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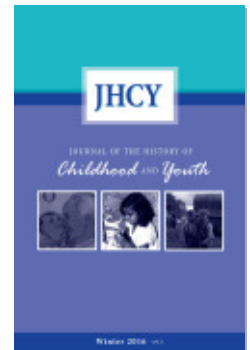
## Assent as Agency in the Early Years of the Children of the American Revolution

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## ASSENT AS AGENCY IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CHILDREN OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Wallace Evan Davies opens *Patriotism on Parade*, his 1955 history of veterans' groups and hereditary organizations, such as the American Legion, the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), on a personal note. In an endearing foreword, he recalls his own experience as a member of the Children of the American Revolution (CAR) in the early 1920s. In addition to reminiscing over the "dubious distinction" of serving as a flagpole in a DAR "living flag" ceremony, he recalls the more singular duties he performed as president of his local CAR Society. Chosen to deliver a welcoming address at the New York state convention, Davies stunned his audience, for better and worse he implies, by delivering a speech that was a mere three sentences long. He conjures the image of his younger self scurrying off the stage to reclaim his seat before disapproving adults could quite realize that the speech was over, causing his peers to erupt in applause at this audacious display of brevity.

For the adult historian Davies, an even more telling vignette—he calls it a "moment of apotheosis"—occurred when he was called upon to recite the CAR creed at the organization's national convention. On stage, the creed utterly forgotten, Davies recalls stammering through a few words before trailing off into silence. But it was in that moment he experienced an epiphany. His fellow CAR members, who were supposed to be intoning the sacred words with him, were equally mute; none of them, he surmised, knew the creed either! Davies left the stage not merely unrepentant over his very public flop, but exhilarated by a previously unrealized sense of solidarity with his CAR peers. In this remembered moment, he bonded with them not over their common exalted ancestry, but over a shared brattiness in their failure to learn their lessons properly.<sup>1</sup>

The veracity of his memories aside, we should pay careful attention to the use to which Davies the adult puts the alleged experiences of Davies the

child. Writing as a liberal-minded scholar during the McCarthy Era, Davies was critical of many DAR political positions, even as he shared fond recollections of individual members (including his own mother). Unable to reconcile this dissonance between the personal and the political, he opts for erasure. The Daughters, he writes, “have not really been a major influence” in American culture, but functioned as a weak reflection of “certain tendencies” rather than as “forces in themselves.” Unwilling to grant these women the agency to embrace causes he found problematic, he dismisses their contributions. Davies does not even mention the cultural or political significance of the CAR; it is fair to assume he never considered the organization from this perspective.

He does, however, remember himself, and quite gallantly, his peers, as little iconoclasts—their will detectable only in their resistance to adult concerns. But in viewing children’s agency solely as an oppositional force, Davies effectively abrogates the CAR’s contributions to American political culture just as effectively as he writes off the work of the DAR. In fact, many CAR members participated eagerly in the activities of their organization, and only by searching out their willing compliance—as well as their efforts to shape the organization to their own preferences—can these children be restored to their place in the political culture of late nineteenth-century America.

In this article, I argue for an evaluation of children’s agency that rests on a continuum from opposition to assent.<sup>2</sup> While it would be foolish to deny that agency can be expressed through resistance, scholars such as David Lancy offer important correctives to this one-dimensional analysis by suggesting that a preference for casting children as resistant is part of an “agency dogma” that actually serves to write children out of dominant cultural trends.<sup>3</sup> Rather, we should be attentive to the ways in which children willingly conform to adult agendas, not necessarily because youth acquiesce to power, but because their interests often align with those promoted by adults. It is unsurprising that people who share privileged identities of race, ethnicity, or social class might perceive convergent interests, making the CAR a particularly intriguing site to analyze children’s compliance. Further, at a time when adults claimed to venerate youth—as they increasingly did at the turn of the twentieth century—even age, the marker of identity that differentiates children from adults, could be deployed by children in ways that accorded them influence. In other words, restoring compliance as a facet of children’s agency is, ironically, a way of rendering them more powerful and allowing historians a clearer vision of children’s ability to shape the culture in which they lived.

Scholarly conversations about agency owe much to the rich interdisciplinary foundations of childhood studies. Recent works have drawn particular

attention to the manifestation of agency within peer groups, making a valuable distinction between “voice” as individual expression and “agency” as a collective expression of will.<sup>4</sup> This distinction does not negate the importance of children’s voices, but provides an analytic framework for examining children’s collective contributions to shaping the larger culture. This insight is particularly valuable when examining children’s agency at the turn of the twentieth century—an age that saw the formation of youth peer cultures, as well as the construction of ever more finely age-graded categories of childhood.<sup>5</sup> Historians David Macleod and Joseph Hawes enshrine the importance of age group and peer culture, respectively, in their important overviews of American youth from 1890 to 1940.<sup>6</sup> While both are interested in the ways that children used the culture’s near obsession with age and the formation of a nascent peer culture to their advantage—Hawes suggests that youth employed peer groups as a “shield” against adult scrutiny—this conversation can be broadened to include young people who discovered that cooperation with adults provided them the best way to exercise their own agency.

