New Books from Childhood Studies Faculty

**Dr. John Wall, Professor Religion and Childhood Studies**

*Give Children the Vote: On Democratizing Democracy*  
(Bloomsbury, 2021)

Throughout history, the right to vote has been extended to landowning men, the poor, minorities, women, and young adults. In each case, the meaning of democracy itself has been transformed. The one major group still denied suffrage is the third of humanity who are under 18 years of age. However, children are becoming increasingly active in political movements for climate regulation, labor rights, gun control, transsexual identity, and racial justice. And these have led to a growing global movement to eliminate minimum ages of enfranchisement.

This book argues that it is time to give children the vote. Using political theory and drawing on childhood studies, it shows why suffrage cannot legitimately be limited according to age, as well as why truly universal voting is beneficial to all and can help save today's crumbling democratic norms. It carefully responds to a wide range of objections concerning competence, knowledge, adult rights, power relations, harms to children, and much more. And it develops a detailed childist theory of voting based on holding elected representatives maximally responsive to the people's different lived experiences. The book also introduces the concept of proxy-claim voting, wherein parents or guardians exercise proxy votes for non-competent persons, both child and adult, until whatever time those persons wish to claim or reclaim the exercise of their vote for themselves. Ultimately, the book maps out a new vision of democratic voting that, by equally empowering children, is at last genuinely democratic.

**Meredith Bak, Assistant Professor of Childhood Studies**

*Playful Visions: Optical Toys and the Emergence of Children’s Media Culture*  
(MIT Press, 2020)

The kaleidoscope, the stereoscope, and other nineteenth-century optical toys analyzed as “new media” of their era, provoking anxieties similar to our own about children and screens.

In the nineteenth century, the kaleidoscope, the thaumatrope, the zoetrope, the stereoscope, and other optical toys were standard accessories of a middle-class childhood, used both at home and at school. In *Playful Visions*, Meredith Bak argues that the optical toys of the nineteenth century were the “new media” of their era, teaching children to be discerning consumers of media—and also provoking anxieties similar to contemporary worries about children’s screen time. Bak shows that optical toys—which produced visual effects ranging from a moving image to the illusion of depth—established and reinforced a new understanding of vision as an interpretive process. At the same time, the expansion of the middle class as well as education and labor reforms contributed to a new notion of childhood as a time of innocence and play. Modern media culture and the emergence of modern Western childhood are thus deeply interconnected.

Drawing on extensive archival research, Bak discusses, among other things, the circulation of optical toys, and the wide visibility gained by their appearance as printed templates and textual descriptions in periodicals; expanding conceptions of literacy, which came to include visual acuity; and how optical play allowed children to exercise a sense of visual mastery. She examines optical toys alongside related visual technologies including chromolithography—which inspired both chromatic delight and chromophobia. Finally, considering the contemporary use of optical toys in advertising, education, and art, Bak analyzes the endurance of nineteenth-century visual paradigms. [https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/playful-visions](https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/playful-visions).
Meredith Bak’s ongoing work on historical optical toys and researching physical artifacts resulted in the publication of a teaching resource “Material Artefacts: Using Objects to Illuminate the History of Media and Play,” which focuses on the study of toy magic lanterns and is included in the collection Research Methods for Primary Sources (London: Adam Matthew Digital). In summer 2021, she was invited to give a virtual guest lecture on ‘The Ludic Archive’ at the Konfigurations des Films Archives Mini Cluster Seminar, Goethe University (Frankfurt). In fall 2021, she was invited to participate in a virtual roundtable on nineteenth-century optical amusements and papercraft for a Crafting Communities event series: Critical Crafting In and Beyond Humanities Classrooms: 19th-Century Material Culture and 21st-Century Open Pedagogy, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). In spring 2022, she continued this collaborative work with Crafting Communities in an interview for the Victorian Samplings podcast. She also presented new research on the ethics and aesthetics of cardboard in contemporary children’s STEM culture at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference in April.

Sarada Balagopalan published her first Editorial in the journal Childhood (July 2021) titled, “Precarity and the Question of Children’s Relationalities”. She edited (along with Jonathan Josefsen, Bengt Sandin and Karl Hanson) the book, Representing Children: The Politics of Children’s Rights and Representation (Palgrave 2022) and also authored a chapter in this volume. Sarada was invited to write the Introduction for the Special Issue (edited by Divya Kannan and R. Maithreyi) of Children’s Geographies focused on “Modernity, Schooling and Childhood in India: Trajectories of Exclusion”. She co-organized, with Karishma Desai, a panel on, “Schooled Futures, Skilling and Gendered Temporalities” for the American Association of Geographers (AAG) annual conference and presented a paper titled, “Relationalities and Entrepreneurial Self-making in Mumbai, India”.

