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# **States of Childhood**

**From the Junior Republic to the American Republic,  
1895-1945**

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## Introduction: Child Protection or Child Labor?

Travelers should be sure to visit the curious community in Freeville, New York, where boys and girls were in charge, wrote Baedeker's turn-of-the-twentieth-century guide to the United States. This "miniature republic modelled on the government of the United States" was well worth a detour to observe the "legislature, court-house, jail, school, church and public library" staffed by citizens aged fourteen to twenty-one, most of them immigrants or impoverished youth. Of course, these young Americans were not actual members of the civil service—the republic's legal status was "similar to that of a state reformatory"—but their adultlike activities were exceedingly realistic nonetheless. They "elect their rulers, make and enforce laws, and carry on business just as adults do in the greater world," author James Muirhead marveled. "This interesting experiment seems to work well, and a visit to Freeville rivals in sociological interest that to Ellis Island."<sup>1</sup>

The brainchild of philanthropist William R. George, Freeville's juvenile society was the period's most famous junior republic, but it was hardly alone. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a motley crew of reformers helped scores of American youth to construct thousands of cities, states, and nations around the country "on a similar plan" as later editions of Baedeker's explained. In these child societies, boys and girls of all races and ethnicities and from across the economic spectrum were the officials and citizens. They made laws, sat for civil service exams, and paid taxes. They constructed buildings and swimming pools, ran hotels and restaurants, and printed newspapers and currency. They opened juvenile libraries and museums, tended vegetable gardens and zoos, organized cooperative stores and charities, staffed banks and post offices, performed in theaters and on radio broadcasts, and administered hospitals and schools of law. During an era of vigorous campaigns against young people's presence in the nation's labor force and on its streets, junior republics supplied opportunities for youth to play adultlike roles in age-restricted worlds. Some, like George's later "junior municipalities," expanded their activities beyond campuses and clubhouses into the surrounding communities, incorporating public spaces into these civic dramatizations.<sup>2</sup>

Each of these environments was a "village like any other" as George frequently observed of Freeville. He insisted that the junior republic's simultaneous resemblance

to and separation from the “big republic”—in his words, “no one can tell where the big Republic leaves off and the Junior Republic begins”—enabled young people to learn valuable life skills and called for building still more such similar juvenile societies across the nation. News media and travel guides shared his enthusiasm and his interpretive framework. They reported regularly on elections and publicized the latest accomplishments of the inhabitants, some as young as five, whose daily lives were “passed in experiences and obligations of mature citizens,” while reassuring visitors and readers that the adultlike experiences that improved kids’ character “without taking away their independence” were merely “miniature” and “model” versions of their elders’ activities: work-like educational and recreational experiences rather than work itself. Later, they reported stories of lives transformed upon graduation into adult society, thanks to the training these youth-only settings supplied, particularly for immigrant, working class, and minority youth. From Chicago judge Sidney Marovitz (Boys Brotherhood Republic) to Milwaukee mayor Carl Zeidler (Newsboy Republic), from US surgeon general Julius Richmond (Allendale) to University of Michigan labor economist William Haber (Newsboy Republic), from Philadelphia superintendent of schools Constance Clayton (Youth City) to Motown songwriter Alfred Cleveland (Hill City), from Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists William Dapping (George Junior Republic) and Theodore White (George Junior Republic) to actors Steve McQueen (California Boys Republic) and Jerry Stiller (Boys Brotherhood Republic), distinguished and lesser-known alumni credited their republic experiences with offering them practice in the personal and professional skills critical to their successes in later life.<sup>3</sup>

The massive movement that mobilized about these curious communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century United States drew in psychologists and educators, ministers and police, juvenile judges and businesspeople, playground advocates and the American Legion, efficiency experts and good government activists, the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the National Youth Administration. Jacob Riis, Jane Addams, G. Stanley Hall, Ben Lindsey, Cyrus McCormick, Andrew Carnegie, Eliot Ness, and J. Edgar Hoover offered vocal backing. International curiosity brought numerous visitors to the republics and inspired adaptations abroad.<sup>4</sup>

Impressive for the scope of support it generated, the junior republic movement was on the leading edge of an even broader trend. In an era when public opinion increasingly favored segregating young people from the world of adults, the Freeville republic and its many descendants allowed young people to simultaneously inhabit both a rural village and a miniature United States, to simultaneously be kids from the tenements of New York City on summer vacation and US senators debating matters of national importance—in short, to live what American Institute of Child Life director William Forbush called a “double life.” Similar opportunities lay at the center of the era’s broader efforts to fashion a new identity for the nation’s youth. Educators and youth workers like Forbush soon discovered that as young people playing adult roles



**Figure 0.1**

George Junior Republic at Freeville.

