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Benjamin Spock and the Spock Papers at Syracuse University

Robert S. Pickett

Syracuse University, rspicket@syr.edu

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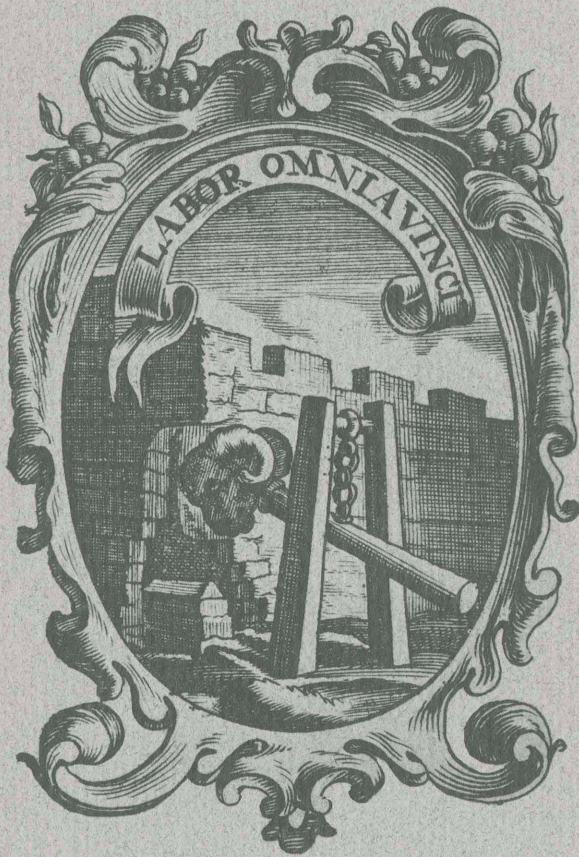
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VOLUME XXII, NUMBER 2, FALL 1987

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VOLUME XXII

NUMBER TWO

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Benjamin Spock and the Spock Papers at Syracuse University

BY ROBERT S. PICKETT *

Born in 1903 at New Haven, Connecticut, into a staunch Episcopalian family, Benjamin McLane Spock has become one of the most noted figures in the history of American pediatric practice. His moralistic New England heritage has expressed itself in an almost selfless devotion to the children of America, first through the best seller *Baby and Child Care*, which has revolutionized attitudes towards parenting and, later, during the 1960s, by his leadership in the American peace movement.

Benjamin Spock's early family life provided an initial stimulus for his eventual drive to attain success in a professional field and to live a socially useful life. Thereafter, the direction of his life as well as his professional and political concerns seemed to evolve from both a mixture of personal attributes and a set of historical circumstances that provided the arena for his activities.

Doctor Spock, as he is known to millions of people, has not been a major contributor to scientific research. However, he has triumphed where more medically esteemed physicians have often failed. He be-

* The author is Professor of Child, Family and Community Studies at Syracuse University. He is also co-director of the Syracuse Consortium for the Cultural Foundations of Medicine, a consortial arrangement between Syracuse University, the State University of New York Health Sciences Center at Syracuse, and Le Moyne College. The SCCFM is dedicated to advancing knowledge concerning various academic disciplines and their contribution to understanding the domain of health. The author has written a full-length book on the history of juvenile corrections in early nineteenth-century America, entitled *House of Refuge*, and numerous articles on the history of children and families.

The author specifically wishes to express his appreciation to Dr. Ruth Wynn of the Department of Child, Family and Community Studies of Syracuse University for her efforts prior to the creation of this article and for her collaboration with him in interviewing Jane Spock, as well as her role in the initiation of a larger collaborative study that will deal with Doctor Spock's contribution to child development.

gan his career as a competent practitioner and established himself relatively early as a specialist in the area of behavioral problems of children. He also became a faculty member of respected medical schools. Nevertheless, prominence did not come from these achievements. His major professional contribution grew out of his ability to take his own experience as a physician, add to it the scientific and practical findings of others, and translate all this into a form that millions of people could use on a day-to-day basis. Spock reached the literate lay public with concrete and helpful advice that has aided worried parents in their attempts to handle the mundane as well as the more serious health problems of childhood.¹

Because of his ability to deal in simple and direct ways with the common problems of child care, the name 'Dr. Spock' is now revered in nearly every corner of the world. The paperback version of his *Baby and Child Care* is the daily authority on how to care for small children, and still remains one of the world's best-selling books. By 1985, forty years after its initial publication, over 30 million copies had been sold.

