

STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

# The Annals of Iowa

---

Volume 69 | Number 4 (Fall 2010)

pps. 469-471

---

## Science in the Service of Children, 1893–1935

Hamilton Cravens  
*Iowa State University*

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2010 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

---

### Recommended Citation

Cravens, Hamilton. "Science in the Service of Children, 1893–1935." *The Annals of Iowa* 69 (2010), 469-471.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1491>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](http://iowa-research-online.org)

new opportunities for American Catholic women. Cummings cautions her readers not to laden the women with twenty-first-century expectations. She presents them as they were — late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women who accepted the hierarchical structures of their church and found friendship with men who often failed to acknowledge their accomplishments. They also experienced the complexity of gender relationships within their own organizations and religious communities.

*New Women of the Old Faith* deserves careful study and praise from scholars of American Catholicism, gender studies, and U.S. history. Cummings's work is a tour de force for two reasons. First, she contributes to an already rich and growing scholarship that challenges the assumption that Catholic women, as members of a patriarchal church, were incapable of genuine work on the behalf of women. Second, *New Women of the Old Faith* is a ground-breaking contribution to gender studies. Cummings proves that the power of religious identity, often neglected in gender analysis, is a decisive component in understanding women's gender relationships and life work.

Cummings's text is a pleasure to read; each chapter is a "page turner" that will capture the interest of both armchair and professional historians. *New Women of the Old Faith* entices scholars to pursue further analysis of Catholic women as protagonists in the shaping of American Catholicism and the United States.

*Science in the Service of Children, 1893–1935*, by Alice Boardman Smuts. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. xiv, 381 pp. Illustrations, table, notes, index. \$32.00 paper.

Reviewer Hamilton Cravens is professor of history at Iowa State University. He is the author of *Before Head Start: The Iowa Station & America's Children* (1993).

Alice Boardman Smuts has written an excellent book on a very important subject: the complex history of the launching of the sciences of the child in America. Readers of the *Annals of Iowa* should know that our state played a formative role in this story through the establishment of the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station at the University of Iowa in 1917, the first such scientific research institution in the world. The Iowa Station was, quite literally, the pioneer, the trailblazer, in the field, and Smuts provides an able summary of that history. Readers will find this book engagingly written and absorbing in its content.

What Smuts does, and does well, is to identify and describe the myriad persons, institutions, and movements that came together to create this fascinating interdisciplinary science — child development

— and its applied social technology, parent education. In her words, there were three movements and one goal: the creation of a science of the child. The first of these movements consisted of several components, including, between 1893 and 1910, the emergence of social feminism and social research; psychologist G. Stanley Hall and his erratic leadership of the child study movement; the precipitation of various groups interested in scientific childrearing, organizing mothers, and parent education; and the contributions of social workers and reform-minded scientists. Having traversed this material myself, I congratulate Smuts on writing this part of the history clearly and succinctly — based on assiduous research.

In the book's second part, covering the years 1910–1921, Smuts turns to the founding institutions of child development: the Children's Bureau, under Julia Lathrop's fine leadership; the child guidance movement, which grew out of the uses of psychiatry to "solve" juvenile delinquency; and the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station. Here again Smuts does a fine job of summarizing complex and seemingly inchoate developments and fitting them into a clear mosaic of description of key patterns.

In the book's last part, comprising six chapters and about half the text, we learn how the child sciences were developed, especially institutionally, with the role of private philanthropy, especially the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, in child development, and the Commonwealth Fund, which supported the child guidance movement, all between the 1920s and the 1940s. A brief epilogue carries the story down to present times.

Whether to devote as much research and space to the more recent period was something I struggled with in my book on the Iowa Station; I agree with Smuts that the post-World War II history of the field is truly another story worth a separate book. I am also glad that Smuts has written the book she has, with the kind of general coverage she has provided. I had thought that I might write such a work after I finished my book, but life has a way of upending one's plans. We can all be grateful that Smuts has persevered and written this book, which was quite a challenge, given the convoluted history she manages to describe so engagingly.

Two authors can go over the same or closely related materials and decide that they have their own purposes, which can differ, sometimes dramatically. Smuts clearly identifies with and admires the people in her story. She accepts the basic premises under which they functioned and approves of their goals, by and large. She is more interested in describing how the nation "got" its child development science and its

institutions than in probing its intellectual history, investigating the inevitable conflicts and tensions in depth, or setting it into a larger context of science and social attitudes, not to mention academic, philanthropic, or governmental issues, conflicts, and the like. Thus her interesting chapter on Arnold Gesell misses the methodological criticism of Gesell's successor, Milton J. E. Senn, that Gesell used the same few individual children to set his norms, for he had no understanding of what a random sample was. This is not to be critical of Smuts; she has written a fine, useful book that needs no defense. It is just that she has made some choices about what to include and what not to include. That is fair enough.

*The William Howard Taft Presidency*, by Lewis L. Gould. American Presidency Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009. xv, 269 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Karen A. J. Miller is associate professor of history at Oakland University. She is the author of *Populist Nationalism: Republican Insurgency and American Foreign Policy Making, 1918–1925* (1999).

In an effort to “refresh” volumes in its American presidency series, the University Press of Kansas is replacing some of its earliest studies with new ones that reflect contemporary directions in scholarship. As one of the foremost scholars of politics at the beginning of the twentieth century, Lewis Gould is well positioned to write this concise yet authoritative account of William Howard Taft's presidency.

Gould has set out to explain why Taft was a lesser light of the Progressive Era. Abandoning the dismissive language that pervades some of the older scholarship, Gould does not blame Taft's failings on a lethargic sensibility, the absence of a brilliant intellect, or a lack of interest in the presidency. Instead, he views Taft as a politician who did a creditable job but failed to negotiate the political turmoil of his time.

In 1908 William Howard Taft's political career seemed blessed. A confidant of Theodore Roosevelt, he had secured the president's support for the Republican presidential nomination. Roosevelt's efforts on behalf of Taft were an extraordinary asset to his campaign. From the moment of his election, however, Taft's charmed political life began to slip away.

Taft inherited a party that was torn by dissension. Congressional progressives from the Midwest were already challenging conservative party leadership. The first legislative battle facing Taft was tariff reform. Gould regards the Payne-Aldrich Tariff debates as “a self-inflicted wound that shaped the rest of the presidency” (51). His description