

Syracuse University

SURFACE

The Courier

Libraries

1995

Dr. Freud and Dr. Spock

James Sullivan
Rutgers University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/libassoc>



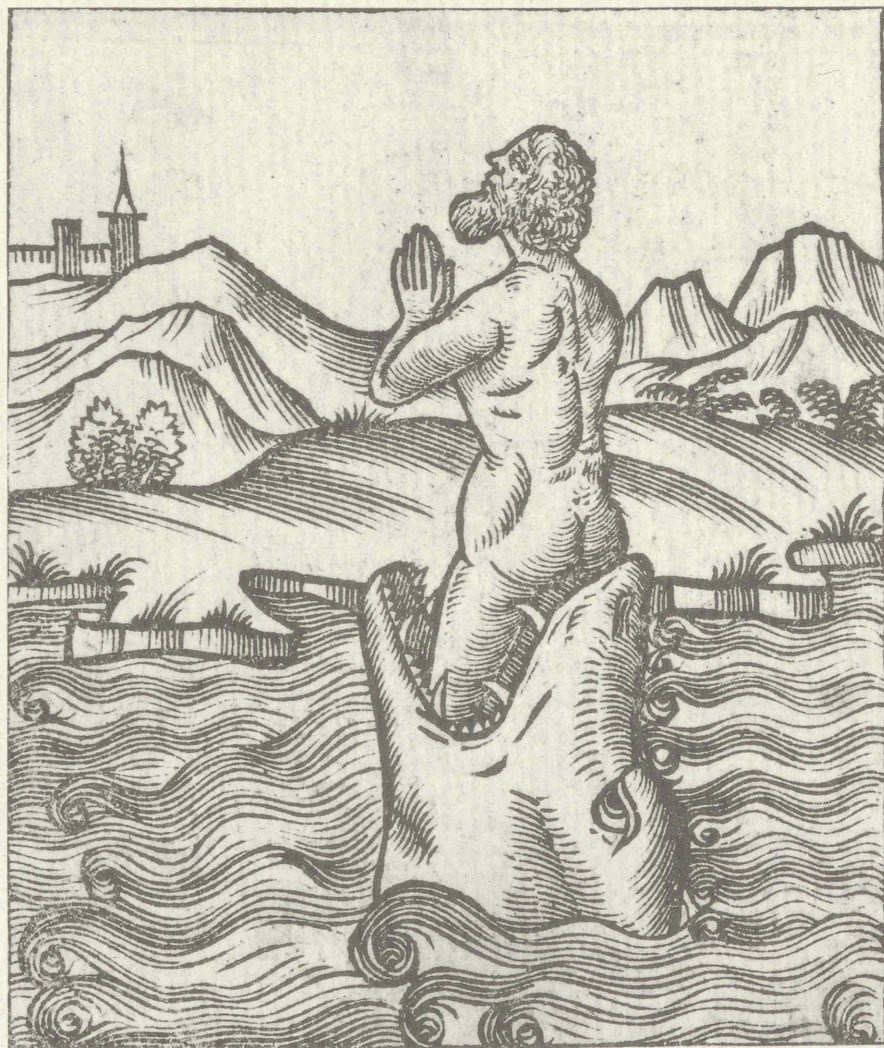
Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sullivan, James, "Dr. Freud and Dr. Spock" (1995). *The Courier*. 328.
<https://surface.syr.edu/libassoc/328>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Libraries at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Courier by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY ASSOCIATES
C O U R I E R



