

jury to trust him on the goodness of his client, Esman merely asserts that we need more coercion in America and that it will always be put to splendid uses. It's laughable. □

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## Ready or Not: What Happens When We Treat Children As Small Adults

by Kay S. Hymowitz

Encounter Books • 2000 • 290 pages •  
\$16.95 paperback

Reviewed by Jennifer Roback Morse

**L**ibertarianism is sometimes summarized as the right to do any nonaggressive act. *Anything That's Peaceful* is the title of one of Leonard Read's finest books. We might suppose that the cause of a free society is well served by extending that freedom of choice to ever younger people over an ever wider scope of activities. Kay Hymowitz convincingly demonstrates that broadening children's freedom of action undermines the wider cause of a free society. Paradoxically, even the children themselves are not well served, and become less free, if their elders grant them too wide a range of freedom.

*Ready or Not* is both important and challenging for libertarians. It is important because the central premise of the book, contained in the subtitle of the earlier, hardback edition, "why treating children as small adults endangers their future—and ours," is true. The book will be challenging because Hymowitz's style of argumentation is distinct from the usual libertarian style. She will not immediately fit into the obvious categories of "friend or foe" of liberty. But on closer reading and reflection, it becomes clear that she is, by all means, an important and profound friend of liberty.

Not all child-rearing methods are consistent with the needs of a free society. Hymowitz makes a compelling, and to this reader, novel argument that early generations of Americans realized that their experiment in liberty required distinctive child-rearing methods.

She calls this new method for a New World "republican childhood." The children of a free people needed to be trained for their liberty. They needed to be taught to think for themselves, to have a manly independence, and not to be servile and fawning toward authority figures.

But the republican childhood of old was by no means a precursor of the modern hippie love child, overindulged and permitted everything. Republican childhood required that children be taught to control their passions and impulses. On Hymowitz's telling, the childhood of yesteryear combined a strong measure of self-discipline with the cultivation of independence.

The villain that appeared on the stage of the early twentieth century was not the set-piece villain of either libertarianism or its enemies. Hymowitz's villain is neither capitalism nor statism, but rather the idea of naturalism. Naturalism holds that children are "naturally capable, fully conscious and intentional." Their authentic selves will emerge if only adults will leave them unfettered. Children should not be introduced to norms of behavior and collective knowledge bound up in customs of long usage. Rather than being initiated into culture, children should be protected from it.

Hymowitz accurately dubs this social program "anti-culturalism." Although there is a libertarian variant of this romanticism, it is usually most useful to the political left. Hymowitz's analysis, although not explicitly a work of political philosophy, gives a hint as to why this might be so.

As a matter of plainly observable fact, children are not noble savages, whose most pressing need is to be left alone. Children need guidance and instruction if they are ever to be able to use the freedom that our society ultimately wants them to have as adults. Ironically, she reports that the children most "left alone" by adults prove to be particularly vulnerable to peer pressure and ultimately to the influence of impersonal forces such as advertising. This is why romantic naturalism is so appealing to the left. It undermines all existing authority, including cultural authority. The left can then move its own ideology into the void.

This argument will be challenging for many libertarians because it is social criticism more than the economic or political criticism with which we are most familiar. It is not primarily a libertarian critique of government, with an argument of what the state has done wrong and how more minimalist policies would help. (But libertarians will find themselves cheering her attack on the loony, anti-culturalist school curriculum.) Nor is it primarily a statist critique of the market, with an argument about how enlightened government regulation could easily correct the situation. (But readers on the left will be gratified by her criticism of advertising.) This is primarily a work of social criticism, which is to say a critique of the more amorphous thing known as culture, and of those ubiquitous actors, ourselves. She is challenging every reader of every ideological persuasion to be on the lookout for these poisonous ideas.

When she attacks the vacuous instruction that masquerades as education in many schools, the target in the cross hairs is neither the teachers' union nor compulsory schooling laws. When she criticizes advertising, her object is not to devise regulations. Her object is to persuade us to turn off the TV and to keep a close eye on the school curriculum. Most any reader can find some part of himself in this book and therefore will find some small but genuine contribution he can make by taking its argument to heart.

The libertarian political philosophy works because it is well-grounded in truths about human nature. People are self-interested. They will work harder for something they own than for some amorphous common good. Their self-interest can be channeled towards cooperative ends. Those facts lead us to favor individual freedom over collective action or coercive centralization.

But these are not the only truths about human nature. It is equally true that we are born as helpless babies and not as fully grown economic men. Childhood is not merely a socially constructed artifact that we can deconstruct and reconstruct at will. This core idea of Hymowitz's book is certainly true. Children are not prepared for the autonomy appropriate to adults and will not automati-

cally become prepared for it. Treating small children as if they were adults really does threaten their future, and ours. □

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### Grover Cleveland: A Study in Character by Alyn Brodsky

St. Martin's Press • 2000 • 496 pages • \$35.00

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Reviewed by Lawrence W. Reed

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**H**aving just endured vacuousness on a grand scale in the last presidential campaign and eight years of verbal subterfuge and prevarication under Bill Clinton, Americans are in need of an inspiration from their political past. They have it in the person of our principled 22nd and 24th president, Grover Cleveland—brought to life in the past year by not one but two laudatory biographies. *An Honest President: The Life and Presidencies of Grover Cleveland* by H. Paul Jeffers is an entertaining but barebones account of America's most underrated chief executive. It appeared in early 2000 but was soon eclipsed by Alyn Brodsky's superbly written and more thoroughly researched *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Character*. In admiration for their subject's honesty and candor, both authors cite this characteristic Cleveland remark: "What is the use of being elected or reelected unless you stand for something?"

Both books, appearing as they do in a climate of cynicism about the political process and the caliber of today's politicians, will surely rekindle an interest in Cleveland. In comparison to him, most recent aspirants for and occupants of America's highest public office look like rogues and pipsqueaks.

Historians rate Cleveland among the better half of presidents, and some have even labeled him "near-great." But he didn't fight a war and he didn't shmooze and slither his way to political power; nor did he exercise power as if he loved it for its own sake. He did the public's business honestly and frugally and otherwise left people alone. Historians who are deluded into thinking that "greatness" means expanding the frontiers of the coercive