Many of the elements which have contributed to Spock's life can be examined in the Benjamin Spock Papers housed in the George Arents Research Library at Syracuse University. Spock's papers, which are described in the last section of this article, include a substantial amount of material relating to his career from the mid-1940s to the early 1970s. During this period, he completed *Baby and Child Care* and went on to become a controversial political figure. The following

1. In addition to a standard biography by Lynn Z. Bloom, *Doctor Spock: Biography of a Conservative Radical* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), there are several articles by historians that deal with Spock's influence on the history of child care. See William Graebner, "The Unstable World of Benjamin Spock: Social Engineering in a Democratic Culture, 1917-1950", *Journal of American History* 67 (1980): 612-29; Nancy Pottishman Weiss, "The Mother-Child Dyad Revisited: Perceptions of Mothers and Children in Twentieth-Century Child-Rearing Manuals", *Journal of Social Issues* 34 (Spring 1978): 29-45 and "Mother, the Invention of Necessity: Dr. Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care*", *American Quarterly* 29 (1977): 519-46; Michael Zuckerman, "Dr. Spock: The Confidence Man", in Charles Rosenberg, ed., *The Family in History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 179-207; and an excellent general review of child-care concerns during the period of Spock's chief influence, Charles E. Strickland and Andrew M. Ambrose, "The Baby Boom, Prosperity, and the Changing Worlds of Children, 1945-1963", in Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 534-85.

pages provide a background sketch that will trace Spock's career from his early family life in New England to his eventual activities as a prominent author and a controversial political figure. This brief biography will present a context for those who wish to know more about the person who became the friendly doctor to the world's parents and was subsequently identified with radical elements in American politics.

SPOCK'S CHILDHOOD AND EARLY EDUCATION

Benjamin Spock's childhood was not touched by the so-called 'permissiveness' that his critics would later charge that he advocated. He began his life in the controlled environment of a proper New Haven household and received his early upbringing at the hands of an authoritarian mother. Although she had very firm ideas of her own, Mildred Stoughton Spock assiduously followed the regimen prescribed by the leading pediatrician of the day, Dr. L. Emmett Holt. Holt's *The Care and Feeding of Children*, which originally appeared in 1894, was the standard treatise on systematic child care.² Holt emphasized regularity in all things. When and how much food should be fed to babies as well as when they should be bathed, made to sleep and eliminate were all matters of a set pattern. As applied by the formidable Mrs. Spock, this meant sleeping in cold rooms and a diet of vegetables and dairy products. Young Benjamin's father, a long-standing official of the New Haven Railroad, was a more distant figure. He had definite views as to how a child should be reared, but he tended to be more reserved in their expression.

Benjamin's initial school experience was an exercise in toughening the mind and body. While still under the age of five, he underwent the rigors of Mrs. Hocking's outdoor school in New Haven. Exposed to the bracing northern air while he sat learning his letters, the young boy discovered that education was as much a matter of moral and physical training as it was of academic discipline. His later schooling, which reinforced this perspective, occurred under the watchful eyes of New England private-school masters, first at Hamden Hall and then at Phillips Andover Academy. Andover, in particular, was known

2. L. Emmett Holt, *The Care and Feeding of Children* (New York: D. Appleton, 1894).

for its emphasis upon moral training. Spock went to Yale College for his undergraduate studies and completed them in 1925.

While at Yale, young Spock was not acknowledged as a scholar, but he received acclaim for his physical prowess. Blessed with a large frame, determination, and considerable energy, he was crucial to the Yale crew team's success as they went on to the Olympic competitions of 1924. He felt at home on the water, and his qualities as a member of the crew team exemplified the way in which he approached most things. In describing Spock's contribution to the team, a *Boston Post* sports writer commented: "In the race against Harvard and in all the races which were rowed by Yale in 1924 he passed the stroke down his side of the shell with such smoothness and accuracy that he kept all forward of him in line".³

A professionally oriented person by virtue of his background and early schooling, young Ben Spock decided on a medical career. In 1925 he entered Yale Medical School. Spock's academic career provides few clues to his later activities, but at about the time of his first year in medical school, an event occurred that gave some indication that he would not follow the path of his forebears. Although he was the eldest son and his family obviously wanted him to continue at Yale, Ben decided to transfer to the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University. Another telling instance of independence was his falling in love with Jane Cheney—not the ideal choice, in his mother's view. Nevertheless, after a year of trying separation, the young couple married in 1927.