### ANCESTORS, AGE, AND AGENCY

Founded in 1895 by Harriett M. Lothrop, the Children of the American Revolution was (and remains to this day) an organization that requires its members to trace their lineage to ancestors who either fought in, or provided material support for, the American Revolution.<sup>7</sup> In claiming the cultural and political importance of such familial bonds, the CAR was part of a *fin-de-siècle* surge in the growth of hereditary organizations, most of which took up staunchly nationalist positions as legitimate guardians of American tradition.<sup>8</sup> In this, they joined myriad fraternal associations and religious congregations that, skipping over the realities of the Civil War and its uncomfortable racial politics, reified the Revolution as the true crucible in which the republic was founded.<sup>9</sup> This veneration for American history resonated with hundreds of thousands of middle-class white Americans, native-born and immigrant alike, who participated in the era’s near mania for collecting antiques and old coins, founding local historical societies, and putting on historical pageants, as well as preserving the birthplaces of Revolutionary heroes and creating house museums out of their former residences.<sup>10</sup> Many historians have drawn attention to the ways in which women contributed to this cultural preoccupation; however, I argue that these pursuits, what one scholar calls the “domestication of history,” provided an especially welcome place for children.<sup>11</sup>

Newly enshrined at the emotional heart of the middle-class family, children found themselves excluded from paid jobs but increasingly available for the

performance of complicated cultural work that parleyed their dependence into a socially significant place in the life of the nation.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Karen Sánchez-Eppler concludes her provocative work on the cultural importance of nineteenth-century children with a coda that features them quite literally wrapped up in an American flag. “How do children carry and express the nation’s story?” she asks on the book’s final page. “What sort of agency can children have?”<sup>13</sup> An examination of the CAR can not only provide partial answers to these questions, but it can also reveal how intimately these queries are linked.

At the dawn of the “century of the child” (which decades later, and in a vastly different context, would also be dubbed “the American Century”), childhood was both central to political debates about the nation’s future and honored as a crucial stage in the development of past leaders.<sup>14</sup> Children who dressed up as a youthful George Washington for historical pageants, visited his birthplace, or read stories about the future leader’s boyish character, would have been hard-pressed to miss the message that childhood could be invested with profound patriotic meaning. CAR children—encouraged to see themselves as the literal and symbolic inheritors of republican tradition—actively, willingly, even eagerly, participated in a movement that provided both rhetorical prominence and actual work for them. To view these children as agents who assented to their roles in the nation’s myriad patriotic tableaux is to acknowledge their importance to American cultural history.

In the summer of 1895, just months after the CAR’s founding, DAR President General Mary Parke Foster wrote to Harriett Lothrop to express her regrets at not being able to attend Fourth of July festivities at the Old South Meeting House in Boston. “Please convey my greetings to the dear children whom we all love so much, and on whom our future depends,” she wrote.<sup>15</sup> Although such language that sentimentally associated children with the future was increasingly commonplace in the Progressive Era, Mrs. Foster really did have a point. Given its genealogical restrictions, the future of the DAR, let alone the CAR, depended on convincing a small group of youngsters that the organization should appeal to them. Unlike other youth organizations, such as the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Camp Fire Girls that would in the ensuing decades recruit widely from the growing population of first and second generation immigrant families, the CAR was dependent on “old stock” familial connections at a time when native-born Americans were increasingly controlling their birthrate. Accordingly, many parents who were active in the DAR, and to a lesser extent, the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), signed up their children at an early age, and tried to instill in their offspring a sense that their bloodlines marked them as something special.

The race to sign up the youngest CAR members—the list was called “the Cradle Roll”—was hotly contested. Elizabeth Searle Egbert was confirmed as a CAR member when she was eight hours old, while Johanna Eakin’s grandmother must have rushed from the birth chamber to the closest CAR registry to enroll the baby when she was only three hours old.<sup>16</sup> As they grew, children who were already longtime CAR members were encouraged to understand the “true meaning” of the organization. Louise Burnes of Dayton, Ohio, wrote to Lothrop to brag about her niece Shirley, age three and a half, who “constantly talks of her ‘revolutionary ancestors’ and sometimes puts ‘Nat’ Hawthorne’s picture ‘to sleep’ when she goes to bed.”<sup>17</sup> Given the nature of the organization and their relatives’ zeal—Mrs. Haton Phelps, for example, was the adult president of a society in Seattle comprised solely of her fifteen grandchildren—CAR children, enrolled before they could possibly express a preference, often found themselves part of a “voluntary association” that resembled a family reunion.<sup>18</sup> As children grew up, however, some began to assert their desire to associate both beyond their extended families and within their own age group, even as they remained engaged participants in an organization that many had been a part of since birth.