Source: William R. George, *Nothing Without Labor* (Freeville, NY: George Junior Republic, 1902).

seemed to enjoy adjusting themselves to the era's new social expectations, these virtual adults were also helping to build and operate the institutions that sheltered them as they learned and played. In schools and settlements, YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs, churches and summer camps, orphanages and reformatories, the many institutions devoted to serving young people embraced the component activities of these child societies. Vocational education and home economics enabled kids to construct their housing and prepare their meals. Youth congresses and junior sanitation squads helped them to maintain order in their institutions and neighborhoods. The result was that the dual experience of protected childhood and of virtual adulthood that characterized participants' lives inside junior republics became a defining feature of modern youth.<sup>5</sup>

The lack of a sustained and unified national junior republic movement—William R. George's ultimate ambition—marked not George's failure but rather the popularity and broad diffusion of his republic's core principles. The Freeville republic indeed became

a village like any other well beyond George's original intent, not merely a microcosm of adult society but a microcosm of the American youth experience itself. Whether playing alone or under adult supervision, whether inside age-restricted environments or moving through their communities, the generation that came of age in this period found this juxtaposition at the center of how the nation understood its youth as a biological and social category distinct from adults. In short, the "sheltered childhood" that historians agree became a reality by World War II depended in large part on the proliferation, over several decades, of these role-plays of adulthood and the broader embrace of the idea of a double life for modern youth. How the history of the junior republic movement makes visible the overarching importance of these everyday performances in the emergence of the sheltered childhood as a disciplinary category and a set of supporting institutions is the subject of this book. The decline of role-playing adulthood as a constitutive practice of the modern American youth experience and the lasting legacies of the republic movement will also be addressed.<sup>6</sup>

### The Double Lives of Modern Youth

Conceptions of youth in America have varied over time. Paintings from early in the nation's history depict young people as pint-size adults, an understanding embedded in laws about their eligibility to work, make contracts, marry, accept criminal responsibility, and testify in court. In the twenty-first century, by contrast, discussions of the "no-risk childhood" and "helicopter parenting," with scientific and legal support from neurochemical studies of teenage decision-making and criminal prosecutions of parents for allowing their children to play in public, point to how much assumptions about youth capacities have changed.<sup>7</sup>

An especially dramatic shift in prevailing assumptions about young people's place in American society occurred between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. The population of the increasingly industrial and urban nation began to question some long-held beliefs—for example, that work experience was preferable to school attendance, that kids should be responsible for crimes committed, and that leisure activities such as smoking, moviegoing, driving, and wandering the streets at night should be permissible at any age. Scholars agree that over this extended period associated with the arrival of modernity many young people were excluded from the arenas and activities that came to be thought of as adult society. Pushed out of the labor force and public life and into extended education and recreation, their youth-directed activities were replaced by adult-supervised alternatives that sought to build character and teach values for future citizenship, previously supplied by work and other modes of public engagement. The youth who remained in adult society faced diminishing autonomy, such as requiring adult escorts in public at night or parental consent to enter legal contracts.<sup>8</sup>

Economic history features prominently in accounts of the broad transformation in social expectations about youth. The turn of the twentieth century was a time of significant transition as a wage economy located in factories and firms replaced the prior family economy in which men, women, and children worked together at home. Social roles diverged as new cultural scripts directed men to go off to earn for their families, women to tend to domestic concerns, and kids to attend school and participate in organized play. The separation and gendering of home and work, the creation of a family wage for men, the introduction of laborsaving machines at work and at home, and the proliferation of mass-produced goods and entertainments—including specialized markets for children—are all part of this story of the construction and maintenance of a new identity category that has been called the “sheltered” or protected childhood. So too are the host of individuals and institutions that helped young people adjust to the new order so as to avoid the perils of “precocity”—that is, premature access to adult experience. These included developmental psychologists and university child study programs; educators and public schools; justices, probation officers, and the juvenile court system; youth workers and playgrounds; boys clubs and Scout troops. Contrasting this era’s programs with an earlier generation that exploited kids, scholars describe how individual philanthropists, religious charities, and female volunteers sustained them until, in many cases, the state assumed responsibility for the child welfare programs and services that private institutions pioneered.<sup>9</sup>