VOLUME XXX · 1995

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY ASSOCIATES
COURIER

VOLUME XXX • 1995

- An Interview with Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie
By Paul J. Archambault, Professor of French, Syracuse University 5
The renowned historian Le Roy Ladurie dicusses his influences, his writing, his career as scholar and director of the Bibliothèque Nationale, and his views on Europe's religious, economic, and political inheritance.
- Gustav Stickley and Irene Sargent: United Crafts and
The Craftsman
By Cleota Reed, Research Associate in Fine Arts, Syracuse University 35
Reed sheds light on the important role played by Irene Sargent, a Syracuse University fine arts professor, in the creation of Gustav Stickley's Arts and Crafts publications.
- An Interview with Thomas Moore
By Alexandra Eyle, Free-Lance Writer 51
Introduction by David Miller, Professor of Religion, Syracuse University
Moore talks about readers' reactions to his best-selling books, the contemporary hunger for meaning, his "nonmodel" of therapy, and his own circuitous path to success.
- Dr. Freud and Dr. Spock
By James Sullivan, Doctoral Candidate, Rutgers University 75
Sullivan explains how Benjamin Spock translated psychoanalytic ideas about adults into practical advice for raising healthy children, and how Freud's ideas also influenced Spock's political philosophy.
- Arna Bontemps's Creole Heritage
By Charles L. James, Professor of English, Swarthmore College 91
James traces the lives of Bontemps's central Louisiana ancestors and the social upheavals they endured before, during, and after the Civil War.

- Peaks of Joy, Valleys of Despair: The History of the
Syracuse University Library from 1871 to 1907
By David H. Stam, University Librarian, Syracuse
University 117
- Drawing on a variety of sources, Stam presents engaging samples of life in
the early days of the Syracuse University Library.
- The Planning and Funding of the E. S. Bird Library
By John Robert Greene, Professor of History, Cazenovia 135
College and Karrie Anne Baron, student, SUNY Geneseo
- Greene and Baron tell the story of how Chancellor William P. Tolley
willed the E. S. Bird Library into existence.
- Belfer Audio Archive: Our Cultural Heritage in Sound
By John Harvith, Executive Director of National 147
Media Relations, Syracuse University
- Harvith reveals how romance led to his discovery of the Belfer Audio
Laboratory and Archive, and what he found therein.
- Standing Where Roads Converge: The Thomas Merton
Papers at Syracuse University
By Terrance Keenan, Special Collections Librarian, 157
Syracuse University Library
- Keenan describes the contents of the Thomas Merton Papers, focusing
on Merton's ideas about Zen Buddhism.
- News of the Library and of Library Associates 163
- Post-Standard Award Citation, 1995, for Daniel W. Casey
Recent Acquisitions:
Research and Design Institute Collection
Virginia Insley Collection on Public Health Social Work
Donald C. Stone Papers
From the Collections
Two Poems by Robert Southwell
A Declaration of Loyalty to Country, 1775
Introducing The Library of Modern Jewish Literature
Library Associates Program for 1995-96

Dedicated to William Pearson Tolley (1900-1996)

Dr. Freud and Dr. Spock

BY JAMES SULLIVAN

ON THE AFTERNOON of 11 July 1971, Dr. Benjamin Spock braced himself for his address to the National Women's Political Caucus in Washington, D.C. The audience was hostile; Spock meant to speak on behalf of a coalition of progressive political parties, but the women seated before him had not forgiven Spock for the sexism that slanted his famous child-rearing advice. Some women walked out as he began speaking. When he concluded, Spock gripped the podium as Gloria Steinem, founder of *Ms.* magazine, rose from the middle of the audience and thundered, "Dr. Spock, I hope you realize you have been a major oppressor of women in the same category as Sigmund Freud!" Spock hung his head in shame, or so some believed. Actually he was looking down at the lectern, trying to compose some response, and feeling a little proud to be placed in the same category as Dr. Freud.¹

Steinem's denunciation hit the mark; the theories of Freud, known broadly as psychoanalysis, formed the foundation of Spock's pediatric advice and political philosophy. In the 1930s Spock had studied psychoanalysis at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute while practicing pediatrics. In 1946 Spock published *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, which translated psychoanalytic theories about adult neuroses into practical advice for

James Sullivan received a B.A. and an M.A. in United States history from the University of Florida. He is currently finishing a Ph.D. at Rutgers University, where he is writing his dissertation about Dr. Spock, popular psychology, and political culture.

Note: The author thanks Kimberly Brodtkin for her helpful suggestions and claims persistent weaknesses as his own.