One of the hallmarks of children’s nascent culture at the turn of the century was its reliance on the cultivation of peers. In church groups and extracurricular clubs, but most especially in the classroom, children were growing accustomed to defining themselves as an age cohort comprised of peers. Burgeoning commercial markets for toys, books, and clothing all reinforced the idea that youngsters of a certain age shared similar tastes and pursuits.<sup>19</sup> Most CAR members enjoyed the economic and social privileges that allowed them to participate in the consumer culture and look forward to the extended years of schooling that cemented these generational bonds.<sup>20</sup> It is unsurprising, therefore, that even quite dutiful CAR members asserted their will to be a part of an age-restricted group in ways that did not always accord with their parents’ wishes. In a development that can be seen as a harbinger of the finely age-graded membership levels that Boy and Girl Scouting would institute in the interwar years, CAR members, beginning in the late nineteenth century, frequently insisted on dividing their societies into junior and senior sections. While this did not typically please adult leaders—since it meant twice the work for chaperones—it did not cause as much discomfort as children’s willingness to include others in their age-restricted groups.

The same CAR members who rejected meeting with their younger siblings tried to include friends and acquaintances who, in the eyes of adult leaders, did not belong. In Peoria, Illinois, the Zeally Moss Society originally admitted only

the children of DAR women, but in 1906 voted to include all eligible children.<sup>21</sup> As this may have included children of women who were failed applicants to the DAR (DAR membership often depended on social standing as well as lineage) in addition to the offspring of SAR members, children's desire to socialize with their peers may have run at cross purposes to their mothers' desires to draw social circles in ways that they saw fit. In some cases, children even voted to include friends and schoolmates of "no lineage" in their societies. Although the historical record is not completely clear on the outcome of these votes, it appears that a compromise was reached between children and adults: Societies retained their ancestry requirements, but were permitted to sponsor associate members who did not qualify for full CAR membership. These children who continued as active members of the group well into their teens—a rarity for most voluntary youth groups—mixed compliance with resistance when it came to the composition of their chosen peer culture.

Notwithstanding some CAR Societies' efforts to include peers who lacked the requisite Revolutionary ancestors, CAR children appeared to have learned, and affirmed, lessons about the proper civic standing of Americans from diverse backgrounds. Befitting the era's typical reform priorities, and rendering services that can be usefully understood as a child-like analog of women's "municipal housekeeping" duties, CAR members donated books and toys to juvenile facilities, children's hospital wards, and underfunded public schools. Acting as young philanthropists, they also raised money for the DAR's kindergarten at Ellis Island and the Tamasa School for "mountain whites" in eastern Tennessee. In performing these activities, CAR children blended an older, often faith-based commitment to juvenile philanthropy with a Progressive sense of municipal service; they also blended a preference for association within their age cohort, regardless of background, with a self-conscious awareness of the privileged civic position they occupied due to their birthright.

In an article entitled "Americanism," a CAR member sketched out her understanding of the social contract that governed the organization, as well as the country at large. "A member of the most savage tribe in the center of South Africa owes certain duties to it and its chief. The same is true of a citizen of the most civilized nation in the world," she wrote.<sup>22</sup> Her point, however obliquely expressed, was that through service to the less fortunate, CAR children enacted their place in the American body politic. Children took this message to heart, even as they revealed clear opinions about who deserved their charity. A CAR society from San Antonio, Texas, for example, participated in a drive to supply milk to needy babies, but the "motion was made that the babies must be white, American babies." "Some of our children," an adult CAR leader wrote,

“took the stand that the Mexicans did not help give us this beautiful, free glorious country and they did not think it right to care for their babies.”<sup>23</sup> This report was an unusually forthright example of CAR children’s affirmation of the worldview that underlay their philanthropic activities. More often, the “Americanism” that filled the CAR magazine celebrated the exploits of those who did, in the eyes of CAR members, help to create a “free glorious country.”

One of the most important activities for CAR members, and one that many took to with panache, was historical research, much of which found its way into the pages of the national magazine. Many children—some as young as five—published stories about Revolutionary luminaries or their own Revolutionary ancestors, while others wrote detailed accounts of battles or paeans to famous speeches. The majority of young authors, however, chose the lives of Revolutionary children as the focus of their research. Although adult leaders occasionally appealed to the children in rather patronizing terms—“we know that you enjoy stories” and want to read about “brave little heroes and heroines,” as well as “great men”—the youth responded with dedication and precision.<sup>24</sup> Their stories reached far beyond the life of Joseph Plumb Martin, the most written-about youth of the Revolution, filling the pages of the CAR magazine with the exploits of youth all but forgotten even by contemporary scholars of early America.<sup>25</sup> If the children’s tales contained little analysis, they were nevertheless chockfull of detail and imbued with respect for youth who had supported the Revolution.

Male and female CAR members submitted articles about both boys and girls, investing Revolutionary children with pluck, industriousness, and ingenuity. They wrote about young soldiers who braved the deprivations that plagued Colonial forces, never complaining about inedible hard tack or barefoot marches. Younger CAR members tended to write about correspondingly younger Revolutionary-era children who did their part by spinning cloth or sacrificing favored animals to feed the starving army. Children did write to gain recognition from adults—the very first issue of the CAR magazine announced an essay contest, with winning entries to be published in the following issues—but the volume of stories that made their way into the magazine suggests that CAR members also wrote because they were inspired to do so.