Existing histories recognize that this modern youth experience came unevenly to different populations based on class, race, region, religion, and nationality, and they qualify claims of young people’s total separation by pointing to exceptions such as continued involvement in farm labor and the preparatory nature of activities that youth workers and youth-serving institutions supplied. Yet they say little about the mechanisms that persuaded young people to accept these new social norms before the widespread enforcement of child labor and compulsory schooling laws. Such accounts raise critical concerns about schools and youth-serving institutions—for example, how vocational education reinforced class divisions and gendered identities rather than providing occupational mobility or how juvenile courts restricted the legal rights of youth people in the name of child protection. Yet these histories typically accept the self-depictions of schools and youth-serving institutions as havens or islands from the labor force and public life in a modern world.<sup>10</sup>

This book documents how in junior republics and beyond role-plays of adulthood were well suited to making the transition to the new identity for youth that scholars already have described. Since, by definition, a dramatization of an experience is not the thing in itself, yet is like that thing in itself, by performing adult roles young people vicariously experienced this life stage while defining themselves in opposition to it. Of course, young people have long played at being adults, and most of the component

activities of George's Freeville republic predate the period under discussion. Critical connections to turn-of-the-century popular culture and scientific thought help to explain why these specific activities gained mass popularity and why the practice more generally held special significance for the generations who came of age between the late nineteenth century and World War II.<sup>11</sup>

In an era of public fascination with a range of model environments and vicarious experiences from wax museums to stereoscopes, a period when leading scientists believed imitation and impersonation were central processes in youth development, the virtual adulthoods at Freeville and elsewhere enabled young people to enjoy being disciplined to their reduced status while educators and youth workers congratulated themselves on designing child-saving programs on scientific grounds. Long before the theoretical and empirical investigations of Victor Turner, Erving Goffman, Michel Foucault, or Judith Butler, this body of theory and practice about young people's "dramatic instinct" articulated how, through performance, a new social category could take shape. The construction of youth was a result of what kids did as much as who they were, and it involved virtually experiencing adulthood on equal grounds with removal to age-restricted sheltered space. These role-playing programs were wildly popular—many sustained active alumni associations—and young people's voluntary participation in their ever-expanding uses proved key to the disciplining and behavior modification that resulted. The spread of republics and their component activities beyond marginal youth to the mainstream and later into American institutions serving adult populations (including factories, prisons, and internment camps) reworks our understanding of the uneven arrival of the sheltered childhood and highlights the widespread confidence in the uses of role-plays as behavior management tools. In turn, it points to a rich history of children and performance beyond the school pageants, children's educational theater, and working child actors that have been the focus of prior inquiries. These everyday performances make clear how age—like gender and race—may be performed, and that the impact of such performances on youth, on sponsoring institutions, and on state building, have gone unrecognized to date.<sup>12</sup>

As this rich array of activities made encounters with "adulthood" a routine feature of the American youth experience, the associations with vicarious experience that helped to popularize such behavior management techniques masked the value young people brought to schools, youth-serving institutions, and the state. The role-plays that tapped young people's predilections for performance inside campuses and clubhouses, and their "migratory instincts" throughout the community, were not merely developmentally productive—they were economically productive as well. Like the artisans-turned-factory-workers who found their craft knowledge reorganized out of their hands by a new managerial class, so too in this period young Americans found their preferred playtime activities becoming the lifeblood of adult-sponsored programs, with the further indignity that the most basic fact of their productive energies went largely unseen.

Young people role-played a range of adulthoods—caring for playgrounds, cleaning streets, conducting school health inspections, chasing truants, adjudicating cases of juvenile delinquency, policing neighborhoods, taking local censuses, collecting fingerprints, manufacturing military goods, and advertising government programs. In so doing, they built the institutions that were to shelter them from adult society: helping resource-poor schools and youth-serving institutions get off the ground, improving the communities they were ostensibly to be protected from, and expanding services supplied by the state. As educators, youth workers, and public officials took on the role of *parens patriae*, then, a novel variation on the family economy appeared. Activities publically characterized as merely representational had real impacts, and the parental institutions that scholars associate with young people's removal from the labor force and public life were in fact economically dependent on "sheltered" children's education and play.<sup>13</sup>

