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The Boy Problem: Educating Boys in Urban America, 1870-1970

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for their ethnic origins, noting that their assimilation into mainstream American culture remains incomplete. He characterizes their culture as “American Italian.” Many of them still experience persistent prejudice. Some retain allegiance to their homelands by playing soccer and bocce; they take pride in their Italian heritage, but identify themselves as more American than Italian. Gems observes that despite Italian achievements in the political, economic, and social life of the United States, “Italian-American monuments are no longer dedicated to Christopher Columbus, or even to national leaders, statesmen or -women, or military heroes, but to athletic heroes in the popular culture” (pp. 214–215).

*Sport and the Shaping of Italian-American Identity* is a clear and engaging summary of the experiences of the first four generations of Italians in the United States. Those who are familiar with this saga will find little original material in Gems’s volume, but they will gain new knowledge about how sport enabled newcomers from Italy to gain entry into mainstream American society while preserving the customs and traditions of their home regions and villages. Gems’s book has a few weaknesses. It is repetitive, and includes too many digressions on the Italian experience in the United States. It also lacks depth on the cultural meaning of soccer and bocce for Italian-American players and spectators. But, on the whole it is a major contribution to a subject neglected by specialists in immigration history, and it will enlighten readers from the general public who enjoy learning more about Italian-American participation in and contributions to American sports.

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JULIA GRANT. *The Boy Problem: Educating Boys in Urban America, 1870–1970*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. Pp. 230. \$45.00.

Julia Grant’s *The Boy Problem: Educating Boys in Urban America, 1870–1970* came at an opportune moment when I struggled to understand why my eight-year-old son had difficulties in his fourth-grade class. Unable to sit for extended periods and complete his assignments on time, my son interrupted his peers and his teacher. Rather than linking my son’s problems to what Grant calls the current “moral panic” (p. 2) over bad boys of color, I learned that my son’s difficulties were, instead, tied to centuries’ old notions of acceptable and unacceptable behavior—in reality, learning styles—in and outside the classroom. Indeed, Grant’s book forces us to reconsider the ineffective and destructive approaches in attempting to mold racially and ethnically diverse, migrant and immigrant, poor, working-class young boys into productive male citizens. She demonstrates that even when many European American boys in the early twentieth century had the opportunity to escape the clutches of poverty, prejudice, and the ghetto, entrenched racism, intimidation, and violence locked out African American boys from those same av-

enues of social mobility, forcing them to occupy the current ranks of the “boy problem.” Today’s boy problem, she says, is a long-term “consequence of inadequate and punitive schools, poverty, race, ethnicity, and cultures of masculinity that emerge as an antidote to oppressive social structures” (p. 1).

Using a thematic and chronological approach, Grant’s study begins by exploring the evolution of misguided models for the socialization of the poor, immigrant, ethnic, and working classes that emerged in the nineteenth century with the explosion of urban centers in the North. Spurred by massive immigration, industrialization, and urbanization, social reformers worried about the growing “dangerous classes” and illiteracy, lawlessness, and poverty found in the cities (p. 7). Rather than assisting parents, reformers established reformatories, orphan trains, and public education aimed specifically at containing boys who they viewed as troublesome. Similar institutions for girls emerged, too, but on a smaller scale and they focused on containing sexuality and inculcating domestic values, underscoring the gendered nature of social reform.

The rise in anxieties and beliefs about the inherent, savage nature of boys, an ideology that emerged in the early twentieth century, led reformers to organize athletic programs and build boys’ clubs and recreation centers, including the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), to tame and channel boys’ energies into useful activities. Compulsory and special education also figured prominently in the social reformers’ approach to handle particularly wayward and problematic boys. To control and contain poor, unruly, and unsupervised boys who posed a moral menace to the larger society, reformers invented the crime of truancy, giving school officials the power to police the bodies of school-age boys in public spaces. In the classroom, reformers turned to the accepted practice of measuring intelligence to determine boys’ fitness in the standard educational setting. Reformers then sent boys who scored poorly on the intelligence tests to classes for “backward” or “subnormal” children or, in extreme cases, to institutions for the defective and uneducable.

The rigid and intolerant culture of the schools, Grant demonstrates, contributed to the development of destructive peer cultures of delinquency in the early and mid-twentieth century. Robbed of opportunities to demonstrate their promise in the classroom, boys resisted schooling, performed poorly, and simply stayed away. To affirm their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities, many of these boys joined gangs and devised alternative ways of expressing their masculinity. When child welfare workers sought to reorient such youths to the school setting, they misunderstood the larger context in which the boys and gangs operated. Focusing on tapping into the boys’ masculinity as a way to transform their behavior, welfare workers ignored the larger social structures that confined them in and outside the classroom and, in the process, re-inscribed the same notions they sought to overturn.

