leaves and the underbelly of the data that suggests that sexual harassment is “widespread” (p. 175).

The book struggles with the intersectionality of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual identity, and disability. Although McKenzie Leiper purports to focus primarily upon gender, arguing that the debate about equality has centred on “gender inequities in the profession” (p. 9), some of her quotations and her commentary go well beyond an essentialized gender analysis. Undoubtedly, had she begun rather than ended this study in 2002, she would have asked more direct questions in her interviews about these very pressing matters. All in all, this is a major piece of sociological research that will lay a baseline against which historians and future generations of women lawyers can measure their lives and careers.

Constance Backhouse

University of Ottawa


The story of Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn evokes images of a carefree and adventurous boy who always manages to evade adult authority. As such, Huck has become a powerful symbol of the idyllic childhood many North American adults idealize. Historian Steven Mintz extends the metaphor of Huck’s river journey beyond romantic nostalgia in *Huck’s Raft*, his survey of American childhood. In 17 chapters, the book explores the socio-economic and cultural changes that have affected children’s lives and adults’ expectations of childhood since the colonial period. Mintz demonstrates that, like Huck, who suffered at the hands of an abusive and neglectful father, children have often sailed their rafts through precarious waters, steered more by parents, social reformers, and economic realities than by their own desires. There are several scholarly manuscripts that detail the efforts of American child reformers or explore changing parenting styles. There are also works, such as Harvey Graff’s *Conflicting Paths*, that reconstruct childhood from first-hand accounts. *Huck's Raft* deserves praise for attempting to do both — to synthesize changing family patterns, reform impulses, and cultural sentiments towards childhood with children’s own thoughts, reactions, and recollections. The result is a comprehensive study of the past four centuries that explores the continuous tension between the power of adults and the agency of children in the United States.

Several themes recur throughout Mintz’s narrative. One is the uncertainty and instability of American children’s lives since the Puritans arrived in New England. Mintz argues that the character of this instability shifted through three overlapping phases. In the colonial period, strict religious doctrine and indentured labour characterized pre-modern childhood. In this period, parents viewed children...
as incomplete adults and sped their maturation process. In the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries, apprenticeships, family migrations, and conflicts often took
young children far from their families. Yet, at the same time, adults began to
view children as more fragile and innocent beings, creating a new, modern
phase of childhood. In the twentieth century, these modern attitudes transformed
children’s health and education, but many young people remained vulnerable to
violence and economic hardship. Mintz suggests that in the last 30 years a postmo-
dern notion of childhood has emerged. The postmodern child is exposed to
mature themes and ideas at an early age, and yet usually remains dependent on
his or her parents for much longer than children in earlier phases.

Mintz also emphasizes adults’ continuous preoccupation with young people’s
activities and well-being. Mintz cites texts from as early as the Puritan era that
decry the spiritual weakness of the young to concerns about juvenile delinquency
expressed in the medical papers and popular periodicals of the 1940s and 1950s, to
demonstrate how adults have tried to reform and improve children’s lives. Mintz
believes that adults’ interest in children’s well-being has generally yielded positive
change — particularly where children’s physical health and education are
concerned.

However, Mintz distinguishes between what he describes as clear-headed,
Progressive Era reformers and the panicky parents, educators, and legislators of
later periods. Unlike the early-twentieth-century reformers, who Mintz argues
channeled their concerns into a “sustained public commitment to children’s
welfare” (p. 155), adults of the last quarter century have succumbed to “alarmist
myths” about high rates of youth violence, child abduction, teenage pregnancy,
and academic failure. He argues that the belief that the young were more likely
to smoke, drink, steal, vandalize, and even kill led adults to question their
support of youth programmes and prompted calls for tougher juvenile jail sen-
tences. Similarly, fears about stranger abductions and the safety of playground
equipment restricted younger children’s mobility and increased parental anxiety.
Mintz demonstrates that concerns such as these were usually based on exagger-
ated claims and incorrect information; adults were still more likely than teenagers
to smoke, drink, or commit crimes, and children were more likely to be physically
harmed by a family member than by a stranger.

While his point about the destructive consequences of moral panics is
persuasive, Mintz’s attempt to separate well-meaning child savers from meddle-
some moralists is less convincing. Early-twentieth-century social reformers were
not less motivated by contemporary fears than adults in the 1970s and 1980s, as
Mintz implies. Earlier adults feared the temptations and health hazards of the
city and its immigrant populations instead of recreational drug use and poor aca-
demic performance, but they were still fearful of the changes they saw in their
society. The consequences for young people were similar as well — as children’s
memories from boarding schools, state institutions, and separated families found
in *Huck’s Raft* confirm.

Indeed, throughout the book, Mintz treats children as active participants in
historical change, consistently presenting first-hand accounts — including diary
entries, life stories, and selections from memoirs — to give young people a voice in the text. These accounts emphasize the diversity of children’s experiences in the United States. Mintz often uses these sources to highlight the ways race, gender, and class affected children’s lives. African American children — first as slaves, then as a disenfranchised group — generally had shorter childhoods than their white contemporaries. Similarly, boys and girls were raised to fit specific gender roles, shaping how they saw themselves and their place in society. Most importantly for Mintz, parents’ income levels and socio-economic status often determined their children’s health and levels of education.

Mintz’s account of these varied childhood experiences might leave readers wondering what exactly defines childhood. The author defines childhood as the period between infancy and 18 years of age, a definition that contradicts Mintz’s evidence that childhood is continuously being redefined. Throughout Huck’s Raft he demonstrates that factors such as the economy, religious beliefs, migration patterns, gender roles, and racism have given childhood diverse meanings. It seems inappropriate to impose rigid age boundaries on such a fluid concept, one that is more determined by a young person’s dependency on adults, and by adult attitudes towards children, than by a specific age.

Still, Mintz offers a thorough review of his subject, buttressed by a diverse source base that far outweighs the shortcomings of his study. Huck’s Raft joins Joseph Kett’s Rites of Passage and Harvey Graff’s Conflicted Paths as an engaging survey and enjoyable read that will be appreciated by both the scholar and the lay reader. While its approach to and definition of childhood will provide ample fodder for graduate seminars, Huck’s Raft will offer undergraduates a comprehensive synthesis that demonstrates the ways social realities and cultural concepts have affected — and continue to affect — young people’s lives. It is a welcome addition to a growing area of historical inquiry.

Katharine Rollwagen
University of Ottawa


Men, Women and Property in England, 1780–1870 offers a new and rich interpretation of the interrelationships between property and capital accumulation by family members, family and individual life cycles, and the economy and urban landscape of Leeds. In its focus on these themes, this impressive history echoes and builds on much of the early work in family history that examined family strategies and structures within an economic framework. It builds, too, on R. J. Morris’s earlier work on the middle classes and the property cycle. This is an economic and social history of the Leeds middle classes that places the families of that city in the broader context of the nation, but is also