If they shared with factory workers the experience of being deskilled by the reorganization of knowledge, American youth shared with the era's women a common experience of being divorced from the economy in ways that were as much rhetorical as real. Historians have described women's experience of the disintegration of the family economy and its replacement with the wage economy and how an ideology of separate spheres redefined female domestic activities as "unproductive" despite alternative measures of the value they produced. This book proposes that, in constructing and operating the institutions that sheltered them, young people faced a similar fate and that age, like gender, played a critical role in the definition of work. For young people, the framework applied to diminishing their economic contributions was one that focused on the "double life" rather than the "separate sphere" of sheltered childhood, which tells us about only one of the lives that these populations led. In their attention to the developmental possibilities of playing adult roles in supervised settings, theorists of education and recreation—and the schools and youth-serving institutions that applied their ideas—divorced youth from the economy by articulating a distinction between the copy and the real thing. As educational philosopher and Chicago Laboratory School director John Dewey put it, "Cooking, sewing, manual training...in the school...represent, as types, fundamental forms of social activity...it is possible and desirable that the child's introduction into the more formal subjects of the curriculum be through the medium of these activities." Edward Devine, of the New York School of Philanthropy and the New York Charity Organization Society, concurred: "Work which we deny...in the factory, for profit, may be demanded in school...for education and training." Neither mentioned the fact that such child-centered "media," to use Dewey's term for these activities, helped their institutions' bottom lines.<sup>14</sup>

Identifying in the theory and practice of developmental psychology, education, and youth work a vibrant conversation about mediated experiences and child development suggests the recent revival of interest in the educational and socialization potentials of

role-playing that has accompanied new technologies—from video games and virtual worlds to augmented realities and live-action role-playing—is merely a variation on discussions held by earlier generations. These conversations gave attention to harnessing kids' leisure-time interests to gamify learning as a response to the failures of prior modes of instruction. Educators were confident that mediated experiences could teach the requisite skills for the era's new economy and offer tryouts of future careers. Their experiments with the performance of alternative selves with real and yet “not real” consequences, and their ambition to simultaneously build simulated worlds that resembled reality and to make reality into simulation, provide a rich body of evidence about past theory and practice in the science and technology of role-playing as a resource for guiding future talk and action in the field. In an era of increasing algorithmic regulation in politics and society, when user-generated content is a staple of the digital economy, the awareness of how earlier generations' models of political and social life obscured as much as they revealed and how an older discourse of virtuality and play diminished young people's economic contributions invites critical engagements with both the reality and the rhetoric of this generation's latest tools. Recovering this set of older understandings reveals how a multiplicity of concepts associated with twenty-first century computing and information technology—including virtuality, gamification, and labors of fun—have deep roots in American life as well as consequences that seem to have been overlooked. These materials invite new kinds of questions for present-day reflection, for example, about the real-world status of virtual activities, the models of citizenship that participatory simulations embed, the implications of the discourses that accompany new technologies, and the shifting border between the meanings of *reality* and *virtuality* as virtual activities become increasingly routine.<sup>15</sup>

Over the nearly half-century that is the focus of this story, the adult experiences that young people vicariously encountered changed. Activities inside schools and youth-serving institutions expanded into public settings, with ever-growing engagements with industrial machines—for example, in junior traffic patrols and school film and radio production. Yet the belief endured that educational and recreational variations on adult occupations and the environments associated with childhood stood outside the market. Adult-organized youth activities thus did ultimately spawn a “sheltered childhood”—just not in the ways scholars have previously presumed.

### **William R. “Daddy” George: Father of National Trends**

Junior republics, as total simulated societies for youth, illustrate the claims of this book in the clearest terms. Drawing on new sources and looking with fresh eyes at familiar subjects finds that the youth societies previously regarded as fringe phenomena were in fact part of a larger grouping of institutions and programs with expansive reach across the United States. Many offered training for staff and citizens, ensuring that republic

affiliates went on to careers in education and youth work and, in so doing, spread the movement's basic ideas.<sup>16</sup>

Each republic, a world in itself, could be the subject of an extended study. This book details the histories of those that illustrate the movement's evolution as well as broader efforts to engage young people in the constant performance of adult roles as a means to promote the double life they embraced. Its focus is the adults in the story, but, where possible, it excavates the views of youthful participants. At the center of this story is William R. "Daddy" George, a businessman and good government reformer whose junior republics and later junior municipalities aimed to set national standards.

Compared by contemporaries to figures such as Charles Darwin, Thomas Edison, Samuel Morse, Alexander Graham Bell, Jacob Riis, and Booker T. Washington, George is all but forgotten today. The six chapters of this book recount the story of how George, unable to control the runaway popularity of his ideas, found the institutions he had organized outnumbered by the school republics, Boy Cities, playground democracies, junior towns, garden cities, child commonwealths, Boys Towns, Junior States, and



**Figure 0.2**

William R. George.