1. *Washington Post*, 12 July 1971; Benjamin M. Spock, telephone interview by author, 26 January 1994. Steinem's quote is in Mary Morgan and Benjamin M. Spock, *Spock on Spock: A Memoir of Growing Up with the Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 247–8. Note that Spock's memoir errs on the date and that in July 1971 Spock was not yet a candidate for the U.S. presidency.

raising children. A milestone in pediatrics, *Baby and Child Care* reflected the broader impact on professional medicine of Freud's work, which marked the transition from a strictly biological understanding of mental phenomena to a more psychological approach. Psychoanalysis informed Spock's politics as well, shaping his critique of the United States war in Vietnam and of the emerging feminist movement.²

Psychoanalysis arrived on American shores in 1909. In the autumn of that year Freud made his first and only visit to the United States where he delivered five lectures on psychoanalysis as part of the twentieth anniversary celebration of the founding of Clark University. Dr. Granville Stanley Hall, the president of Clark and a key figure in the founding of experimental psychology in the United States, had invited Freud to present his then-new theories to an audience of prominent American academics and medical practitioners. Carl Jung and Sandor Ferenczi accompanied Freud, and, along with the eminent American academic William James, all were house guests of Hall in the small Massachusetts city of Worcester, forty miles outside of Boston. Each morning, while walking through the surrounding woodlands, Freud composed his thoughts for the day's lecture, which he delivered extempore in German. Gratified by the respect accorded him at Clark, Freud approached each day eager to persuade his audience, and the introductory lectures he delivered there remain perhaps the clearest exposition of early psychoanalytic theory on record.³

2. Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1945). A similar argument may be found in A. Michael Sulman, "The Freudianization of the American Child: The Impact of Psychoanalysis in Popular Periodical Literature in the United States, 1919-1939," (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1972).

3. *Boston Evening Transcript*, 8 September 1909; *Ibid.*, 11 September 1909. Freud's lectures were published in English as Sigmund Freud, "The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis," *The American Journal of Psychology* 21 (April 1910): 181-218; and Freud, "Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis," in James Strachey, ed. and trans., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), 111:1-58. Hereafter *The Standard Edition* will be referred to as SE. An exhaustive account of the Clark Conference may be found in Saul Rosenzweig, *Freud, Jung, and Hall the King-Maker: The His-*

Before the Clark Conference in 1909, only a handful of American doctors had heard anything of Freud's work, and even in Europe Freud's ideas had gained little acceptance. Before the advent of dynamic psychology, medical professionals understood mental disorders almost exclusively in terms of biological mechanics. That is, doctors assumed that all mental phenomena were the result of the physical operation of the nervous system, and they strove to manipulate the tangible world of the body to achieve cures in the more elusive realm of the mind. This strictly biological approach facilitated experimentation and observation, distinguishing neurology, psychiatry, and psychology as "scientific" pursuits and separating medical professionals from spiritual healers, exorcists, and various other lay enthusiasts. Unfortunately, medicine's commitment to a physiological etiology of mental disorders led to discouragingly few effective treatments; prescriptions of diet, massage, exercise, or bed rest did little for those suffering from emotional or neurological disturbances. In the first decades of the twentieth century, physicians in the field of mental health were searching for new ways of thinking that promised results, and a small number of doctors on both sides of the Atlantic were moving beyond the mechanistic, biological approach to consider the dynamic, psychological explanations offered by Freud and his pupils.⁴

toric Expedition to America, 1909 (Seattle: Hogrefe and Huber, 1992). Also very helpful are Nathan G. Hale Jr., *Freud and the Americans: The Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in the United States, 1876–1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 3–23; Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Basic Books, 1953), 265–9. Also see John Chynoweth Burnham, *Psychoanalysis and American Medicine: 1894–1918* (New York: International Universities Press, 1967), 7, 11, 27–8; Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 801–2; Reuben Fine, *The History of Psychoanalysis* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Inc., 1979), 76; Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek, *Freud and America* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 27–42.