Although children did not discuss the details of their research processes in published stories, they did occasionally write to CAR president Harriett Lothrop to regale her with tales of their visits to historical societies and their painstaking labors in local libraries.<sup>26</sup> Children’s obvious pride in their scholarly accomplishments drowned out the fact that they were essentially forced into becoming public historians. Denied the privilege of establishing their



own claim to membership—a DAR mother's marriage license and a child's birth certificate proved legitimacy—children created links to the Revolutionary generation without resorting to family papers. Although they emulated the precise research techniques for which the DAR was well known, CAR children deployed a tool unavailable to their mothers. Through their historical research into Revolutionary youth, CAR members claimed kinship as an age cohort who shared the patriotic devotion of youngsters from the past. All heredity societies hope to accrue to themselves some of the honor that they claim for distant relations, but CAR children claimed a dual inheritance. Their bloodlines linked them to particular patriotic ancestors, but their self-consciousness as children allowed them to align themselves with all brave Revolutionary youth.

CAR children affirmed their connections to Revolutionary ancestors, and thus to their own privileged place in the nation, not only with their research, but also through the emotional, almost mystical connections that their work was supposed to foster. A lengthy piece in the first issue of the CAR magazine demonstrates this. "Washington's Visit to Reading, Pa" by Paul Robinson Norton chronicles the President's trip to the boy's home city.<sup>27</sup> Norton carefully describes the precise route of Washington's entourage as it made its way west to quell the Whiskey Rebellion. To this point, the evidence for Norton's story probably came from legitimate historical sources, but soon a different tone emerges. In a turn that feels almost magical, a child appears, peeking around a corner unnoticed until the "father of the nation" sweeps her up onto his lap. All is still precisely related—the stool on which they sit and window that Washington directs the girl to look out are noted. Clearly, Paul Norton deemed family lore passed down by his great grandmother, the child on Washington's knee, to be as reliable as historical records. In the story, Washington proves his greatness by including the child in his brief visit, while Norton affirms her place by using her future reminiscences as a reliable eyewitness account.

One of the few themes that appears repeatedly in the stories children submitted to the CAR magazine is hinted at in Norton's tale: Washington may have been famous for recognizing children's presence, but his contemporaries more often than not overlooked, or underestimated, them. Tales about Revolutionary-era girls are particularly noteworthy as apparently innocent youngsters are always lingering, unnoticed in doorways, while secret British plans are being made, and, of course, overheard. Slyly innocuous young ladies bearing the accoutrements of their femininity—freshly baked bread rolls, balls of yarn, or baskets of kittens—are casually waived through enemy lines, only to be revealed as the bearers of Colonial intelligence that had been cached amongst their seemingly innocent burdens. And in stories that ended just this side of a critique of Revolutionary

patriots, girls were dismissed as irrelevant by their own fathers and brothers.<sup>28</sup> In tale after tale—written by both CAR girls and boys—girls spring to the defense of Colonials caught in hopeless circumstances and save the day through their fierce albeit underappreciated devotion to the cause.

If some CAR members balked at the “excessive and exacting schoolwork” required by historical research, and others refused to join because they did not want to give up their Saturdays, many children obviously did both, putting extraordinary effort into the research and writing of their essays. It is impossible to read their published articles and fail to note the authors’ pride of ownership. While it is certainly true that “the problem of agency is compounded by the problem of sources,” the pages of the CAR magazine often reveal a sense of kinship that CAR members felt for the Revolutionary-era children who they believed were often overlooked and underestimated by both enemies and allies.<sup>29</sup> Of course, the magazine, flush with children’s writing, was still marked by the hand of adult editors—although it lacked the professional imprimatur that would later characterize the publications of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and that renders those sources even more challenging for historians of youth to interpret. Still, the presence of an adult hand does not necessarily obscure the hand of the child.<sup>30</sup> In the following section of this article, I argue for the authenticity of children’s agency within an unlikely source. Although state-sponsored archives may well be among the last places scholars should look for voices of the marginal, compelling evidence of children’s efforts to shape CAR programming to their own design can be found in, of all places, the United States Congressional Record.<sup>31</sup> The CAR, like the DAR, was officially sanctioned by Congress, and thus required by law to submit regular reports. DAR leaders, deferential to the power of Congress and proud of the accuracy mandated by their own organization, may have exerted a lighter editorial hand on children’s Congressional reports, rendering these documents an intriguingly unexpected place where children’s voices emerge alongside adults’.