*Source:* William R. George Family Papers, box 122, folder 10–27, envelope 16, "Activities and Group Pictures." Courtesy Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

youth cities that sprang up across the nation. Yet as these diverse juvenile democracies escaped George's oversight, they further fueled public confidence that environments providing young people with access to vicarious experiences of adulthood—whether in total youth societies or through their component activities—would benefit individual Americans and American society more generally in the short and longer term.<sup>17</sup>

Chapter 1 recounts how, during the summer of 1895 in rural Freeville, New York, George invented the first junior republic, an agrarian democracy populated by immigrant youth from New York City's slums. Anxious about the future of the increasingly multi-racial nation, he hoped this civic dramatization might integrate new Americans into the body politic by familiarizing them with the democratic values and practices he and other white, middle-class elites preferred. Like many inventors, past and present, George borrowed liberally from the work of his contemporaries already engaged in scattered efforts to teach city children to farm and administer youth governments and courts. His genius was to combine these activities into a whole that was more than the sum of its parts: a total environment that removed young people from participation in labor, politics, the military, and other public engagements and substituted an adult-supervised simulation instead. The camp was an immediate hit with participants, who surprised even George with their enthusiasm and their competency at playing adult roles.

This first chapter situates George's work within the context of the broad cultural fascination with simulated environments and vicarious experiences as well as extant practices at the period's youth-serving institutions. The travel guides that pointed visitors to Freeville were equally besotted with a variety of other educational amusements that dotted the nation—for example, Palestine Park, "a copy in miniature of the famous Holy Land," in Chautauqua, New York. A shared vocabulary of "miniature" and "model" linked junior republics and their components in the public mind to these opportunities for surrogate encounters with alternative times, places, and identities, engaging visitors' sense of simultaneous distance from and immersion in a second reality. The immersive experiences of panoramas, world's fairs, and wax museums sped up and slowed down time, enlarged and condensed space, and, subsequently became symbols of broader cultural transformation. These associations suggest why the George Junior Republic was an international tourist destination and why republic building blocks such as vocational education and youth congresses gained support for mass diffusion thanks to these new interpretations. Equally they suggest why, compared to other reform-oriented institutions, the George Junior Republic was so beloved by participating youth.<sup>18</sup>

Chapter 2 describes how the enthusiastic reception of the Freeville experiment prompted George to replicate his work in new settings and how other reformers—impatient to spread the junior republic idea—soon eclipsed his efforts with their own variations on his work. Engineer and fellow good government reformer Wilson Gill, who organized juvenile republics and cities inside urban public schools from 1897, established that the locations for such child democracies mattered less than their

internal structures. The discovery that environments offering realistic roles to play were more important than realistic environments for role-playing, and that republics could be organized inside existing institutions, hastened the spread of these youth democracies and the lessons they supplied.

The new field of developmental psychology, led by G. Stanley Hall, rooted these alternative environmental theories of behavior in an interpretation of youth biology that, like the human science tradition it drew on, resonated with the culture's fascination with the copy—most notably in its attention to young people's instincts for imitating past and present adult roles and by extension living double lives as they played. The era's popular recapitulation theory suggested that young people reenacted the history of the human race as they matured, and the broader concept of "playworlds" enabled them to simultaneously inhabit two different times and places. Observations of young people discovered that role-plays of adulthood dominated their activities at all stages of development, from young children's recreations of Eskimo villages and reenactments of the settlement of Plymouth Rock to older children's more general enthusiasm for dramatic "play-adulthood." These findings offered still more evidence about how young people naturally lived one life in the here-and-now and another life removed in time and space—and how adults could guide biological instincts for impersonating adults toward pedagogical ends in the junior republics, schools, and youth-serving institutions that "carried still further" these ideas.<sup>19</sup>

Synergies between Gill's plans to establish mirror societies inside schools and the work of educators including Hall's student John Dewey to fashion schools as miniature societies where young people's play instincts were guided to pedagogical ends point to the growing consensus around a curriculum that paired sheltered childhood and simulated adulthood in the era's campaigns for the "new education." Indeed, Dewey would later join the advisory board of Gill's organization. In his calls to vitalize education by bringing it into contact with "life," and his practical experiments with learning-by-doing through a "culture epoch" curriculum in which children progressed through earlier eras of civilization, Dewey's widely influential plans for an ideal school prioritized the reproduction of adult occupations past and present inside a society in miniature where students were "freed from economic stress." The writings and laboratory school that became models for many educators thus pressed to expand pupils' opportunities to live simultaneously as virtual adults and real kids. As scientists and educators increasingly agreed that vicarious experiences had important pedagogical possibilities—whether or not they took place inside environments that duplicated someplace else—the building blocks of the Freeville republic such as youth congresses and model kitchens became mass educational activities.<sup>20</sup>