The move to Columbia meant that Benjamin and Jane began their married life in the less formal atmosphere of New York City, a fact that had distinct implications for his eventual career. They managed on the relatively meagre resources supplied by a legacy from Benjamin's godfather and some assistance from Jane's mother, but their lives were enriched by a lively social life. Both were admired for their ballroom dancing and for their conversational abilities. During this period, New York was alive with intellectual activity. Immigrants from Europe were bringing new ideas to the arts and to politics, and philosopher John Dewey's notions of progressive education were being translated into reality. It was a time of excitement.

3. Benjamin M. Spock Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University.



Benjamin McLane Spock, ca. 1948, when he was on the staff of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

Upon completing his initial medical education, Spock took a two-year internship at the New York Presbyterian Hospital and eventually a one-year internship at the New York Nursery and Child's Hospital. The Child's Hospital, which later became affiliated with the Cornell Medical Center, provided a pediatric placement in the Upper Hell's Kitchen area of Manhattan's West Side. There, the young physician saw at firsthand to what joys the less fortunate entered the world. His earlier background had not allowed him to see much of the less privileged side of life, but his internships opened up new realities.

Marriage also revealed new vistas. Jane Cheney, attractive and socially conscious, exposed her husband to political notions outside the scope of the elder Spocks' New England Republicanism. Jane's

allegiance to socialism during her college years and publications such as *The New Republic* and the more Marxist *New Masses* entering the Spock household were signs that Benjamin's more conservative outlook was being subjected to profoundly new influences. Although he would never forsake some of his reserved personal habits or appear in public in less than business attire, the young physician's perspective on social issues underwent an irreversible trend away from conservative politics.

At this juncture, Benjamin Spock's intellectual and professional training also departed from the traditional path of most pediatricians. Possibly because Jane had to undergo psychoanalysis as a prerequisite for her job as a recorder of psychological case histories, and certainly because of his experience with patients, Spock became more interested in the psychoanalytic perspective. It was apparently Jane who first suggested to him that personality formation was fairly well established by age two.⁴

In order to gain additional knowledge and experience, Spock took a year of advanced training at the Payne Whitney Clinic of the New York Hospital. While there, he underwent his own analysis and under supervision conducted an analysis of an adult patient. Though he gained considerable insight from this experience, he failed to develop great skills as an analyst and decided not to specialize in child psychiatry. Nevertheless, his interest in the psychological aspects of child rearing proved very useful. As a psychoanalytically oriented pediatrician, the young Dr. Spock headed in a direction that would mark him as unique, both in terms of his practice (which he pursued for nearly a dozen years) and as the advice-giver that he eventually became.

The early 1930s were difficult for the young couple. Benjamin Spock was not the easiest person to live with. Though he was blessed with a great deal of energy and maintained a warm and pleasant public presence, he held impossibly high standards for himself as well as for those around him. During these years Jane's health was a problem. Her first pregnancy ended in a premature birth and the baby was lost. Although she was eventually able to deliver successfully their first child, Michael, she suffered through several miscarriages and was obliged as well to undergo a gall bladder operation. A worrier by

4. Interview, Jane Cheney Spock, 23 June 1987.

nature, she worried about her husband. Benjamin had suffered a bout of pneumothorax. In addition, he was struggling to come to terms with the death of his father.

Like many couples, the Spocks had to wrestle with the economic uncertainties of the Great Depression, but their fortunes, both in terms of finances and physical health, gradually improved. During the period after the birth of their first son, Benjamin was beginning to gain a reputation as a competent and understanding pediatrician. He also enjoyed his work in the New York Hospital, where the clients were considerably more varied than those of his largely upper-middle-class practice. While working there, he became familiar with a great variety of children's diseases and learned more about the effects of child abuse and neglect. As time passed, he developed considerable skill in the handling of children. Though he towered over them and retained an imposing presence, the children seemed to know that they could trust him.

WRITING THE BOOK

During the early 1940s, the situation in Europe was pressing Americans to recognize the inevitability of their country being drawn into war. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the United States moved into an all-out mobilization. Doctor Spock volunteered immediately to enter the service, but was not accepted because of problems with his back. As a result, during the first two years of the war, the Spocks continued their civilian life in New York City and summered at Honnedaga Lake in the Adirondacks, where Spock served as resident physician to a small group of rich families. It was there that he found the time he needed to begin to think about writing a book that would embody his ideas about child health.