4. Burnham, 53–8; Gerald Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965); Hale, 24–97; Rosenzweig, 15–6; Ruitenbeek, 47–54; Barbara Sicherman, "The New Psychiatry: Medical and Behavioral Science, 1895–1921," in Jacques M. Quen and Eric T. Carlson, eds., *American Psychoanalysis: Origins and Development* (New York: Brunner/Mazel,

Three of the most important figures in the growth of psychoanalysis in the United States heard Freud speak at Clark. James Jackson Putnam, a prominent Boston physician and professor of neurology at Harvard, capped a long and distinguished career by rejecting much of his own teaching to become the first president of the American Psychoanalytic Association. His unimpeachable reputation helped avert Victorian objections to the sexual content of Freudian psychology and assured that psychoanalysis would receive serious consideration. Adolf Meyer, the administrator of the New York State Psychiatric Institute and later the chairman of the Psychiatry Department at Johns Hopkins, also lent his considerable reputation to psychoanalysis. Meyer required that a generation of medical students familiarize themselves with Freud's work, and several of Meyer's students went on to become important figures in the American psychoanalytic movement. Abraham Arden Brill had already studied with Jung at Burghölzi, Switzerland, and had taken the lead in translating Freud's work into English. In 1911 Brill founded the New York Psychoanalytic Society, and in 1931 the Society opened the New York Psychoanalytic Institute. Dedicated to training psychoanalysts, the Institute amassed perhaps the largest library of psychoanalytic material in the world and attracted many of the best medical students in the area to its seminars at 247 East 82nd Street.⁵

It was here that Spock gained his formal education in psychoanalytic theory and practice. In 1932, after completing his training at Yale Medical School and Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons and finishing a residency in pediatrics, Spock took another residency in psychiatry at the Payne Whitney Clinic in New York

1978), 20–37; Sicherman, “The Quest for Mental Health in America, 1880–1917,” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1968); Garfield Tourney, “History of Biological Psychiatry in America,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 126 (July 1969): 29–42.

5. Samuel Atkin, “The New York Psychoanalytic Society and Institute: Its Founding and Development,” in Quen and Carlson, 73–86; Burnham, “The Influence of Psychoanalysis upon American Culture,” in Quen and Carlson, 52–72; Burnham, *Psychoanalysis and American Medicine*, 13–46; Hale, 17–8, 370–7, 389–96; Ruitenbeek, 43–58.

City. At the clinic, colleagues trained in psychoanalysis impressed Spock with the sense they made of their patients' problems. In 1933 Spock opened his own pediatric practice and pursued his interest in Freud's ideas by enrolling in the Psychoanalytic Institute. Spock attended two seminars each week, and, as was expected of everyone at the Institute, Spock underwent analysis himself, with Bertram Lewin and Sandor Rado, two well known figures in the psychoanalytic movement. In the five years that Spock spent there, the Institute became a world-class center of psychoanalysis as the New York Psychoanalytic Society incorporated colleagues fleeing Hitler's Germany. The New York Institute also became famous for its loyalty to Freudian orthodoxy, even as the psychoanalytic movement splintered in Europe. Through his affiliation at the Institute, Spock met people on the leading edge of psychology and progressive education, he began lifelong friendships with Margaret Mead and Erik Erikson, and he received the best training available in the United States in psychoanalysis.⁶

But nobody at the Psychoanalytic Institute could tell Spock what he really wanted to know; no one could translate psychoanalytic ideas about adults into practical advice for raising psychologically healthy children. Freudian theory held that a patient's psychological disturbance originated in some earlier traumatic episode, and frequently this trauma was thought to have occurred as early as childhood or even infancy. Psychoanalysts, however, had focused on diagnosis and treatment, not prevention. They agreed, for example, that some adult psychological problems derived from a too forceful or too early weaning from a mother's breast, but no psychoanalyst could say when the right time was for weaning. Toilet training could lead to problems as well, but again, psychoanalysts had no advice for parents.⁷

Spock was one of the first people to stand at the crossroads of pediatrics and psychoanalysis. As a practicing pediatrician, Spock

6. Atkin, 77–82; Lynn Z. Bloom, *Doctor Spock: Biography of a Conservative Radical* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1972), 70–5; Hale, 322–5; George H. Pollock, "The Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis from 1932 to the Present," in Quen and Carlson, 121–4; Morgan and Spock, 91–110.

