MISCHA HONECK AND GABRIEL ROSENBERG

Transnational Generations: Organizing Youth in the Cold War

The Cold War had just turned hot on the Korean Peninsula in late June 1950 when Deon Smith, a young Boy Scout from Mt. Vernon, Illinois, pitched his tent in Valley Forge. Fears of a global cataclysm loomed over the Revolutionary War battlefield, where nearly 50,000 Boy Scouts from the United States and twenty allied nations had gathered to celebrate Independence Day. Their jamboree marked the biggest encampment of youth on American soil to date, big enough to garner an address by President Harry Truman. "I hope that you young men . . . will take home from this jamboree a clearer understanding of the meaning of human brotherhood," said Truman. "I hope that you will work for freedom and peace with the same burning faith that inspired the men of George Washington's Army here at Valley Forge."[1] Given the geopolitical context, the subtext was clear: "freedom and peace" required the "burning faith" of fighting men. Irony, as well as faith, burned in Truman's comments. Beyond the rhetoric of global brotherhood, Truman's internationalist overtures obscured particular national geopolitical interests on the peninsula and cast communism as an inhuman menace. Meanwhile, even as the grand statesman rallied the crowd, Deon Smith was busy forging international ties of his own—ties that did not grow out of security concerns but were driven by juvenile excitement and curiosity. He took part in various "Scoutcraft events" and "inter-camp visits," traded souvenirs with his distant peers, and formed friendships with Scouts from near and far. "Some of the most interesting groups we have met," Smith wrote, "are the Scouts from foreign lands," including boys from the former enemy nations of Germany and Japan. In this, Smith *explored* internationalism rather than merely assuming it. Who, then, assembled universal brotherhood more decisively at this jamboree: the president, whose speech recoded the chaos, flux, and pleasures of a sprawling encampment in the overdetermined, ironically nationalist registers of liberal internationalism, or the boy, whose handshakes gave literal flesh to Truman's rhetoric?[2]

1. "Scouts Hear Truman Assail Communists' 'Religion of Hate,'" *Washington Post*, July 1, 1950. "Truman Tells Boy Scouts Need for 'Burning Faith,'" *Christian Science Monitor*, July 1, 1950.

2. "Mt. Vernon Scouts Having Great Time at National Jamboree," *The Register News, Mt. Vernon, Illinois*, July 6, 1950. On liberal internationalism as a variety of American nationalism, see John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism, and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, 2000).

Diplomatic History, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2014). doi:10.1093/dh/dhu011

If the history of U.S. foreign relations was once dominated by the dusty doings of only the Trumans and Washingtons of history, it has, of late, become a more inclusive and populist affair. In the past decade alone, historians have sought to re-narrate America's relationships with the world by examining a variety of previously marginal subjects. Influenced by a broader transnational turn in the humanities, these works examine the diffusion of people, objects, and ideologies through and across national boundaries. On topics ranging from tourism, migration, literature, sport, music, and family life to environmentalism, food, diseases, and mass social movements, groundbreaking works have emphasized informal cultural transmissions, nonhuman agency, transnational contexts of ideological formation, and nonstate or quasi-state actors.[3] This historiographical trend has been an unfolding conversation about not only which nations mattered in the study of foreign relations but also who and what constituted nations and citizens in transnational contexts. Looking back, then, at both Valley Forge and recent scholarship, a question looms: is there also a place for Deon Smith at *our* jamboree?

This forum answers with an enthusiastic yes. It contends that, despite the relative invisibility of children and youth in the history of foreign relations, there are important lessons to be learned from tracing the footprints that young people left in the dynamic, interconnected, and volatile world of the Cold War—both as individuals and as members of adult-led organizations. The articles of the forum argue that the work of organizing youth was also the work of organizing national, transnational, and international politics. This selection is not intended to be an exhaustive account of the possibilities of such an argument, or how it offers insights into how the politics of youth operated uniformly in all geographic and cultural contexts. Instead, we highlight a selection of articles focused primarily, but not exclusively, on the politics of youth in the postwar North Atlantic world. Individual articles explore American girls at an international Girl Scouts retreat, foreign child sponsorship organizations in the United States, a transnational movement to constitute a "European" youth identity, Soviet–African student exchange programs, and Canadian youth "walkathons" aimed at fighting poverty in the developing world. Combining untapped textual and visual sources, the articles track a generational approach to the negotiation of national and ideological boundaries and emphasize how faith in generational difference underwrote narratives of national and international progress during the Cold War.