Benjamin Spock was a natural writer. He came from a family of people who believed in the written word and practised that belief. In an age in which people increasingly used the telephone as a means of communication, he continued to be an inveterate letter writer. Writing for a larger public did not prove at all difficult for him, for he had already begun to put out papers with other physicians. In 1936, he had collaborated with Dr. Mabel Huschka of the New York Hospital in writing an article entitled "The Psychological Aspects of Pediatric Practice", which appeared in volume 13 of *Appleton-*



Dr. Spock interacting with a toddler, ca. 1955.

Century's *Practitioners Library of Medicine and Surgery*. This publication convinced him that there were important ideas that he could communicate by the written word.

As the summer of 1943 commenced, the Spocks started the project that would eventually become Benjamin's major contribution to the welfare of both parents and children. With Jane's constant help as spouse, typist, and collaborator, he began to write the first sections of the book. Fortunately, because of the minimal medical demands of the handful of families who provided the cottage in which the Spock family resided, the work rapidly took shape. Benjamin would pace back and forth or sit on the porch railing, occasionally jumping up to peer at the copy that began to commit itself to paper, while Jane sat patiently at the typewriter. Occasionally she would offer suggestions, as he haltingly uttered the phrases that eventually formed the corpus of *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*.

When the Spocks returned to New York City, the process of writing the manuscript continued. Despite a long and busy day, they

worked until late in the evening. There was no longer any time for the sailing that Benjamin loved. The social activities that they so thoroughly enjoyed were replaced by intense efforts to acquire more information to buttress the central focus of the book.⁵ Although Jane was now pregnant with their second son, she gathered practical advice and counsel from social workers and did library research, while Benjamin consulted with colleagues and acquaintances, checking out various parts of the manuscript. He even asked mothers for their reactions to the ideas he was developing. Producing the manuscript placed heavy demands upon the household, but the Spocks did not seem to mind the pace.

Benjamin Spock's eventual entrance into the United States Navy and his final assignment on the West Coast disrupted the later phases of manuscript completion; but this did not deter the continuation of the writing. When he took on active duty, Jane consulted others when she needed to. It was she who carried out final negotiations with the publishers. Also, she did the tedious work of last-minute revising and indexing, often taking down his changes by long-distance telephone at two in the morning.⁶ Nevertheless, by the end of the war, the book was done, son John had been born, and the Spocks were ready to take on new challenges.

Doctor Spock's approach to advice-giving, both in terms of his practice and his writing, was at odds with the more strict pediatric procedures of the day. Because of his psychological training, he went against current views by recommending much more physical contact between parents and their children. He knew that some of the rigidity of pediatric advice had grown out of conditions prevailing in earlier times. He was aware, for example, that infant-feeding concerns emanated from the period prior to the widespread use of pasteurization, when many infants and small children had died from bacterial contamination of cow's milk, and the various infant formula experi-

5. Interview, Jane Cheney Spock, 23 June 1987.

6. Although he had not done so in the first edition of *Baby and Child Care*, Benjamin Spock acknowledged in later editions the many contributions which Jane made during the book's initial creation. See the dedication page in Benjamin M. Spock and Michael B. Rothenberg, *Baby and Child Care* (New York: Pocket Books, 1985). Readers will also note in this edition how the co-authors took great pains to credit all those who contributed in any way to that specific edition. This is typical of Benjamin Spock's innate sense of fairness.

mentations had not yielded widespread reliability. By the 1930s, however, pasteurization had become mandatory and many more children were surviving to adulthood. With such improvements as these in mind, he advocated more flexible attitudes in matters like feeding, sleeping, and toilet training.

As he conscientiously worked with the families in his practice, Spock noted that intelligent and concerned parents were often very anxious about doing the right thing for their children. He also noticed that the medical establishment paid little heed to these general concerns. He thought that if the knowledgeable parents in his practice, such as anthropologist Margaret Mead, worried about how to handle her child, the legions of parents who lacked her education and financial resources would certainly need help. Obviously, here was a fertile field for a person who wanted to influence lives in a positive manner.

Though some of the Spocks' friends regarded him as "too permissive" with respect to matters such as discipline, feeding, and toilet training, he did not falter in his convictions. Typically, in keeping with his approach in other matters, he displayed a firmness that belied his gentle and flexible public demeanor. He was determined to make parents feel comfortable as caregivers to their own offspring. Coincidentally, his colleague Erik Erikson, who later paid monthly supervisory visits to Spock's program at the University of Pittsburgh, was in the process of developing a theoretical approach that stressed the importance of trust in the initial development of human beings.

