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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-58240

Title: "Reconstructing Childhood: Youth, Citizenship, and the American Civil War."

Recommendation:

Accept after minor revision.....

Rating	Excel .	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	✓			
Techn. Quality		✓		
Clarity		✓		
Significance		✓		

Reviewer Name: Faheem Abdul Muneeb

Reviewer Report

Overall Assessment

The manuscript entitled "Reconstructing Childhood: Youth, Citizenship, and the American Civil War" presents an ambitious historical analysis of the transformation of childhood during and after the American Civil War. The central argument—that the Civil War marked a decisive moment in which childhood evolved from a largely passive social category into an active political institution through systematic propaganda, educational restructuring, and youth mobilization—is both original and intellectually engaging. The paper further extends this historical argument by tracing the long-term influence of wartime child mobilization on Progressive Era reforms and contemporary political debates concerning education, child protection, and citizenship. This broad chronological perspective distinguishes the manuscript from many existing studies that examine Civil War childhood solely within the immediate wartime context.

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The manuscript demonstrates extensive engagement with a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including government documents, contemporary newspapers, educational materials, children's magazines, songs, legal statutes, photographs, memoirs, and historical scholarship. The comparative discussion between the Union and the Confederacy is particularly effective in illustrating how both governments mobilized children through different ideological strategies. The paper successfully shows that although the North and South employed different forms of educational and cultural propaganda, both ultimately incorporated children into the broader political and military objectives of the war. This comparative approach gives the article analytical balance and prevents it from becoming a purely descriptive historical narrative.

Another commendable aspect of the manuscript is its interdisciplinary character. Rather than limiting itself to military history, the paper integrates perspectives from political history, educational history, childhood studies, legal history, and political theory. The discussion linking wartime mobilization to later Progressive Era reforms concerning compulsory education, child labour legislation, juvenile justice, and child welfare demonstrates an appreciation of historical continuity and institutional development. The manuscript therefore contributes not only to Civil War historiography but also to broader discussions regarding the historical construction of childhood as a political and legal institution.

The article is generally well organized, progressing logically from wartime propaganda and youth mobilization to post-war reforms before concluding with contemporary political implications. Each major section builds upon the previous discussion, allowing readers to follow the development of the central thesis. The inclusion of historical images and appendices further supports the narrative and enriches the historical presentation.

Despite these considerable strengths, the manuscript would benefit from several revisions before publication. The principal argument is highly ambitious and sometimes extends beyond what the historical evidence fully demonstrates. Certain interpretative claims require more cautious qualification, while the transition from nineteenth-century history to contemporary American political debates could be better justified theoretically and historically. Furthermore, some sections rely heavily on descriptive historical evidence without always developing the broader analytical implications. These issues, however, concern refinement rather than fundamental weaknesses. The manuscript already presents an original and valuable contribution and, following minor revisions, would be suitable for publication.

Strengths of the Paper

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One of the most significant strengths of the manuscript is its originality. Rather than simply documenting children's participation during the Civil War, the paper advances a broader historical interpretation by arguing that the war fundamentally reconstructed childhood into a political institution. This central thesis provides the manuscript with a clear intellectual contribution and distinguishes it from existing literature focusing primarily on child soldiers, wartime education, or propaganda independently. By integrating these themes within a single conceptual framework, the study offers readers a fresh perspective on the relationship between childhood and state formation.

The comparative analysis between Northern and Southern approaches to childhood represents another major strength. The discussion effectively illustrates how Confederate educational policies emphasized regional identity, military sacrifice, and sectional loyalty through textbooks, patriotic songs, military academies, and school culture, whereas the Union placed greater emphasis on national unity, moral education, civic duty, and broader participation in support roles. Although both societies mobilized children for wartime purposes, the manuscript convincingly demonstrates that they employed distinct ideological mechanisms to achieve similar political objectives. This comparative framework significantly strengthens the historical argument.

The manuscript also demonstrates impressive engagement with primary historical materials. The extensive use of wartime songs, propaganda posters, educational textbooks, legislative documents, contemporary photographs, and historical pamphlets enriches the analysis and provides substantial evidentiary support for many of the author's arguments. The integration of visual appendices alongside documentary evidence enhances the historical authenticity of the discussion and reflects careful archival research.

Another notable strength is the effort to connect Civil War experiences with later developments during Reconstruction and the Progressive Era. The discussion of compulsory education, child labour reforms, juvenile justice, mothers' pensions, settlement houses, and emerging conceptions of childhood illustrates that the author is concerned not only with wartime events but also with their institutional legacy. This broader historical perspective enhances the significance of the study and encourages readers to consider the long-term consequences of wartime social transformations.

Finally, the manuscript is written in an engaging style that maintains readers' interest throughout. The historical narrative is lively without sacrificing scholarly seriousness, and the chronological organization allows the argument to develop progressively. Overall, the paper succeeds in presenting a compelling historical interpretation supported by extensive documentary evidence.

