

## Before Headstart: the Iowa Station and America's Children

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*Before Headstart: The Iowa Station and America's Children*, by Hamilton Cravens. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993. xviii, 327 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JOAN GITTENS, SOUTHWEST STATE UNIVERSITY

*Before Headstart* tells the story of the University of Iowa's Child Welfare Research Station from the 1920s to the 1950s, the years when the institute was at its most productive and powerful. Hamilton Cravens argues that the Iowa Station's uniqueness lay in its double role as both a shaping force in the field of child development and an institution that challenged the discipline's main assumptions.

The research center began through the efforts of Cora Bussey Hillis, a Des Moines woman involved in child welfare concerns. An astute political organizer, Hillis was active at a time when child welfare was considered the natural province of club women like herself. She was able to tap the energies of the Iowa Mothers' Congress, the Iowa Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the progressive wing of the Republican Party in her efforts to establish a child welfare research station at an Iowa university.

Once established, the Iowa Station deviated from Hillis's plans in significant ways. For one thing, it focused on scholarly research, and, like other child development centers of the time that were bent on establishing their scientific and scholarly credentials, it had little to do with the more activist realm of child welfare practice that Hillis promoted. Another and defining deviation from her original intent was the Iowa Station's focus on the normal child at a time when children were often divided into types, such as "dependent," "delinquent," and "feebleminded." The Iowa Station pioneered in the study of normal children and made its intellectual reputation primarily through this focus.

The Iowa Station became as famous for challenging the norms of scientific thinking as it did for studying normal children. In an era when the orthodox position among child development scientists was that intelligence was inborn and fixed at birth or affected only marginally by environment, Iowa Station researchers questioned such determinism and argued that intervention in a child's life could foster significant gains in measurable intelligence. The station's Iowa Orphanage Studies defied the conventional wisdom that the intelligence of children placed with foster or adoptive parents would replicate that of their birth parents. They argued rather that the children's adoptive environment had a profound influence on their intellectual abilities. An even more controversial study found that children designated as

"feeble-minded" actually gained significantly in IQ points when they were placed with older mentally retarded women in the Iowa State School for the Feeble-minded, owing to the increased attention that the children received compared to their desolate lives in the orphanage.

In addition to their faith in the critical role of nurture over nature, the Iowa Station scholars differed from other child development experts in their political involvement. The station's position on the beneficial effects of environment had profound political implications, and the Iowa experts were frankly more engaged in shaping policy, especially educational policy towards children, than other scholars in their field, who seemed to pride themselves on their detachment from the world of advocacy. Especially during the New Deal era, scholars from the Iowa Station had a significant impact on programs such as the inclusion of nursery schools as part of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration.

By posing the Iowa Station in opposition to the larger field of child development, Cravens presents a thorough study of this discipline as it developed in a critical time. That makes his work an important contribution to the history of social science. His research is careful and extensive, and his intent is to move beyond the merely institutional history of the organization to set it in its broader national context. But the rarefied quality of the discipline, which Cravens aptly describes as "the tiny professional scientific subculture of child development" (186), sometimes makes the subject matter of his work difficult and arcane, unnecessarily so considering the compelling questions that it raises. Child development experts were so concerned to disassociate themselves from the practical world of child welfare that the chapters on the science itself seem detached from any larger reality than the most academic of exercises, despite the fact that the intellectual stakes—the implications for the view of human nature and its capacities—were clearly very high. The second half of the book, where Cravens demonstrates the way the Iowa Station deviated from the norm and made its academic work pertinent to the larger society, is the more engaging part of the story.

Cravens sees the Iowa Station as a forerunner of shifting American values, in that its research tended to emphasize the individual child rather than children in groups. According to Cravens, American social thought in the first half of the twentieth century was notable for its tendency to classify, to see individuals only as part of larger units such as family, gender, or ethnic group. Conversely, the second half of the twentieth century has focused almost exclusively on the individual. This is an interesting contention, but Cravens never really develops the view, asserting it as an accepted assessment of the intellectual

climate of the time rather than proving it to potentially skeptical readers.

The book is most successful in describing the development of the study of child development and the Iowa Station's role in that field, least successful in connecting this academic history to the broader culture of the time.

*Choosing Truman: The Democratic Convention of 1944*, by Robert H. Ferrell. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994. xiii, 137 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY RICHARD S. KIRKENDALL, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

This impressively researched, well-written, and forcefully argued book concentrates on the most important decision made by the Democratic Party in 1944. In doing so, it deals with the major turning point in the career of a prominent Iowan, Henry A. Wallace. The decision concerned the selection of the vice-presidential candidate. What made it so important is that the person chosen soon became president—and at a crucial time.

Up to this point of decision, Wallace had enjoyed one success after another. After editing *Wallaces' Farmer* and founding what became the nation's leading seed corn company, he served two terms as secretary of agriculture and one as vice-president. By 1944, many people regarded him as the person who should succeed Franklin Roosevelt. But the Democrats chose Truman for the vice-presidency that year. He became president in 1945, fired Wallace from the cabinet in 1946, and defeated him for the presidency two years later. Soon after that staggering defeat, the Iowa native, then living in New York, dropped out of politics.

Why did Wallace's life take this turn in 1944? Robert Ferrell argues that the turn was engineered by party leaders, most notably Robert Hannegan, the chair of the Democratic National Committee, and Edwin Pauley, the committee's treasurer. They waged a successful campaign to persuade Roosevelt that Wallace would hurt the ticket and then to convince convention delegates that Roosevelt believed this and thus wanted Truman. Their motive was to defeat Wallace, whom they considered strange, a poor politician, too liberal, and unfit to succeed the sick Roosevelt in the White House. They looked at several alternatives before settling on Truman.

Although Ferrell's account significantly advances our understanding of the 1944 decision, several features seem unsatisfactory.

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