During the 1960s, Spock came under attack for having fostered permissiveness in child rearing. His critics claimed that he was responsible for the unruly youths who demonstrated in the streets and universities. Spock was quite willing to accept his special affiliation with the younger generation, but the charge of permissiveness was incorrect. He had not advised parents to be permissive. In fact, he had repeatedly told them to be "firm and friendly". That was his personal and professional style. Spock believed in limits. He even remarked that he had erred with respect to the older of his two sons, because there had been no "clear rules and clear limits" as to how to rear a child.⁷ He may have thought of himself as "a loving father",

7. Bloom, *Doctor Spock*, 89.

but his children thought that he was “distinctly reserved”.⁸ In any case, he was not a permissive parent, nor did he intend that others should be. His desire to inspire all parents with confidence in their own efforts had been misconstrued and misinterpreted.

Doctor Spock’s attitude reflected his own New England background. His practical emphasis upon self-reliance came through as he reversed the earlier approaches on child rearing of pediatrician L. Emmett Holt and the more recent views of behaviorist psychologist John Watson. Watson, the dominant figure of American child psychology in the 1920s and 1930s, distrusted parents and advocated professional systemization of child rearing.⁹ By contrast, Spock expressed considerable faith in parental ability. He believed that parents possessed inherently good judgment and only needed to gain confidence. Other authorities concurred with the Spock approach. People such as Doctors Milton Senn and Frances Ilg at the Gesell Institute at Yale University regarded Spock’s work as an important breakthrough. Even though he did not pay great homage to Gesell’s famous ‘ages and stages’ approach to child development, they thought that Spock was thorough and imaginative, as well as practical.

BENJAMIN SPOCK AT MID-CAREER

The years following the initial publication of *Baby and Child Care* were busy ones for the Spock family. The paperback version had become an enormous success. In a note written to Spock in the fall of 1947, Pocket Book publisher Robert F. de Graff remarked: “It is probably unnecessary to tell you that the book has had, in our opinion, a remarkable sale, which has only been limited by an inability to get sufficient paper to supply the demand”.¹⁰ Book publishing at that time was on the crest of the wave that ushered in huge sales in

8. Bloom, *Doctor Spock*, 90.

9. John B. Watson began publishing as early as 1913, but the most clearly delineated example of his views with respect to parenting can be seen in his *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1928). For a brief, but useful analysis of Watson’s perspective, see Elizabeth M. R. Lomax, et al., *Science and Patterns of Child Care* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1978), 109–50.

10. Robert F. de Graff to Benjamin Spock, 3 September 1947, Spock Papers, Box 1.

inexpensive paperbound books. The Pocket Book edition of *Baby and Child Care* contributed to this revolution. The original printing was a quarter of a million copies, but these were quickly snapped up by an eager public. Numerous printings of larger runs soon followed.

The Spocks were also on the move. Benjamin Spock had come to a crossroad in his career. Given the success of his book, he decided to leave clinical work and become an academic. Forsaking a promising practice, which he had begun in 1933, and leaving behind many colleagues and friends, he joined the staff of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. To a considerable extent, the stay in Rochester provided a relatively peaceful interlude in the life of the Spock family. While in New York, both of the Spocks had been active in many of the concerns of the day. Jane had been involved in alleviating the plight of Spanish children suffering from the ravages of the Spanish Civil War, and Benjamin had been caught up in the progressive movement in education. In addition to his busy practice, he was the attending physician at the Brearley School for girls. His intellectual life was also exciting; he was continuing his studies at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, intensively reading John Dewey and Sigmund Freud, and engaging in stimulating interactions with the educational psychologist Dr. Caroline Zachry. Nevertheless, the move to the Mayo Clinic was justifiable—for personal as well as career reasons. The Mayo Clinic was one of the most prestigious institutions of its kind, and Rochester offered a much quieter atmosphere, one that could have been considered more conducive to the raising of two sons.

In spite of the pleasant surroundings, the stay in Minnesota lasted only a brief time. After four years the Spocks moved to Pittsburgh, where Benjamin took on with his teaching and research commitments a complex array of administrative duties at the University of Pittsburgh. The Spocks enjoyed the social life in Pittsburgh; but Benjamin did not find administration to his liking, nor did his research efforts prove to be particularly fruitful. Fortunately, he had gained sufficient stature to be in demand in other places. In 1955, an offer from the Medical School at Western Reserve University lured them away to Cleveland, Ohio.

By now, Benjamin Spock's professional career was discernibly sep-

arate from the conventional mainstream. Increasingly, he used his talents to synthesize his knowledge and experience for the public's well-being. During the years immediately following World War II, the United States had experienced an enormous growth in population—the 'baby boom'. A very young generation of parents needed and eagerly sought counsel. Doctor Spock provided the support they wanted, and herein lay his major gift to society.

