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Review of *Children of the Western Plains: The Nineteenth Century Experience* By Marilyn Irvin Holt

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Whether they lived on the Great Plains during pre-territorial, territorial, or early statehood periods, youngsters received attention from adults who often tried to replicate life back home. Immigrants and African Americans attempted to preserve their own traditions and customs even if they lived in a dominantly white American town. Sometimes whole communities relocated together, and bigotry and racism varied among the settlements. Children’s lives revolved around home—whether they lived in dugouts, soddies, or adobe dwellings—and church and community families. Adults built schools, organized Sunday schools, and provided church and social opportunities. Education emphasized basic skills and literacy and varied from home schooling to classroom instruction, depending upon population. Early settlement children learned to work, and they found time to play. They also knew droughts and blizzards, “quitters and stickers,” family crises and separations, illness and death.

Young people wrote diaries, letters, and journals, and reminiscences later as adults. Through these primary documents and a number of contemporary photographs, Holt paints a picture of childhood on the Plains. She does not mention, however, how many primary sources she analyzed. How many of these records were actually written by children? How many were reminiscences with a “child-turned-adult” perspective? From the notes section it appears the author used at least sixteen diaries and letters and sixty-nine reminiscences. She also includes several secondary references that deal with overland migration and frontier families in the Plains and Western states, though she overlooked Children’s Voices from the Trail (2002), which examines the child’s perspective of the westward movement and might have been useful to her study. Even so, Children of the Western Plains is a worthwhile addition to the growing collection of literature about youngsters in the nineteenth-century American West.

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