### PIRATES, PRISON SHIPS, AND JONES’S BONES

Magisterial in bulk and encyclopedic in content—a typical index ranges from Abyssinia to Zymotic disease—the Congressional Record is, however, virtually silent on children. Excepting a passing reference under “health and labor,” the only early twentieth-century entries that directly concern youth are the Children’s Bureau and Children of the American Revolution. Despite being virtually written out of the record, CAR children managed to make their presence known. Their voices are detectable in two ways: an excess of enthusiasm for projects that would otherwise be of only polite interest to DAR leaders,

and the decidedly childlike twist that CAR members conferred on topics that, though inspired by their historical training, reached beyond the approved canon of CAR activities. The topics most frequently seized upon by CAR members—think of them as pirates, prison ships, and Jones’s bones—reveal children’s commitment to CAR projects, but with an increasingly independent cast. In the first example, children worked enthusiastically in tandem with adult leaders to honor Revolutionary hero John Paul Jones. In the second case, the children extended their reach by participating in a sanctioned cause—the erection of a monument to captured Colonial forces—with such zeal that adults fretted over their independent actions. In the final example, children outgrew the patriotic brief established by adult leaders. Children deployed their CAR training, but they combined it with plot lines from less exalted forms of children’s culture and applied it to a youth who did not measure up in the eyes of their mothers. In all three cases, children enthusiastically repeated back lessons they had learned as CAR members, and if their mothers were not entirely pleased, they should not have been surprised to hear these lessons recited in a childish register.

One of the more peculiar manifestations of patriotic expression in *fin-de-siècle* America—and one exuberantly supported by many CAR members—was a penchant for the disinterment and reburial of worthy members of the civic pantheon. This reclamation of the honored dead, including luminaries such as Jefferson Davis and James Smithson, acted to both physically and metaphorically reposition American heroes so that the narratives in which they starred could be rewritten for contemporary political ends. In the South, the Children of the Confederacy and junior members of the Ladies’ Memorial Association worked with the United Daughters of the Confederacy to shore up support for the “Lost Cause.”<sup>32</sup> Although the cause of northern women was more diffuse, it was no less eagerly embraced. In what historian Michael Kammen calls the “most nationalist” example of patriotic exhumation, the remains of John Paul Jones, hero of the American Revolution and “father” of the United States Navy, were rescued from an ignominious Parisian boneyard and moved to the grounds of the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland.<sup>33</sup>

In 1904, the DAR urged the US Congress to look into the matter, and with both public and governmental attention focused on Jones, events began to move quickly.<sup>34</sup> By February, 1905, when the *New York Times* announced that Jones’s remains had been found amid a tumble of ill-marked graves, many CAR Societies were avidly following the events, but none with greater attention than the John Paul Jones Society of Detroit, Michigan. Understandably, this namesake society was on heightened alert throughout the winter, as “the return of the body [was] of great interest” to all members.<sup>35</sup> The children’s vigil was

only part of their schedule, however; they put on a Colonial costume program that was enjoyed by the “poor Polish women” at the Franklin Street settlement and hosted a variety of fundraisers that enabled them to contribute to the Jones recovery operation. Even though the Detroit children might have legitimately claimed primacy in honoring Jones, they were not alone. Many other societies contributed to the recovery fund, including the John Hart Society of Pittsburgh, whose “minute men” stood guard over a collection box that held contributions for the recovery, as well as donations for the support of a child-headed household in need of assistance.<sup>36</sup>

Although Jones’s body was shipped to the United States the following summer, it lay quietly in a Brooklyn warehouse for nearly a year, waiting for the proper moment in the Revolutionary calendar.<sup>37</sup> CAR members who had trekked through the snow to Valley Forge, site of the Continental Army’s most infamous winter encampment, or endured hours of frigid temperatures at Mount Vernon to honor George Washington’s February birthday, would have understood why: specific days, however inconveniently they arrived, carried great meaning. Jones’s reburial ceremonies at Annapolis were scheduled for April 24, the anniversary of his most exalted victory, when his undersized sloop of war, *Ranger*, defeated the HMS *Drake*, a well-armed British frigate. President Theodore Roosevelt was on hand to deliver the eulogy, and although tickets were required for admission to the ceremony on the Naval Academy grounds, citizens of all ages—including CAR members—thronged the streets to witness the passing cortege.<sup>38</sup> In the following weeks, children from Philadelphia to Washington, DC, wrote to founder Harriett Lothrop to report on the inspiring ceremonies.

If adult and youth members of the CAR stood side by side when honoring John Paul Jones, efforts to exhume and honor other Revolutionary patriots revealed some fractures in their generational solidarity. The fundraising campaign for the construction of the Prison Ship Martyrs’ monument in 1908 began well within the remit of the CAR, but eventually led some children down a path that their leaders did not sanction. Captivated by a lurid backstory from the Colonial past, and, perhaps, titillated by the monument’s former location in an unsavory neighborhood awash with “street urchins,” CAR members responded with an enthusiasm that disquieted adult leaders.

The Prison Ship monument, designed by noted architect Stanford White, marked the place of reburial of thousands of captured Colonials who had died on the British prison ships during the Revolution. The appalling conditions onboard these ships, anchored in British-controlled New York harbor, guaranteed a miserable imprisonment for most; historians estimate that over ten thousand men and boys—more than the total number of Colonials killed in

battle—died of typhus, dysentery, and small pox. When they succumbed, prisoners were typically “buried at sea,” a euphemism for the practice of unceremoniously dumping corpses overboard, which meant that bones regularly washed up in the brackish pools and swampy ground that constituted the Brooklyn shoreline. Although there were efforts made early in the nineteenth century to inter *in situ* what remains could be gathered up, they did not work well, and the deplorable conditions of the graves became a cause célèbre for New Yorkers, including Tammany Hall bosses who referred to the decrepit burial site as the “Nation’s Infamy.”<sup>39</sup>