Benjamin Spock's talents as a speaker and a writer contributed to considerable demands upon his time. Although he fended off most offers of speaking engagements tendered to him, Spock was unable to resist the pressure to present his views to the mass media. He began to write monthly columns for large domestic publications, such as the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Redbook*. Also, he was persuaded to appear in a series of programs on the relatively new medium of television. His strength did not lie in his ability to generate new knowledge, but rather to pass on in simple and straightforward language the recent medical discoveries of his colleagues.

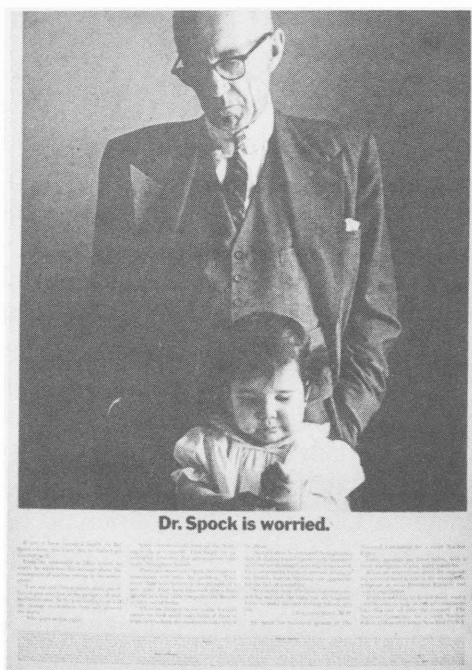
Spock spent the remainder of his academic career as professor of child development and child psychiatry at Western Reserve. His move there ushered in a period of peak activity. By 1956 publishers had sold over eight million copies of his book, and demand for it continued. Spock was called upon to prepare new revisions to keep up with burgeoning medical knowledge and an ever-broadening market of readers.

As the financial rewards from Benjamin's long-standing best seller and his other writings were realized, the Spocks ranged further in their vacations. In the early 1960s, they began sailing in the Virgin Islands. Jane, who had to learn how to sail to keep up with her husband, had developed a cautious but accomplished style of sailing. By contrast, he was more adventurous. He loved the excitement of the open sea, which, no doubt, offered a welcome contrast to the demanding schedule in Cleveland. In addition to an active social life, he was revising *Baby and Child Care*, authoring and co-authoring numerous books, writing continuously in domestic magazines, teaching, advising, and supervising students, conducting investigations, constantly negotiating with his publishers, and answering countless letters from anxious parents all over the world. Also, in this period, he began his involvement in national issues.

DOCTOR SPOCK, PHYSICIAN FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In the early years, the issues which Spock took up were closely related to his role as a pediatrician. In this respect one thinks of his leadership in the national campaign to support fluoridation. But, gradually, his attention turned to national priorities that were less specifically related to child health. He gladly accepted the invitation to membership on the United States Committee for UNICEF. He was also called upon to address the White House Conference on Children and Families.

As he became increasingly involved in the national arena, Spock addressed topics other than health and began to advocate social policy that he thought might have an impact on children. *Ladies' Home Journal* editor Bruce Gould urged Spock to adhere to the kind of articles that readers had been accustomed to seeing, but Spock in-



Dr. Spock and a baby in the *New York Times* full-page advertisement, 16 April 1962. The text indicated that Spock had become a sponsor of the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy.

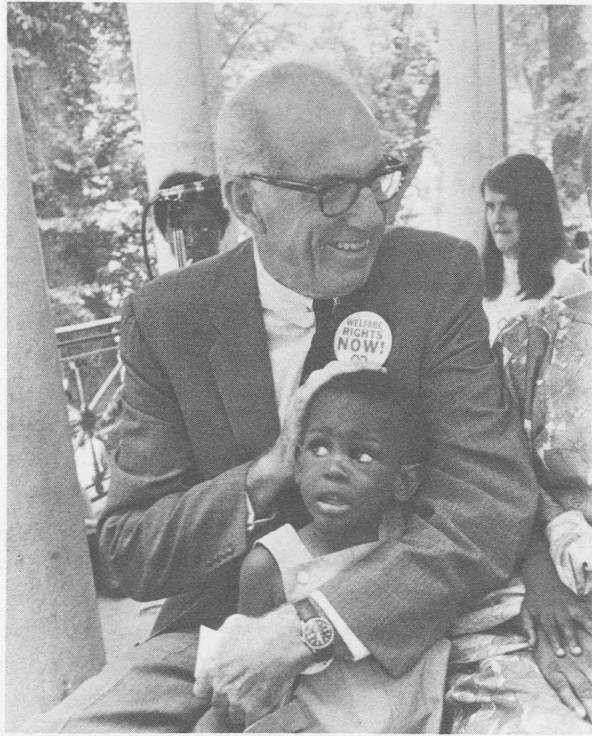
sisted on writing about broader issues. Not long after the Soviets had launched Sputnik, a number of self-proclaimed authorities on education, such as historian Arthur Bestor, began to use the national media to flay the American educational system. Although he knew that it was far from perfect, Spock wrote extensively in its defense.