Chapter 3 documents an explosive surge of copycat youth societies during the first decade of the twentieth century, thanks to support from prominent developmental psychologists and educators and the growing recognition that republics could be

integrated into the programming at existing public and private institutions. A renewed effort from George to reassert jurisdiction with a National Association of Junior Republics proved powerless to stop this trend. At schools, reformatories, orphanages, settlements, YMCAs, boys clubs, and playgrounds—institutions that already had embraced building blocks of the junior republic idea—juvenile democracies opened their doors to thousands of mostly needy kids, diversifying the range of role-plays available and setting the movement on a new, largely urban course.

Junior republics did not bypass America's small town, rural, and middle-class populations, however. Optimistic about such youth societies' preventive potentials, juvenile judge Willis Brown set out to organize a national network of Boy Cities for these populations and a competitor organization to George's and Gill's republic variations that would link year-round republics at schools and youth-serving institutions with a centralized summer camp. The introduction of two Boy Cities into the Gary, Indiana, public schools—a system lauded and imitated across the nation for its "social efficiency" as well as its "new education"—showcases how even individuals and institutions at odds on curricular questions (most notably Teachers College colleagues John Dewey and David Snedden) placed vicarious access to adult experience front and center in their educational plans. Equally, it underscores their shared belief that these activities' economic benefits—including making school lunches and furniture, organizing school records, repairing facilities, and reducing strain on the juvenile court system by diverting cases to student juries—constituted not child labor but a campaign against it instead. Sharing with advocates of dramatic education such as Minnie Herts Heiniger the view that "the fact acted out is the fact remembered," Brown and his colleagues were unable to grasp the full impact of these everyday performances. Gary's educators, leading the charge for school measurement, failed to measure the economic value of the goods and services they did not see.<sup>21</sup>

The invisible productivity of youth in Gary underscores how the interpretive framework linking junior republics and components to educational entertainments—which suggests reasons for mass popularity during this period—equally explains why activities at junior republics and other youth-serving institutions could be read as reducing rather than expanding the child labor pool. This influential set of beliefs about mediated experience concealed how many of the institutions scholars link to the construction of the sheltered childhood—most notably schools and playgrounds—were built in part by kids. Duplications of adult occupations that were realistic but not real, even the activities within the Gary schools' work-study-play system that were labeled "work," were exempt on account of their educational ambitions, an interpretation the US Children's Bureau spread in its praise for these educational methods.<sup>22</sup>

Chapter 4 describes how, in the 1910s, junior republic organizers, recognizing the impossibility of reaching all youth with programs confined to age-restricted campuses and clubhouses, designed new kinds of juvenile democracies to improve the

environments young people were to be protected from and reshape youth behavior in public spaces. William George played a leading role in these efforts as he once again aimed to recapture his influential position on the national stage, this time with a program of “junior municipalities” that expanded junior citizens’ activities into public settings. Other reformers were similarly inspired, organizing community-based role-plays such as newsboy republics, juvenile health inspectors, and Boy Scouts. The schools and settlements, orphanages and churches, camps and YMCAs, playgrounds and boys clubs that had welcomed junior republics and the component activities of these complete societies to their campuses and clubhouses embraced these developments, now in partnership with local officials who recognized that, when faced with shortages of municipal workers, they could rely on children to play these roles.<sup>23</sup>

From Boston to Birmingham, young people impersonated sanitation workers and police officers, explorers and queens, expressing their dramatic instincts in public and bringing to communities the behavioral improvements and cost savings already seen at junior republics, schools, and youth-serving institutions as they patrolled parks, enforced street trades laws, beautified their communities, and adjudicated delinquency cases involving other youth. Lacking direct adult supervision, these new activities were exceedingly popular. Yet if these vicarious experiences of adulthood at first appeared to offer young people greater autonomy, in fact they signaled youths’ increased self-monitoring and the state’s growing recognition of the disciplinary power and economic benefits of everyday performance as well. Chicago’s Boys Brotherhood Republic (BBR), a vocal advocate on youth issues, showcases how the republic movement’s institutionalization and its growing conservatism were linked. As the nation’s republics were increasingly found inside schools and youth-serving institutions, political expression and economic innovation gave way to institutional maintenance and adjusting youth to new social expectations. BBR’s departures from republics’ business-as-usual equally highlight how claims about the realism of civic dramatizations obscured the narrow vision of democratic participation they taught. In an era marked by controversies about the adult institutions young people were modeling—including the inhumanity of the industrial system and the need for more unions, the economic status and individualized nature of housework, and the meaning of citizenship in a democracy—most organizers carefully directed youth attention to accept the status quo.<sup>24</sup>