This was all a far cry from reclaiming unkempt Revolutionary graves in otherwise decorous New England churchyards, but CAR members were drawn to the work. Perhaps it was the inhumane treatment of the Colonials at the hands of the British, or the fact that so many young boys were victimized—histories of the prison ships often stressed the youth of many captives. Or maybe it was the sensationalized allure of the neighborhood itself, overrun with poor children that CAR members were accustomed to helping through settlement projects and trips to juvenile facilities. While the New York press did fault adults from the “lower strata of society” for disrespecting the grave site, it reserved its strongest condemnation for the “ruthless” and “degraded urchins” of the Fifth Ward who “were in the habit of playing ‘hide and go seek’ among the coffins.”<sup>40</sup> Whatever their reasons, CAR members responded to the monument fund with zeal.

In the records of the Fifty-eighth Congress, 1903–1905, the adult national treasurer of the CAR tersely noted the children’s interest. The young philanthropists had outdone themselves, she admitted, but they had pursued their charitable work in an unorthodox, and unsanctioned, fashion. The sum donated to the project by the local societies was “considerable,” the treasurer observed, but “unknown to me as it did not pass through my hands.”<sup>41</sup> Yet it is no surprise that the Children of the Revolution were drawn to the Prison Ship Martyrs’ monument—they had years of collective experience memorializing burial sites and fundraising for a variety of patriotic causes. If the children got out in front of their mothers on this particular project, they still had every reason to believe that they were acting within the proper scope of their work. However, when CAR members took up the cause of another youth whose fate was bound up in an altogether different shipboard adventure, they asserted their agency in a way that met only with opprobrium from their adult leaders.

In February 1909, members of the Nathan Hale CAR Society of Bound Brook, New Jersey, who had raised funds for the interment of John Paul Jones’s body, were treated to a stereopticon lecture on the captain’s life in the assembly

rooms of the Lafayette School. The Congressional Record is silent on how this talk was received by the children, but documents reveal that at a subsequent meeting, members were enthralled by the exploits of another sailor. The subject of their interest was a young man named Philip Spencer, who had served onboard the *Somers*, a naval training vessel, and was “cruelly hanged” after having been identified as the leader of a failed mutiny. “The matter was brought up in a purely patriotic spirit, in the attempt to discover, if possible, why there is in the history no mention made of this boy,” reads the report from the society, in an unusually affective entry.<sup>42</sup> But Spencer was not a Revolutionary figure—he was hanged in 1846—and he might very well have been guilty of treason. So why did the children wish to make him a project of their society?

It is not a coincidence that the three projects seized upon by CAR members all had nautical themes. At the turn of the century, children’s culture, from the ennobling to the entertaining, was awash in adventure stories set on the oceans. “In this wonderful Twentieth Century of ours such vast quantities of reading matter comes to us that we have to select from it that which seems profitable and worth-while, as well as entertaining,” one CAR leader intoned, not realizing that adults had inadvertently helped to sculpt those choices. On the top of a long list of DAR-approved maritime heroics was Alfred Thayer Mahan’s *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660–1783*.<sup>43</sup> Mahan’s stirring tribute to naval heroes, published in 1890, was a staple of school history courses and regularly recommended in the pages of the CAR magazine (in ensuing years it would also find a prominent place in Boy Scout handbook bibliographies and gain mention in Girl Scout mariner materials). However, for every Mahan-inspired “profitable” history there were dozens of sea adventures that did not grace recommended reading lists but were nevertheless immensely popular with children.

The Rover Boys, eponymous protagonists of the first series published by Edward Stratemeyer’s syndicate, had been having adventures on land and sea since 1899. Stratemeyer himself, writing as Alfred M. Winfield, sent the lads on rollicking journeys, including *The Rover Boys on the Ocean*, in which the boys are taken prisoner while on board ship. Adding to the popularity of naval adventure stories, the recent war in the Philippines provoked an outpouring of patriotic titles featuring the exploits of Admiral George Dewey.<sup>44</sup> In the decades following Dewey’s victory at Manila Bay, there were no fewer than a dozen biographies in circulation, and many more less sober tales that invoked his name, including Stratemeyer’s—this time writing as Captain Ralph Bonehill—*A Sailor Boy with Dewey: Or, Afloat in the Philippines*. Young readers with a taste for more salacious adventures, and who had, perhaps, tired of

the more mundane pursuits collected in the wildly popular *Boys' Own Book* or *Girls' Own Book*, could amuse themselves with *The Pirates' Own Book*, only one among many juvenile stories that featured exciting privateers.<sup>45</sup> In short, children's reading culture was overflowing with adventure stories involving earnest, though sometimes misunderstood, young men who ran away to find glory at sea.

