



You Can Help Your Country: English Children's Work During the Second World War

Berry Mayall, Virginia Morrow

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Using a rich collection of archives, school histories, photographs and memoirs, this book charts and discusses the contributions English children made to the war effort during World War II. As men and women were increasingly called up for war work, as the country needed to grow as much food as possible, and as the war effort required ever increasing funds, children were the last resource. Many of them worked on the land, planting and harvesting crops, they raised large sums for the war, and they carried out a range of other tasks.

This book not only examines the lives of children during WWII in unprecedented detail, but also it sheds light on the role of children in society generally. The inter-war years were a time when the character and proper activities of childhood were being debated. While protecting the next generation of citizens through evacuation was one strand in thinking, commentators in education and workers' organizations debated whether children should be mainly regarded as learners at school, or could combine that kind of activity with war-related work. This asked a question that still has relevance today: should children be conceptualized as citizens for the future or as participating citizens now?

This debate leads to even larger questions about the social construction of childhood. As children have increasingly been withdrawn from paid and unpaid work, their contribution can be understood through their work at school; though this is often disguised or devalued since adults may conceptualize it as socialization by adults. The inter-war years and the war years in England were a key time for re-thinking childhood, and the issues that were raised then still have relevance to the role of children in society today.

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