Shifting participants’ attention from making republics more like the real world to making the real world more like republics, these proliferating “clubs based on imaginative play ... in which every activity is made a part of a play-world, in which the members live during and, to some extent, between, the sessions of the club” as Forbush described them, transformed communities into simulations, into stages, into institutions without walls as young people cleaned neighborhoods, controlled crime, and expanded state surveillance—helping to “save the city” like the women whose labor was explained away as “municipal housekeeping” during this period. Local officials’

growing participation in youth work during this decade, widely covered in professional journals such as *American City* and *Municipal Journal*, thus reflected not merely their increasing commitment to child protection; their support for activities that gamified public service directly addressed cities' and towns' ever-present financial concerns. The early twentieth century appearance of "mayor for a day" programs, in which municipalities turned over the reins of government to local youth, obscures these populations' everyday contributions to their communities and how many local government operations depended on a hidden force of kids.<sup>25</sup>

Chapter 5 tracks the republic movement into World War I, as federal officials followed local authorities into the education and youth work fields. William George's decision to install a workshop inside the republic for making military uniforms and to dispatch citizens for government work in Syracuse captured the ambiguities that characterized how educators, youth workers, and government authorities "protected" young people from the war. Eschewing old-fashioned methods of military preparedness instruction in favor of the vocational and physical training embraced by progressive educators, federal agencies facing the national security crisis helped to make democratic occupational role-plays even more widely used educational and recreational pursuits. This was nowhere more evident than inside the nation's schools. At the same time government authorities encouraged young people to continue their educations, they remade these educational institutions into economic engines for the wartime nation. As young people manufactured military goods in vocational education classes and home economics courses, print shops and art studios, they contributed "surgical dressings, hospital supplies, hospital garments, refugee garments, articles for soldiers and miscellaneous items totaling 15,722,073 in number and valued at \$10,152,461.96, or ten percent of the entire Red Cross production during the war." Junior civic leagues, Knights of King Arthur, Camp Fire Girls, and Scouts reoriented their service activities around national needs: gathering scrap metals, canning vegetables, hawking war bonds, and distributing government information. Opportunities for military role-playing expanded during the conflict but never rivaled the already popular virtual adulthoods that were such effective ideological maintenance, institution building, and community improvement tools.<sup>26</sup>

Developments during the 1920s at junior republics, schools, and youth-serving institutions expanded on prewar trends to meet new postwar challenges. Pupil traffic patrols helped municipalities address a shortage of police by stationing students in the streets to protect their classmates. Girl Scout cookie sales raised money for program activities and recruited new troop leaders, while the Boy Scouts helped US armed forces make the transition to a national wireless emergency communications system. Favoring a language of "education" and "recreation" to describe activities that their predecessors had proposed were expressions of young people's natural inclination to impersonate their elders, educators, youth workers, and public officials offered new rationales for the child protection and segregation from the labor market such programs supplied.

Taking the focus off the referent to some adult activity—for example, the talk of safety education that drowned out earlier discussions of pupil squads “organized just like real cops”—made young people’s economic contributions even more difficult to see.<sup>27</sup>

A new generation of research across psychology and the social sciences backed this altered explanatory framework, accounting for environmental alongside biological factors in the evolution of self and society, with special interest in the influences of groups. Moving talk of imitation and impersonation to the analysis of symbolic communication and mass media, this research now assigned the successes of junior republics, junior police, Scouts, and other popular programs to their peer orientations. The earlier view that such activities provided young people with opportunities to live double lives by inhabiting multiple times, places, or identities through role-playing was superseded by attention to participants’ roles as individuals within social groups. Academic questions about peer influences on community organization and public opinion took on national significance during the Depression as economic and political conditions prompted widespread youth activism against the status quo.