Philip Spencer was not such a boy. Still, the children of the Nathan Hale Society gallantly took up his cause. Philip, the ne'er-do-well son of John C. Spencer, United States secretary of war, was eighteen in 1846 when his father, desperate over his son's diminishing prospects after he was dismissed from several colleges, pulled the necessary strings to get Philip commissioned as a midshipman aboard the *Somers*. Scuttling any future ambitions while still docked at the New York Naval Yard, Philip drank on duty and assaulted superior officers. Under pressure from Philip's father to get the boy out to sea and away from any officers who might witness his insubordination, Captain Alexander Slidell Mackenzie quickly set sail. But the captain had problems far beyond the presence of one rebellious midshipman: he was in command of a floating anachronism crewed by unqualified teenagers.<sup>46</sup>

The brig-of-war USS *Somers* was one of the last pure sailing vessels built for the US Navy. She was only one hundred feet long, lightly armed, and fitted with just two square-rigged masts, but she was quick as a clipper and charged with chasing down pirates and illegal slave traders. The *Somers* was also part of the naval apprentice program, established by Congress in 1837. Boys from thirteen to eighteen years old were assigned to "school ships," segregated from the bulk of the regular naval force, but still immersed in the fug of tobacco smoke, alcohol, and foul language that characterized most vessels. Given their crews' limited skills, these school ships rarely left port, but the *Somers* was supposed to be different. So with a crew of handpicked, though still ill-trained boys—one hundred of the 120-man crew were under eighteen—the *Somers* set sail on a high-profile training cruise that took her to the western coast of Africa. On the return voyage, one thousand miles from Saint Thomas, Captain Mackenzie uncovered a planned mutiny and confronted its young leader, Philip Spencer. The boy did not deny the plot, but claimed it was all a joke. "This, sir, is joking on a forbidden subject," the captain later testified that he told Spencer. "This joke may cost you your life."<sup>47</sup>

The children of the Nathan Hale Society, who took it upon themselves to research Spencer's case and endeavored to "bring the occurrence to public attention to the end that justice may be rendered to his memory," did not suspect the boy's guilt, although they may have suspected that their interest

in him annoyed their adult leaders.<sup>48</sup> Their insistence on the “purely patriotic spirit” that animated their efforts to uncover exculpatory evidence on Spencer suggests that they knew their affinity for the case would be viewed in a critical light. Adult leaders refused to sanction their efforts, but the children concluded that Spencer was “cruelly” punished by an overzealous captain who was anxious about his own abilities to control a crew of discontented youngsters.

In an odd, but intriguing, conclusion to his book on the *Somers* affair, Buckner Melton speculates on why Philip Spencer should not be judged too harshly, despite his apparent guilt. Citing the psychological pressures of adolescence, which Melton is willing to project back into the early nineteenth century, he suggests that confinement in the “insular, unescapable wooden-walled world” of the *Somers* might have provoked the boy.<sup>49</sup> Spencer had acted in a time and place that did not view adolescent rebellion benignly; however, at the time that the Nathan Hale Society did their research, the notion that older children will push back against what they perceive to be overly zealous adult authority was increasingly accepted as a reasonable, if not always welcome, age-appropriate response. Perhaps it is possible that CAR members occasionally felt themselves overly confined—if only in parlors or public libraries. And if their mutiny amounted only to studying—in a most patriotic way—the mutiny of others, that is a measure of how much they believed in the power of the historical lessons they had been taught and how willing they were to express themselves within the negotiated bounds of their organization.

Throughout this article I have advocated for an understanding of children’s agency that includes assent on a continuum with rebellion. This is only logical, as compliance with one set of directives, or an embrace of one set of authority figures, often means resistance against others. Acknowledging both consent and resistance gives scholars a more nuanced understanding of youth’s relationship to historical trends and a more balanced view of their agency. At the beginning of the twentieth century, CAR children took advantage of a turn toward the domestication of history, and of their own social position, to claim some power for themselves within organizational structures created by adults. As members of a proud heredity organization, CAR children joined together in looking back to the founding of the Republic in order to authenticate their position in the American body politic. Securing their future as privileged American citizens required CAR children to define their pasts in terms that comported, for the most part, with adult wishes.

Decades later, one of their own descendants rejected the cultural power of her extended peer cohort to align herself with what she viewed as her birthright. In 1974, Cathy Goegelein of Madison, Wisconsin, reflected proudly on her



childhood in the CAR before admitting that peer pressure had led her away from the organization as a young adolescent.<sup>50</sup> But as a senior in high school she remedied this mistake and took up her CAR duties with renewed dedication. “It was a crucial turning point in America and I wasn’t even there to wave my flag of red, white and blue,” she wrote. Casting her embrace of the CAR as a rejection of her own age cohort—“Believe it or not I’m still boasting CAR to my friends and listening to their moans and groans always makes me feel proud that I’m not a part of their disloyal Americanism anymore”—Goeglein revealed in a sense of power, of agency, comprised of equal measures of resistance and compliance.