7. Bloom, 83–5; Morgan and Spock, 101–3, 129–31.

dealt with babies, children, and their parents every day, and as a convinced Freudian, Spock struggled to turn psychoanalytic theory into sound pediatric advice. Through eleven years of professional practice he had developed his ideas as well as a knack for explaining them in a simple and reassuring manner. He had published a handful of articles on various aspects of “preventative psychiatry,” and finally, in 1946 he brought his ideas together in *Baby and Child Care*.⁸

The psychoanalytic foundation of Spock’s famous child-rearing manual remains visible in his treatment of a number of topics: childish interest in genitalia (it’s natural), a father’s role (it’s vital), sharing the parents’ bed (don’t do it). But Spock’s advice on infant feeding and toilet training are particularly revealing. Both of these timeless topics also illustrate the larger impact of Freud’s ideas on child-rearing advice in the United States.⁹

In the fifty years before the publication of *Baby and Child Care*, the most popular child-rearing manuals demanded that mothers feed their infants according to a rigid schedule. Spock’s own mother, for example, raised Spock according to Dr. Luther Emmet Holt’s *The Care and Feeding of Children*, perhaps the best known child-rearing manual in the first years of the twentieth century. Holt urged mothers to begin a regular feeding schedule “during the first week of life,” feeding infants “every two hours during the day, twice during the night, or ten feedings during the twenty-four hours.” Holt provided an elaborate chart that allowed mothers to

8. For example, Mabel Huschka and Spock, “The Psychological Aspects of Pediatric Practice,” in *Practitioners Library of Medicine and Surgery* (New York: D. Appleton Century Co., 1938) 13:757–808; Spock, “Emotional Health of Children as Viewed by the Modern School Physician,” *Progressive Education* 17 (March 1940): 186–90; Spock, “Weaning the Baby,” *The Parents’ Magazine*, March 1941, 21–99; Spock, “Notes on the Psychology of Circumcision, Masturbation and Enuresis,” *The Urologic and Cutaneous Review* 46 (1942): 768–70; Spock, “The Occasions when Feeding Problems Begin,” *Nervous Child* 3 (April 1944): 162–4; Spock, “Avoiding Behavior Problems,” *Journal of Pediatrics* 27 (October 1945): 363–82.

9. Similar themes are explored in Mary Ellen Hubbard, “Benjamin Spock, M. D.: The Man and His Work in Historical Perspective,” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1981), 71–7.

calculate the amount of food and the correct interval between feedings based on an infant's age.¹⁰

In 1928 Dr. John B. Watson, a behavioral psychologist at Johns Hopkins University, superseded Holt's work with his manual *Psychological Care of the Infant and Child*, but Watson too urged a regular regime of feeding. "Modern training calls always for an orderly life," Watson averred, and like Holt before him, Watson implied that deviating from an infant's regular feeding schedule could lead to a lifetime of bad habits and weak character.¹¹ Strict regularity in infant feeding seemed a sensible practice in an age when babies frequently died of diarrhea. In the first decades of the twentieth century, after pasteurized milk became the standard, the incidence of infant diarrhea declined, but strict regularity in feeding had become traditional wisdom. Likewise, the belief that regularity in feeding led to strength of character reflected the mechanistic, biological axioms of an earlier era of psychology.¹²

In *Baby and Child Care* Spock repudiated strict feeding schedules in favor of a more flexible approach, which reflected psychoanalytic ideas about infant psychological development. Freud had proposed that in the first year of life an infant experiences the world primarily through its mouth, and through experiencing some mixture of pleasure and pain in this "oral stage" a person forms fundamental assumptions about the nature of the world and its likelihood to satisfy or frustrate.¹³ On this basis, Spock advised that lockstep regularity in feeding was much less important than a positive expe-

10. Luther E. Holt, *The Care and Feeding of Children: A Catechism for the Use of Mothers and Children's Nurses* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1894), 35-7.