In time, Spock was drawn into larger issues, such as nuclear disarmament and civil rights. Though his higher income now provided the opportunity for longer vacations in his beloved sailboats, he could not escape from his own sensitivities. After an initial wariness on his part, he ardently supported John F. Kennedy's New Frontier, but eventually was disappointed by both Kennedy's and Lyndon B. Johnson's war policies. Spock's inborn sense of justice and the moral fervor that smoldered below his normally gentle manner could not be contained for long. As he neared the end of his fifties, Spock began to speak out, both in his writings and in public gatherings.

Doctor Spock was well known for his work as an advice-giver, but his new activities cast him in a different light. Obviously, the times had changed since the end of World War II, and now was the time to be preoccupied with new matters. He assumed leadership in the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, known nationally as SANE. Instead of the baby doctor writing replies to mothers who worried about thumb-sucking or bed-wetting, Spock appeared in SANE's full-page nuclear disarmament advertisement in the *New York Times*. SANE made good use of Spock's image. The large photograph depicted him as the concerned father-physician, looking down worriedly on one of his charges, apparently dismayed by a world in which children could not grow and prosper.

Spock's prominence as a leading member of the peace movement and his eventual nomination in 1972 as a third-party candidate for presidential office presented a major dilemma to many of the millions of parents who loyally followed his advice. He no longer seemed to be the benevolent physician they thought they knew. In the perspective of Spock's life, however, the turn toward activism was an understandable development. His more radical activities had come at the end of a long, often vacillating move from an essentially conservative to a much more radical outlook; but the underlying motivation for his actions had been consistent. He wanted to make a better world for children.

The way had not been easy and had never been free of personal



Dr. Spock with a child during the period of his political activities, ca. 1967.

conflict. Spock's early background as well as his training as a physician marked him as a member of a relatively elite group. His innate propriety and subsequent training prevented him from making an easy transition from pediatrician for a relatively small group of families in New York City to a national celebrity, first as the writer of a best seller and later as a controversial political figure. Although he enjoyed being in the limelight, he was often uneasy about such fame. He was also initially unsure that such activism was consistent with his professional position.

In his early years, Spock scrupulously tried to avoid conflicts and rationalized his refusal to become identified with political activities, many of which he secretly endorsed. He argued that active political participation in causes would violate the trust of his followers; but when he became convinced that lack of involvement would result in what he regarded as a negative outcome, Spock began to take on a

much more public style. Initially, he participated in activities such as backing political candidates with whom he sympathized. However, as time went on, he gravitated to concentrating on issues which he thought that even these politicians had evaded.

When it became clear to him that continued nuclear testing would definitely bring harm to future generations of children, Spock could not remain within the boundaries of professional detachment. He became a man who was ready to go to jail for his beliefs. In time, that opportunity presented itself, and he was spending brief stays in local jails as a result of civil rights demonstrations. Then, in a highly emotional court case in 1968, Spock and four other people stood trial in the federal district court in Boston. They were charged with crimes against the state. Specifically, the “Boston Five”, as the newspaper writers referred to them, were indicted for “conspiracy to aid and abet violation of the Selective Service Act”. Spock was convicted. Although the verdict was later thrown out, Spock had demonstrated both his commitment to the peace movement and his own high standard of personal responsibility.