Finally, Grant focuses on African Americans, detail-

ing their experiences in the educational setting in the twentieth century, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, when they came to the attention of the school authorities in the wake of the Great Migration. Grant details how deeply entrenched racism prevented them from gaining a foothold in the educational system and, instead, funneled disproportionate numbers of them to special schools and reformatories. When community leaders brought race and the failure of the educational system to national attention, the focus was primarily on girls and not on boys' poor school performance. Instead, the gaze shifted to the boys' participation in gangs.

Grant closes her study with an examination of the most significant developments in special education and juvenile justice in the 1960s and 1970s. While new policies and practices were developed to intervene in the lives of some of the most poorly performing school children, poor and racial and ethnic minorities, they were largely ignored in favor of mainstreaming and, later, inclusion of "special needs" children, not necessarily boys of color. Boys and boys of color, in particular, she concludes, continue to be overrepresented in special education and the juvenile justice systems.

Grant's study is successful for its engaging prose and ability to reach across a broad variety of fields, including education, juvenile justice, and childhood, youth, and gender studies, to delineate the interlocking histories of institutions of social control for young people and reveal the deeply entrenched ideologies of gender, class, ethnicity, and race that shaped their establishment and their development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though not her focus, the inclusion of Latino boys in her analysis would have brought new insight to understanding how social reformers' fixed notions of gender, class, ethnicity, and race in the twentieth century served to disempower many, if not most, boys of color in classrooms throughout the United States today. This reviewer would have also welcomed the discussion of African American boys' experiences within each chapter rather than in a separate chapter at the end of the book, for it appears as an afterthought, though this likely was not the intention. Ultimately, she argues, we must transform how we think about boys' and girls' learning styles in the classroom as well as peer cultures of masculinity if we are to enable students of all backgrounds to reach their educational potential.

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ROBERT MACDOUGALL. *The People's Network: The Political Economy of the Telephone in the Gilded Age*. (American Business, Politics, and Society.) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. Pp. 332. \$55.00.

In an increasingly interdependent world, the expansion of transportation and communication networks to cover more territory and connect more people often

seems natural and inevitable. As Robert MacDougall reminds us in this insightful comparative history of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century telephone networks in the United States and Canada, however, the introduction of technologies of reach such as the railroad, telegraph, and telephone has frequently been more contentious and contingent than is commonly perceived. Questions regarding access to and authority over telephone networks produced fierce commercial, political, and cultural battles in both countries. In the United States, they also generated the independent telephony movement, a viable alternative to the dominance of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) and its predecessor, American Bell.

One of MacDougall's objectives is to uncover the dramatic but forgotten early history of the North American telephone networks. The drama of those early years has been neglected, he argues, because AT&T has written or commissioned much of the published history of the telephone. Even independent scholars have relied heavily on the records in the AT&T archives. There is also a tendency in the history of technology to treat the most recent device or system as the most logical one and ignore the choices made along the way and possible alternative outcomes. Consequently, the history of the telephone has focused on the gradual expansion of AT&T's high quality network across the nation. MacDougall has scoured trade journals, the records of AT&T's early rivals, and municipal archives to shed light on the independent movement and its "vision of 'a telephone for the people'" (p. 4). The independents favored decentralized, locally owned and locally oriented telephone networks that offered less expensive but lower quality service to a broader swath of the population.

A second objective is to highlight the role of political economy in shaping technological outcomes. According to MacDougall, the key determinants in the development of the independent telephony movement were the involvement and relative power of municipal governments. In areas where local government actively engaged the telephone industry, there was more competition, wider and earlier access to telephone service, and a more frivolous culture of telephone use. In towns and cities without such municipal involvement, there was less competition, better quality but more expensive telephone service, and a more formal telephone culture.

MacDougall's third objective is to compare the development of the telephone networks in the United States and Canada. In regions of the United States with active municipal governments, such as the Midwest and the West, independent telephony thrived. In 1907, "independents controlled more than half of the six million telephones in the United States" (p. 2). In Canada, where Parliament regarded the telephone as a work for national benefit and cities had much less political power, municipal politicians accepted local monopolies. Ironically, the nationalist vision of the telephone in Canada ultimately undermined attempts to create a sin-