11. John B. Watson, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1928), 121, 3-10, 113-51.

12. J. W. Schereschewsky, "Heat and Infant Mortality," *Public Health Reports*, 5 December 1913, 2595-621; Wrynn Smith, *Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Infant Mortality: A Profile of Health and Disease in America* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1987), 25-6, 32-3.

13. See for example Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, SE, 7:197-8; "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," SE, 17:106-8; *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, SE, 22:97-100, 122-3; *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, SE, 23:153-4.

rience during feeding. Spock explained that, for the infant, “feeding is his great joy.” A baby nurses not only “because he is hungry,” but also “because he *loves* to suck,” and “he gets his early ideas about life from the way feeding goes.”¹⁴ Without mentioning Freud or resorting to jargon, Spock brought a psychoanalytic understanding of infant psychology to his readers.

A baby is meant to spend his first year getting hungry, demanding food, enjoying it, reaching satisfaction—a lusty success story, repeated at least three times a day, week after week. It builds into him self-confidence, outgoingness, trust in his mother. But if mealtime becomes a struggle, if feeding becomes something that is done to him, he goes on the defensive and builds up a balky, suspicious attitude toward life and toward people.¹⁵

With this perspective, Spock simply advised parents to feed an infant when the infant seemed hungry. While he cautioned against grossly over or under feeding, he emphasized satisfaction for hungry babies in order to inculcate in them a “positive feeling for life.”¹⁶ Spock thereby ushered in the now common practice of “demand feeding,” but the logic behind this practice remains essentially Freudian.

The influence of psychoanalytic ideas upon toilet-training advice provides a parallel example. At the turn of the century, Holt declared that an infant should be using a toilet “easily by the third month if training is begun early” and urged that baby bowels should “move at exactly the same time every day.”¹⁷ Watson’s advice specified that baby bladders “only” should be relieved at 6:30 a.m. and bowels at 8:00 a.m. Watson suggested that the baby be strapped into a special toilet seat and then “left in the bathroom without toys and with the door closed” until the deed was done. “Under no circumstances,” Watson proclaimed, “should the door be left open or the mother or nurse stay with the child,” warning

14. Spock, *Baby and Child Care*, 23–4.

15. *Ibid.*, 81.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Holt, 50.



Dr. Benjamin Spock with a young patient and her mother (undated photo by Harold Corsini; courtesy of Syracuse University Library).

that such practices lead “to dawdling, loud conversation,” and “in general to unsocial and dependent behavior.”¹⁸ Neither Watson nor Holt distinguished between children of different ages; they each prescribed a single routine to be learned early and maintained strictly. And neither Watson nor Holt explained their emphases on bowel regularity or its links to a disciplined character, perhaps because, after a century of American fascination with matters digestive, such opinions seemed self-evidently sensible.

Informed by psychoanalytic theory, Spock broke from the tradition of strict toilet discipline and advised parents “to leave bowel training almost entirely up to your baby.”¹⁹ Freud had theorized that in the second year of life a baby outgrows oral fascinations and focuses upon consciously controlling the rest of the body. Freud called this the “anal stage” in reference to the child’s new-found control over bowel movements, and Freud held that the balance of frustration and satisfaction experienced in this stage shaped a person’s basic ability to cooperate with others, negotiate new situations, and cope with life’s imperfections.²⁰ Spock, therefore, assured parents that the timing or strictness of toilet training was less important than “how you go about it.” Harsh training, Spock wrote, “goes right against [a] baby’s grain at this age,” because “in the second year” a baby begins “to gain more control” and be “more independent.” A baby “can hold back on the movement at one time and push with a will at another.” So, Spock urged, parents should maintain a “casual” approach and “never make an issue of the toilet or shame the baby when he fails or has an accident.”²¹ Spock also included a warning which spelled out the psychoanalytic position.