## NOTES

1. Wallace Evan Davies, *Patriotism on Parade: The Story of Veterans’ and Hereditary Organizations in America, 1783–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), vii–x.
2. While my attention to compliance is atypical, scholars have argued that agency should be located on a continuum. Mary Jo Maines, “Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood,” *JHCY* (Winter 2008): 114–24.
3. David F. Lancy, “Unmasking Children’s Agency,” *SSWA Faculty Publications* (2012), Paper 277.
4. Peter B. Pufall and Richard P. Unsworth, eds., *Rethinking Childhood* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 8–9; and William A. Corsaro, “Collective Action and Agency in Young Children’s Peer Cultures,” in *Studies in Modern Childhood: Society, Agency, Culture*, ed. Jens Qvortrup (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
5. Jane H. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); and Sarah Chinn, *The Invention of Modern Adolescence: Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).
6. David I. Macleod, *The Age of the Child: Children in America, 1890–1920* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998); and Joseph M. Hawes, *Children between the Wars: American Childhood 1920–1940* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997).
7. Lothrop is better known as Margaret Sidney, author of the Little Pepper books, one of the best-selling children’s book series of the time.
8. It is challenging to write scholarly histories of the DAR, as their archives—like those of the CAR—are closed to the public. Peggy Anderson, *The Daughters: An Unconventional Look at America’s Fan Club—The DAR* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1974); and Francesca Morgan, *Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
9. Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865–1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).
10. Seth Bruggeman, ed., *Born in the USA: Birth, Commemoration, and American Public Memory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012); and David Glassberg,

*American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

11. Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).
12. Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Susan J. Pearson, *Rights of the Defenseless: Protecting Animals and Children in Gilded Age America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
13. Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States*, 232.
14. Laura L. Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction and the Family in the United States, 1890–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
15. Foster to Lothrop, Box 7, folder 6, Harriett M. Lothrop Family Papers, Archives of the Minute Man National Historical Park, Concord, MA.
16. *Children of the American Revolution Magazine*, May 1912, 9.
17. Box 7, folder 13, H. M. Lothrop Family Papers.
18. Senate Documents, Volume 10, Document 856.
19. Daniel Thomas Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
20. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls*, especially chapters 6, 7.
21. Senate Documents, Volume 10, Document 517.
22. Anita Fiske, "Americanism," *CAR Magazine*, September 1920, 41–42.
23. *CAR Magazine*, August 1914, 2.
24. *CAR Magazine*, August 1913, 7.
25. Elizabeth McKee Williams, "Childhood, Memory, and the American Revolution," in *Children and War: A Historical Anthology*, ed. James Marten (New York: New York University Press, 2002).
26. See Box 5, folder 3 and Box 7, folder 2, H. M. Lothrop Family Papers.
27. *CAR Magazine*, February 1912, 4–5.
28. See *CAR Magazine*, particularly August 1912, May 1913, and November 1914.
29. Maines, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis," 117.
30. Rodney G. S. Carter, "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence," *Archivaria* 61:215–33; and Kristine Alexander, "Can the Girl Guide Speak? The Perils and Pleasures of Looking for Children's Voices in Archival Research," *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 4.1 (2012): 132–45.
31. The Congressional Record is compiled by the superintendent of documents and published by the GPO, the Government Printing Office, Washington, DC.
32. For the role of women in the Lost Cause see Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville:

- University Press of Florida, 2003); and Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).
33. Michael G. Kammen, *Digging Up the Dead: A History of Notable American Reburials* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
  34. *Harrisburg Patriot News*, April 23, 1904, 12.
  35. Senate Document, Volume 8, Document 400. The John Paul Jones Society continued to be interested in their namesake, see *CAR Magazine*, February 1914, 10.
  36. Senate Documents, Volume 8, Document 400.
  37. "Impressive Services Over John Paul Jones' Remains," *Wilkes-Barre Times*, July 6, 1905, 11.
  38. "Commemorative Services Over Body of Adm. John Paul Jones; President's Stirring Speech," *Wilkes-Barre Times*, April 24, 1906, 2.
  39. Robert E. Cray, Jr., "Commemorating the Prison Ship Dead: Revolutionary Memory and the Politics of Sepulture in the Early Republic, 1776–1808," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, vol. 56, no. 3 (July 1999).
  40. *New York Herald*, June 19, 1873, 4.
  41. Senate Documents, Volume 7, Document 277, 346.
  42. Senate Documents, Volume 10, Document 517, 150.
  43. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660–1783* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1890).
  44. Street and Smith publishers, for example, released *The Starry Flag Weekly* and *True Blue* for juvenile readers. "In these stirring times of war every American boy should wear a patriotic symbol to show where his sympathies lay. Any boy who sends three coupons, one from each of any three of our weeklies, will be sent a Dewey medal," promised a back-page ad from *The Starry Flag Weekly*.
  45. Charles Ellms, *The Pirates Own Book: Authentic Narratives of the Most Celebrated Sea Robbers* (Portland, ME: Sanborn and Carter, 1837).
  46. Buckner F. Melton, Jr., *A Hanging Offense: The Strange Affair of the Warship Somers* (New York: Free Press, 2003).
  47. In the winter and spring of 1843 there was extensive press coverage of Mackenzie's trial. He was acquitted in Spencer's death.
  48. Senate Documents, Volume 10, Document 517.
  49. Melton, *A Hanging Offense*, 290.
  50. *CAR National Magazine*, December 1974, xv.