3. Works that have taken the study of Cold War international history in these new directions are Julie Reeves, *Culture and International Relations: Narratives, Natives, and Tourists* (New York, 2004); Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, 2003); Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middle-Brow Imagination* (Berkeley, 2003); Uta A. Balbier, *Kalter Krieg auf der Aschenbahn: Der deutsch-deutsche Sport, 1950-1972*, (Paderborn, 2005); Penny M. von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); Donnah Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946-1965* (New York, 2007); J. R. McNeill and Corinna R. Unger, eds., *Environmental Histories of the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA, 2010); Nick Cullather, *Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, MA, 2010); and Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

A vibrant, new field of historical inquiry, the history of youth and childhood repudiates the notion that adulthood is the precondition for meaningful social and political engagement. In U.S. history, Joseph Kett, David Nasaw, Paula Fass, Kriste Lindenmeyer, Steven Mintz, and many others have persuasively argued that children and adolescents have been active participants in the development of American culture, society, and the nation-state.[4] This literature has both revealed the ways in which young people actively shaped historical events as students, laborers, activists, and consumers, and it has demonstrated that the concept of youth itself has carried widely divergent meanings and definitions in different historical and cultural contexts. Similarly, even as scholars show how representations of youth in art, literature, photography, film, and other cultural media have triggered social change, they have also documented the evolution of childhood and youth as modern cultural constructs—indeed, contending that they are constitutive concepts to contemporary understandings of development, progress, and modernity. Among historians of childhood and youth, this historical dialectic between *youth as actors* and *youth as representations* has spurred productive conversations about the historical processes by which modern subjects are constituted and how historians should account for agency within those processes.

If historians are beginning to recognize young people and weave them into their analyses of past events, this forum locates their place in the history of foreign policy, international relations, and formal and informal diplomacy. Throughout the twentieth century, and to an even greater extent after 1945, young people crossed borders to interact with their distant peers in shorter intervals, partly thanks to innovations in communication and transportation. The belief that youth represented a uniquely idealistic life stage elicited approval for these transnational exchanges in various societies. Young people were found to be politically and culturally impressionable, but were also perceived as unburdened by the past and less likely to succumb to the antipathies of their elders. Demographic shifts, affluence, education, and cultural practices of travel generated new transnational communities of youth that made their presence felt in consumer culture and international relations alike.[5] Transcending the foreign–domestic binary, these intertwined developments created an infrastructure for the politicization of youth stretching from Cold War conceptualizations of children as both imperiled and spoiled to diplomacy programs for high school students and universities as sites of social upheaval.

4. Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the present* (New York, 1977); David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and at Play* (New York, 1985); Paula S. Fass, *Children of a New World: Society, Culture, and Globalization* (New York, 2007); Kriste Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation Grows Up: American Childhood in the* 1930s (Chicago, 2005), and Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

5. On youth transnationalism and travel during the 1960s, see Richard Ivan Jobs, "Youth Movements: Travel, Protest, and Europe in 1968," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 2 (April 2009): 376–404.

The stage for these global youth encounters, to be sure, was often constructed by adult-led organizations and depended upon state support. Adult organizers of different backgrounds saw in youth potent vessels of political reform. Civic and state-run youth associations such as the Boy or Girl Scouts, 4-H, the Communist Pioneers, and the Junior Red Cross trained young people according to their respective doctrines of citizenship, while creating new opportunities for the rising generation in terms of social bonding and public participation.[6] Their diplomatic activities not only overlapped with those of national foreign policy elites. Major international institutions such as the League of Nations and the United Nations also forged ties with prominent youth organizations that proved mutually beneficial. Political education, leisure, labor, national regeneration, and international politics converged in these border-crossing youth movements, with profound ramifications for how young people from different societies viewed themselves, each other, and the world they would both help make and inherit.