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Areas to be Improved

While the manuscript advances an interesting and original thesis, the central argument would benefit from more careful qualification. The paper repeatedly argues that the American Civil War represented the **first** historical instance in which children became active political institutions through systematic wartime mobilization. This is a significant historical claim that requires stronger comparative justification.

Numerous earlier historical examples—including the French Revolution, Napoleonic Europe, and earlier nationalist movements—also involved political mobilization of youth. Rather than presenting the Civil War as the unequivocal first instance, the author may consider qualifying the argument by explaining that it represented the first large-scale institutionalized mobilisation of childhood within the specific context of modern American state development. Such refinement would strengthen the historical accuracy of the manuscript without diminishing its originality.

The manuscript would also benefit from a more explicit conceptual discussion of what is meant by **childhood as a political institution**. Although this phrase appears throughout the paper and forms the basis of the central argument, it is never fully defined theoretically. Readers would benefit from a dedicated conceptual section explaining how the author distinguishes childhood as a biological life stage from childhood as a socially and politically constructed institution. Drawing briefly upon scholarship in childhood studies, political sociology, or historical institutionalism would strengthen the conceptual foundation of the paper and clarify the novelty of the argument.

The comparative analysis between the North and the South is one of the manuscript's strengths, but at times the discussion tends to simplify the differences between the two societies. The manuscript generally portrays Southern mobilisation as systematic indoctrination while describing Northern mobilisation as comparatively moral and voluntary. Although the author acknowledges similarities, a more nuanced discussion recognising that both governments employed forms of patriotic persuasion and political messaging would provide a more balanced interpretation. Such refinement would avoid creating an overly rigid dichotomy and better reflect the complexity of Civil War society.

The section linking the Civil War to Progressive Era child reforms is intellectually stimulating but occasionally moves too quickly from historical correlation to causal interpretation. While the paper argues that wartime experiences directly contributed to compulsory education laws, child labour legislation, juvenile courts, and broader child welfare reforms, these developments were also influenced by industrialisation, urbanisation, immigration, labour reform movements, and changing social philosophies during the late nineteenth century. Acknowledging these additional historical factors would

International Journal of Advanced Research

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REVIEWER'S REPORT

strengthen the argument by presenting the Civil War as one important catalyst rather than the sole driving force behind Progressive Era reforms.

Similarly, the final section connecting Civil War childhood to contemporary American political debates concerning the Florida Parental Rights in Education Act and gun legislation is innovative but requires stronger analytical justification. The transition from nineteenth-century historical analysis to present-day political controversies is relatively abrupt. While the comparison is thought-provoking, the manuscript should explain more explicitly why these contemporary debates represent historical continuities rather than merely thematic similarities. Additional discussion clarifying the methodological basis for extending the historical framework into current political discourse would improve the coherence of the conclusion and make the broader argument more convincing.

The manuscript also contains several sections where descriptive historical evidence outweighs analytical interpretation. Considerable space is devoted to summarising songs, textbooks, legislation, biographies, and historical events, yet the discussion occasionally stops short of explaining how these individual examples collectively reinforce the broader conceptual argument. Strengthening the interpretative commentary following major historical examples would further enhance the scholarly contribution of the paper.

Although the bibliography is extensive and incorporates numerous primary sources, engagement with recent historiography on childhood studies, political socialisation, citizenship, memory, and Civil War cultural history could be expanded. Incorporating additional contemporary scholarship would situate the manuscript more clearly within ongoing academic debates and further demonstrate the originality of its contribution.

Finally, the manuscript would benefit from careful editorial revision. Minor grammatical inconsistencies, punctuation errors, occasional awkward sentence constructions, and repetitive phrasing appear throughout the text. Some section summaries restate arguments already developed in the preceding discussion and could be shortened to improve readability. A thorough language edit would strengthen the overall presentation of an otherwise well-researched manuscript.

Recommendation

This manuscript presents an original and engaging historical interpretation of the transformation of childhood during the American Civil War and its enduring influence on American political and legal thought. The comparative analysis of Northern and Southern approaches to youth mobilisation, the

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REVIEWER'S REPORT

extensive use of primary historical sources, and the effort to connect wartime experiences with Progressive Era reforms represent valuable scholarly contributions. While certain conceptual arguments require further clarification, some historical claims should be expressed more cautiously, and the connections between nineteenth-century developments and contemporary political debates could be strengthened, these revisions are relatively modest and do not undermine the overall quality of the research. With minor revisions addressing conceptual clarity, analytical balance, historiographical engagement, and editorial refinement, the manuscript would make a meaningful contribution to scholarship on American history, childhood studies, political history, and educational history. Therefore, I recommend that the manuscript be **accepted with minor revisions**.