Chapter 6 follows the republic movement into the 1930s, to its renewal in the face of new anxieties about the present and future of American youth as this biological and social category expanded to include African Americans and postadolescents. In a period when increasing numbers of young people, chafing against the economic and political conditions of the Depression as well as adult efforts to restrict their behaviors, were coming to demand new rights and even questioning the democratic foundations of the American republic, the opportunities that junior republics supplied to address the nation’s “youth problem” appealed to adults and youth alike. In light of William George’s death in 1936 and the proliferation of school cities and boystowns as points of access to the republic’s core principles, links to the original Freeville experiment were largely forgotten. Yet George’s vision of how such programs could simultaneously serve as tools for personal and professional development and for the maintenance of law and order persisted—now with new stakeholder support as America’s crises of community disorganization and public opinion, the larger framework for the “youth problem,” came to be seen as national security concerns. The academics, educators, youth workers, and public officials who documented how effectively young people disciplined one another identified potential solutions in peers’ positive influences on peers.<sup>28</sup>

Keeping tabs on youth movements in other nations, the federal government was the most enthusiastic of these stakeholders. The US National Youth Administration, making use of republics’ building blocks from its debut, created nearly six hundred self-contained communities to get young people off the streets and redirect their energies toward public works activities from building infrastructure to building morale. Local governments, led by police departments, similarly embraced juvenile democracies and their component activities in ways that guided youth toward the creation of new, less tangible kinds of value for the state. Turning participants’ attention to

newspaper publishing, radio broadcasting, filmmaking, and public relations alongside now-common youth programming, adult authorities in these settings (together with colleagues at schools and other youth-serving institutions) discovered that as young people persuaded themselves and their peers about the value of the American system, they sold a range of youth programs to adults in their communities as well. Once again, activities undertaken to be developmentally beneficial for youth were equally economically beneficial for their adult sponsors, revealing how a more complete understanding of the intertwined histories of youth reform and government reform in the United States requires attending not only to what the state did for youth but also what youth did for the state.<sup>29</sup>

The state-led expansion of the republic movement during the 1930s marked the disappearance of the double life as a guiding principle for educators and youth workers, as the sheltered childhood was achieved for a majority of youth. Vocational education, home economics, student government, and Scouting—once seen as surrogate encounters with the lives of adult factory workers, homemakers, US senators, and pioneer explorers—shed their associations with mirroring adult reality and instead came to be reconceived as authentic youth-training tools. As a language of “education” and “recreation” replaced an older vocabulary of “model” and “miniature,” organizers of these and other youth activities departed from their predecessors’ long-standing ambitions to copy specific antecedents in the “real” or adult world. Student senates and congresses gave way to student councils; disciplinary boards and pupil patrols replaced junior juvenile courts and junior police; Scouts no longer explicitly aspired to duplicate the heroism of earlier generations. Preparation for later life remained a transcendent ambition for youth activities, but role-plays of adulthood declined in urgency when a majority of young people now accepted their diminished social roles. The experiences of American youth during World War II, which scaled back but did not eliminate young people’s economic contributions, underscore the social transformation that had taken place while simultaneously reminding us that, within educational and recreational contexts, activities with hidden value never entirely disappeared.<sup>30</sup>

These six chapters thus establish the broad historical significance of a set of children’s communities previously understood as merely fringe tools for juvenile reform. They expand the evidence about the sheer numbers of lives that junior republics touched and reveal the broader societal embrace of virtual adulthood as a means of easing the transition to the sheltered childhood and, in turn, constructing youth-serving institutions and the modern American state. Taken together, the evidence presented here adds up to a new understanding of the common life experiences of youth in the United States, how their experiences resonated with the broader technological and cultural transformations of modernity, and the route by which the construction of the sheltered childhood as a cultural category was ultimately achieved. The “double life” that William Forbush identified more accurately captures the period’s dominant ideology than

scholars' previous focus on the "separate spheres" of sheltered childhood alone. And the growth of state interest in child protection was inseparable from the people power youthful populations supplied to local, state, and federal governments.

Tracing the rise and fall of the junior republic movement calls attention to the nation's vibrant conversations about models and dramatizations in education and recreation, revealing how deep engagement with cultural questions about mediation in this era was even more pervasive than previously presumed. Alongside the mimetic comedy, sham battles, and living villages that scholars have described, participatory performances of adult experience were among the most common subjects for representation. Cataloguing the diverse roles that young people performed on a massive scale—for example, as truant officers, health inspectors, and traffic police—identifies their previously hidden contributions to American political development as they learned and played. With the normalization of the sheltered childhood, the importance of role-playing adulthood receded, but its deep influences on American cultural and economic history remain. A conclusion traces the junior republic movement's legacies beyond the continued operations of a few scattered institutions.