Mindful of the revolutionary potential of youth, policy makers on both sides of the Iron Curtain as well as in the developing countries sought to channel adolescent vitality and curiosity to useful political ends. Soviet aspirations to overcome bourgeois culture and create a "new man" rested primarily on the ability to rally young people behind these ideals. The World Youth Festivals of the fifties and sixties that saw Young Pioneers and Komsomol delegates from across the Eastern bloc and Third World nations dancing and singing in unison presented ideological indoctrination and cultural diplomacy as worthwhile entertainment. Fun and leisure as framing devices for transnational youth fraternization were familiar tools for Western educators, too. Governments in North America and Western Europe sponsored liberal youth movements, such as the YMCA or the Scout organizations, to breed patriotic citizens immune to communist propaganda and capable of acting as ambassadors of the "free world." Leaders on both sides of the Iron Curtain believed that the challenges they faced required new transnational modes of affect and belonging that hinged on youth's idealism, flexibility, and ability to transcend provincial nationalisms in favor of global, international, and ideologically grounded citizenship. This faith in the political productivity of youth constituted new differences between young and old and mapped those differences onto charged distinctions between capitalism and communism, developed and developing, East and West, North and South.

Cold War statesmen readily basked in the ambiance of youthfulness and the positive imagery it evoked. Posing as youthful leaders helped them refashion themselves and their imagined national and international communities as dynamic,

6. See, for example, David I. McLeod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison, WI, 1983); Paul C. Mishler, *Raising Reds: Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York, 1999); Gabriel N. Rosenberg, "Breeding the Future: The American 4-H Movement and the Roots of the Modern Rural World, 1914-1948" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2011).

innocent, and forward-looking, and, by contrast, brand their adversaries as old, corrupt, and cynical. Many of these images rested on a shared understanding that youth symbolized the future, yet this future was constantly threatened by the possibility of nuclear annihilation. The "Atomic Generation" growing up in the shadows of Hiroshima and the Cuban Missile Crisis drew its commitment to national reconstruction and transnational exchange from a particular feeling of vulnerability. They were by no means the first to reflect on their place in history, but the dangers specific to that period prompted much of the urgency for the development of political themes "accessible *to* youth, directed *toward* youth, and expressed *by* youth" after 1945.[7]

Writing a history of youth in international relations, therefore, means that we must not rely solely on the projections of adult policy makers. By watching actual youth as they traverse transnational webs of exchange, this forum addresses methodological questions pressing for both scholars of the history of international relations and the history of childhood and youth. How should scholars treat a conceptual category as flexible and contested as "youth" within a terrain as rugged and rocky as postwar cross-cultural and transnational political activity? The forum takes an inclusive approach to who can be considered in the category of youth. Articles discuss youths ranging in age from infancy into their twenties. We take this approach, in part, not only to showcase the diversity of scholars working on the topic, but also to underscore how youth is a concept that is both historically and culturally contingent.

The articles depict how particular configurations of youth and youthful characteristics—energy, flexibility, and purity, to name a few—interface with diverse geopolitical contexts. As Christina Norwig's article contends, such an approach also permits us to examine how youthful subjects are organized, and organize themselves, into "generations" that, in turn, create new, politically productive forms of social difference based on age. Among Norwig's European integration activists, a new "European" generation promised to erase violent nationalisms and to create a unified youthful front against communism. Around the world, similar age-based collective identities cohered in a field marked by transnational political exchange, interaction, and intervention. For adult organizers gazing outward from center to periphery, emergent generations appeared to be a pliable medium for development whose interactions with transnational forces would differentiate them from preceding generations. As Sara Fieldston's article on American foreign child sponsorship programs documents, this mode of political reorganization propelled developmental narratives that conditioned relations between Northern and Southern nations. For U.S.-based administrators, funders, and foster parents, generational differences could be operationalized in arenas as varied as economic development, geopolitical strategy, and ideological combat.