Kate Cairns published two articles relating to youth and environmental justice in Camden: “Feeling environmental justice: Pedagogies of slow violence” in Curriculum Inquiry, and “Caring about water in Camden, NJ: Social reproduction against slow violence” in Gender, Place and Culture. She also coauthored an article (with David Backer) entitled “Social reproduction theory revisited” in the British Journal of Sociology of Education. Kate presented at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association and the American Association of Geographers. She co-organized and moderated a series of panels on “Childism and Feminism” as part of the Transnational Childism Colloquium series. Within the department of Childhood Studies, Kate is happy to begin her new role as Undergraduate Program Coordinator.

Dan Cook was named the Robin M. Williams, Jr. Lectureship of the Eastern Sociological Society for 2022-2023. He will present “Sights in Common: Ruminations Between Photography and Sociology” at the 2023 ESS meetings in Baltimore and at several other venues during the year. Cook published “Vernacular Faith,” a photo essay on small houses of worship and community transition in North Philadelphia in the Winter 2022 issue of Contexts magazine, a publication of the American Sociological Association.

His book, The Moral Project of Childhood (NYU Press, 2020,) was featured in a review essay in the Winter 2022 issue of the Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth. During the past year, he spoke at several gatherings, including Socialism, Capitalism and Childhood, The Social Science History Association and Article 13: Freedom of Expression Symposium.

In May 2022, Prof. Cook gave an invited talk on “When is a Child? Problems and Trajectories of Childhood Studies” to scholars and educators at the Hangzhou Normal University, China.
Lauren Silver received a 2021-2022 faculty fellowship from the Institute for the Study of Global Racial Justice at Rutgers, to support the writing of her new book, *Transformative Childhoods: At the intersection of radical love, art, and storytelling*. Lauren stepped into the role of Director of Graduate Studies for the Department, co-organizing six online research symposia with Stockton University’s Childhood Studies Program. Lauren, along with colleagues Sarada Balagopalan and Kate Cairns, received the Rutgers IDEA Camden Innovation Grant to fund the “Centering Black Childhoods Speakers Series: Scholars, Activists, and Communities in Conversation,” and hosted the inaugural event. Lauren continues to engage in research with The Independence Public Media Foundation supported IDEA Center for the Arts’ project, “Johnson Park: A Gallery of History Reimagined,” in Camden, NJ.

Susan Miller is working on several papers associated with her current book project, *Young Defenders: American Youth, Patriotism and Nationalism, 1890-1939* for which she was awarded a 2020-2021 Rutgers Research Council Grant. One article – “Patriot Games” is focused on lessons of patriotism embedded in youth sports, particularly American Legion Junior baseball. In the past year, she has contributed an entry on historical methods to the SAGE Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood Studies, and reviews in H-Diplomacy and the Journal of History of Childhood & Youth, among other publications. Like scholars and historians everywhere, she pleased to be traveling again to present work. In June 2022, she will present research on children and the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial at Oxford University, Centre for the History of Childhood's colloquium on Children & Heritage.

Lynne Vallone delivered her paper “Princess Victoria and the Cult of Celebrity” at the June 2021 “Finding Shakespeare in the Royal Collection” conference, held virtually.

In fall 2021, Anthony Wright participated in a roundtable discussion titled “Multimodal Ethnography as Method for Staying True to Political Engagements and Critical Epistemologies” at the American Anthropological Association’s annual meeting in Baltimore. Dr. Wright also presented his collaborative ethnographic work on Indigenous youth activism in Mexico at Stockton University’s Childhood Application Seminar Series and participated in a roundtable discussion on digital equity and justice at Rutgers Camden’s Spring Research Symposium. This summer, Dr. Wright will present a paper titled “Intergenerationality in the Pediatric Cancer Ward: Age-Based Power and the Production of Data about Children’s Voices” at a pediatric cancer research conference sponsored by the Centre Léon Bérard in Lyon, France.
John Wall published his latest book in November 2021, *Give Children the Vote: On Democratizing Democracy* (Bloomsbury), in which he makes a political philosophical argument for eliminating all voting ages. He continues to serve as Director of the Childism Institute, which this past year has hosted several international conferences and workshops. And he Co-Directs the Children’s Voting Colloquium, which holds monthly discussions and coordinates with numerous child- and adult-led organizations around the world. He is currently co-editing with Sarada Balagopalan and Karen Wells the forthcoming *Handbook of Theories in Childhood Studies* (Bloomsbury 2022), editing *Exploring Children’s Suffrage* (Palgrave 2022), and co-editing with Tanu Biswas a special issue of *Children & Society* on “Childism.” He published the co-authored “Infantographies” in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, “Childism” in the *Oxford Bibliographies in Childhood Studies*, and “Adultism” in *The Encyclopedia of Social Justice in Early Childhoods and Childhood Studies*, and has several forthcoming chapters and articles on childism and children’s suffrage. He has been a consultant on diverse children’s rights issues for the British Medical Association, UK; the Centre for Global Childhoods, New Zealand; and the Ethical Practice Involving Children (EPIC) Project, Australia.