Involvement in activities such as the peace movement allowed Spock to be at ease with himself. He felt that he was contributing to the good of mankind, and he was pleased that he was not being reimbursed for his efforts. He commented to his biographer Lynn Z. Bloom that he felt contented with his activism for peace, because it salved his “harsh, chronically dissatisfied conscience”.¹¹

Perhaps, Benjamin Spock’s humanitarian activities were not in line with those of the majority of doctors of his time; but in many ways, he fitted a time-honored pattern. Along with well-known people such as Erich Lindemann, Karl Menninger, and John C. Rock, Spock belonged to a national group of doctors known as Physicians for Social Responsibility. Their chief concern was the possible impact of chemical, biological, and radiological warfare. Writing in the mid-1970s, Eugene P. Link described Spock as representing an American tradition originated by people such as Doctor Benjamin Rush, an early American patriot. In his article on Spock for the *Encyclopedia of American Biography*, Link pointed out that Spock fitted the standard in that he came out of an elite background, but that he was “strongly democratic and humanitarian in action as well as in word

11. Bloom, *Doctor Spock*, 95.

throughout his life". Link noted that Spock had "joined a select, but distinguished company of predecessors who ministered to the body politic as well as the body physical".¹²

"RETIRING" TO THE POLITICAL ARENA

After his retirement from Western Reserve in 1967, Spock continued his writing although his life became increasingly involved in third-party politics in the national arena. During the same year, Spock co-chaired the National Conference for a New Politics, in which a varied assemblage of people concerned with civil rights, poverty, and anti-war protest formed a loose coalition to express their convictions and to take courses of action that were at variance with the political mainstream. This volatile group represented many of the hopes that had been ignited earlier in the work of leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr.; but its days of major national influence were numbered. After King's assassination, the upheaval at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Nixon's election, and the killings at Kent State and Jacksonville, the group coalesced sufficiently to nominate Spock as the Presidential standard-bearer for the People's Party in 1972, and in 1976 he was nominated to be a vice-presidential candidate.

The year 1976 witnessed two other bench marks in Spock's life. He made the substantial so-called feminist revision of *Baby and Child Care*, in which he reflected an increased sensitivity to feminist criticisms of his book. Also, he divorced Jane Cheney. During the same year, he married Mary Morgan.

In the 1980s, prior to beginning the revision for the fortieth anniversary edition of *Baby and Child Care*, Spock took another momentous step. With the careful assistance of his wife Mary, he selected a collaborator for the new edition. Pediatrician and child psychologist Michael B. Rothenberg, whom Benjamin had first met in 1955, became the co-author of the revised and updated version of *Baby and Child Care*. As a nationally recognized advocate for children's health care, Rothenberg fitted the mold established so long before. However, to insure that the readership would not desert, the

12. Eugene P. Link, "Spock, Benjamin McLane", in John A. Garraty, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 1021-22.



Benjamin Spock at the tiller of his yacht *Turtle*.

cover was set up to read *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care*, though the title page in fact remained as it was. In spite of his controversial politics and his retirement to a boat in the Virgin Islands, the phrase "According to Dr. Spock" thus continues to be uttered in millions of homes throughout the world.

THE SPOCK COLLECTION AT SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

At present, the Benjamin Spock Papers comprise 108 linear feet of documents presented to Syracuse University in three donations.

Additions to these papers are expected. The original and largest donation occupies 63.75 linear feet and dates to 1968. Most of the papers are from the mid-1940s onward and are organized into the following five groups: Correspondence, Medical Reference Files, Memorabilia, Subject Files, and Writings. The Correspondence files (boxes 1–26), which are arranged by date, contain letters written to Spock, as well as a larger number of typescript copies and handwritten drafts of his replies. Much of the early correspondence relates to Spock's dealings with his publishers and to the various child health programs with which he was involved; but the later papers also contain a good deal of political material associated with the various groups with which he was affiliated. There are many letters from parents and from politically interested people from all over the world, including a good number from prominent figures, such as: Taylor Caldwell, Norman Cousins, Margaret Mead, Ho Chi Minh, child psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, sex educator Dr. Mary S. Calderone, politicians J. William Fulbright, Hubert Humphrey, John and Robert Kennedy, and union leader Walter Reuther.

The second donation of papers takes up 37 linear feet. It contains material spanning the years 1951 to 1976, but is concentrated largely in the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. As such, it pertains to Spock's presidential candidacy and includes photographs, cartoons, caricatures, and hate-mail sent to Spock. There are also newspaper clippings and many articles about Spock, along with articles and books by him. Financial and legal papers, memorabilia, and audiovisual materials round out this portion of the papers.

The third donation of papers occupies 7 linear feet. It consists of material which had been in the possession of Spock's biographer Dr. Lynn Z. Bloom and covers the years 1963 to 1971. Included are correspondence, published materials, some of Spock's writings and notes, Bloom's own notes and typescript, biographical transcripts, interview materials, and audio recordings made in the late 1960s.