7. Michael Scheibach, *Atomic Narratives and American Youth: Coming of Age with the Atom* (Jefferson, NC, 2003), 16–17.

In this sense, the forum locates youth and generational thinking at the center of postwar discussions of political and social change and difference.

The forum charts both the potentials and shortcomings of this generational thought. It leaves little doubt that young people played vital roles in the assembly of globe-spanning political networks with direct and indirect relationships to state actors. The articles track the ways that youth helped to organize and maintain various putatively "post-nationalist" conceptions of citizenship on behalf of those actors, conceptions sometimes rooted in geographic imaginaries like "the West," "Europe," and "the Globe," or, at other times, conceptions founded on ideological abstractions like "democracy," "capitalism," and "communism." In all of these cases, young people were in the vanguard. Youth labored on behalf of imagined futures latent in those conceptions of citizenship, making their time, energy, and bodies available to a variety of transnational political networks. As all of the articles demonstrate, foregrounding this sort of activity challenges historians to rethink what it might mean to recognize and record the agency of youthful subjects. Rather than demanding that youth conform to the traditional model of knowing, self-possessed, and intentional political subjects, these articles find young people shaping politics in unexpected ways. As a result, they relocate politics in unexpected places. The walkathon participants in Tamara Myers' article, for example, operated as embodied advertisements for global awareness, even as their bodies selectively constructed differences between North and South, developed and developing. By utilizing visual sources and emphasizing the visceral dimensions of the walkathons, Myers' article illustrates the affective and embodied political labor of youth participants. Tracking this kind of political activity requires recognition of how complex political processes work *through* children and not merely on them—how the affective, symbolic, and embodied potential of youth becomes a valuable resource for transnational political imagining and design.

Such a narrative might risk naiveté if the articles did not also identify a series of incisive dialectical relationships between youth actors and adult organizers. As with the rambunctious Girl Scouts at *Nuestra Cabaña* in Marcia Chatelain's article, networks that seek to make political use of youth must also reckon with how youth usually do not function as seamless extensions of adult will and design. Rather, the process of working with youth is inevitably also a process of translation, and, in the transnational context, it must often be work to translate across a triple breach of nation, culture, *and* generation. Such intergenerational and intercultural translation often led to unintended consequences. In Chatelain's article, for example, efforts to render Girl Scouts well-behaved, appropriate ambassadors for world peace at a Mexican retreat may also have produced critiques of social and racial inequality in the United States. Similarly, Sean Guillory's examination of Soviet–African student exchange programs reveals dramatic distances between the ambitions of Soviet administrators and the actual result "on the ground." Administrators hoped the exchanges would manufacture elites loyal to the Soviet cause throughout Africa. The programs instead tended to produce a sense of cultural superiority among participants that exacerbated rather than

relieved divides between the Soviet Union and potential African allies. Across the five articles, youth subjects are less empty vessels for the ambitions of adult organizers than they are complex players with their own agendas, interests, and desires.

The forum points toward an exciting frontier of research for scholars of the history of international relations. Much work remains to be done, and we hope that historians will carry the discussion over into other areas of global importance, such as Latin America, China, and the Islamic world. In sum, this forum points out the necessity of treating youth as important actors in the history of postwar international relations, and it describes previously undiscovered channels of transnational political, economic, and cultural transformation. But it also highlights the centrality of discourse about youth in conditioning interactions within and between nations. In this way, the forum demonstrates how the cultural figure of the child and the bodies of actual children were in constant conversation—a conversation that spanned national borders, oceans, and generations alike. In localizing such a sweeping conversation in these five articles, we endeavor to stimulate something of an international jamboree of our own. Our intention in so doing is less that of Truman's—to paper over differences under an internationalist banner—and more that of Deon Smith's: to sniff out some commonalities, to explore some vital differences, and to exchange intellectual souvenirs.