge, mobility, migration, and a scalar focus on institutional and intimate spaces of empire. The editors seem well aware of the methodological limitations in any study on the history of childhood, yet their attempts to push beyond the symbolic role of youth within imperial cultures—for example, 'Empire Day' in schools—is to be welcomed. Robinson and Sleight's editorial introduction hints at the role of more everyday, mundane, fleeting, or distant encounters with imperialism and the British world, rather than previous historical work that has tended to portray empire as an overwhelming and indoctrinating presence in British children's lives. Indeed, this collection seeks to uncover 'more quotidian and less orchestrated interactions among the imperial "family"' (p. 8). In a refreshing move, the chapters here focus on a range of diverse 'imperial' spaces beyond school: homes, public

parks, and youth organisations, for example. Several chapters also examine the imperial experiences of children ‘outside’ of Britain and how these were shaped by complex entanglements of race, gender, and sexuality, as well as exploitation, poverty, and violence. Across chapters that focus on Britain and its imperial ‘others’, the collection also tackles the idea of ‘Britishness’ and considers how this idea was expressed and contested in relation to childhood more broadly. Furthermore, this volume has not isolated children and young people by ignoring the inter-generational relationships that shaped their everyday lives, but has usefully focused—especially in the book’s first section—on adult-child relations and wider familial and care-giving practices.

Two particular chapters in this edited book stand out as provocations for historical geographers and those studying the lives of children and young people. First, Ruth Colton’s chapter on landscapes of play, nature, citizenship, and childhood in late Victorian Britain. In her examination of children’s material engagements in public parks, Colton draws on diverse source material. Notably, she discusses geophysical surveys and the childhood toys archeologically excavated from Whitworth Park in Manchester. This bricolage supports a wonderfully written chapter, and is an encouragement for scholars to consider alternative material sources and ‘traces’ of past childhoods. Second, Kate Darian-Smith’s contribution on ‘memorializing colonial childhoods’ is particularly engaging and insightful. Her discussion of heritage, artefacts, place, and preservation chimes with long-standing interests in cultural and historical geography on cultures of display and representation, but would also engage children’s geographers interested in memory and time. Her discussion of the historic sites that publicly represent children’s colonial pasts in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand is a deeper engagement with ideas on the cultural heritage of childhood and the distinction between ‘the material culture *of* children and the material culture *for* children’ (p. 272).

Darian-Smith also speaks to ideas of absence and erasure in relation to children and young people within commemorative memorials and imperial histories more broadly.

Overall, Robinson and Sleight's volume covers a range of time periods from the nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, with contributions on different geographical contexts and age ranges. This breadth is largely positive, giving the reader an insight into an array of varied experiences, cultural practices and imperial dynamics. However, it has also created an editorial challenge, evident in the large number of sections in this book. There are six thematic sections for fifteen chapters, with half of the sections containing just two chapters each. This collection can therefore feel thinly spread on some of those thematic areas; indeed, each could be worthy of its own edited collection. Whilst I admired the breadth the editors have sought to achieve, the book sometimes lacked depth on those specific thematic areas. A short concluding chapter or afterword could perhaps have tied these themes and sections back together, drawing out connections across the volume. Overall, though, the chapters each contain original and at times absorbing historical research that will engage historical geographers. The collection does meet the aims and ambitions set out in the editorial introduction, yet itself acknowledges the need for more research on working-class youth and those less-studied parts of the British world 'outside' of Britain. This call for more *geographically* diverse histories of empire and youth is one that should resonate strongly with historical geographers, and hopefully fuel wider interdisciplinary conversations.

Sarah Mills

Loughborough University, UK