When a baby gets into a real battle with his mother, it is not just the training which suffers, but also his personality. First of all, he becomes too obstinate, gets in a mood to say “no”

18. Watson, 121–2.

19. Spock, *Baby and Child Care*, 196.

20. See for example Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, SE, 7:185–7, 197–9, 239 n. 1; “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,” SE, 17:72; “On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism,” SE, 17:127; *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, SE, 22:102.

21. Spock, *Baby and Child Care*, 193–8.

to everything, whether he means it or not. (We all know grownups who are still automatically saying “no” to every request.) He becomes too hostile and “fighty.”²²

Spock cautioned further that shaming a child about soiling may lead the child “to dread *all* kinds of dirtiness,” and “if this worrisomeness is deeply implanted at an early age, it’s apt to turn him into a fussy, finicky person—the kind who’s afraid to enjoy himself or try anything new, the kind who is unhappy unless everything is ‘just so.’” To avoid these pitfalls, Spock advised a relaxed approach to toilet training designed to encourage a child to feel capable and in control, an approach derived from psychoanalytic theory.²³

Baby and Child Care became the best-selling book in United States history, making Spock a household name, and Spock traded on this celebrity status to support his political convictions. A Democrat since 1928, Spock was famous enough by the 1950s to make public appearances in support of Adlai Stevenson. In 1960 Spock and Jacqueline Kennedy arranged a televised meeting to support her husband’s candidacy; and in 1962, in response to President Kennedy’s announcement that the United States would resume atmospheric testing of atomic weapons, Spock joined the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) and became a prominent figure in the peace movement. In 1964, after receiving a personal presidential promise to end United States involvement in Vietnam, Spock supported Lyndon Johnson. The following year, when Johnson vastly expanded the war effort, Spock redoubled his own efforts to arouse public opinion against the war. In January 1968 the federal government indicted Spock and four others for conspiring to counsel, aid, and abet resistance to the draft. A Boston jury convicted the five men, but in 1969 an appellate judge overturned the decision. In 1972 Spock ran for the United States presidency as a candidate for the People’s Party, a coalition of small, left-leaning political organizations; and throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s Spock has remained active in various progressive political causes.²⁴

22. *Ibid.*, 195.

23. *Ibid.*, 195–6.

24. Adelaide K. Eisenmann to Spock, 17 October 1960, Correspondence, 1–18

Spock's ideas evolved throughout this odyssey, but psychoanalytic theory provided the touchstone of his political philosophy as well as the foundation of his child-rearing advice. During Spock's training at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, doctrinaire Freudians presented psychoanalysis not simply as one perspective on personality development, but rather as the discovery of the true essence and operation of human nature, as a science proven by clinical evidence. Spock assimilated this position, and over the course of his professional career he found little reason to change his mind. In 1969 Spock based the most complete statement of his political philosophy, *Decent and Indecent: Our Personal and Political Behavior*, on psychoanalytic theory. In particular, Spock invoked Freud's theory of the "Oedipus complex" to condemn both the war in Vietnam and the war between the sexes.²⁵

The Oedipus complex refers to parental relationships within the nuclear family as experienced by children between the ages of about three and six years. Freud argued that around this age children develop a strong, possessive, sexual attraction to the parent of the opposite sex and that this attraction generates feelings of rivalry and hostility toward the parent of the same sex. At the same time, however, children love, idealize, and strive to emulate the parent

October 1960, Benjamin Spock Papers, Syracuse University Library. Hereafter the Benjamin Spock Papers will be referred to as BSP. See the reverse side of Homer A. Jack to Spock, 29 January 1962, Correspondence, January 1962, BSP; Lyndon B. Johnson to Spock, 1 December 1964, Miscellaneous, 1964, BSP; Spock to Lyndon B. Johnson, 23 March 1965, Correspondence, 15–31 March 1965, BSP; John M. Bailey to Spock, 10 August 1966, Correspondence, 1–17 August 1966, BSP; Spock, "April 1968," one hand-written page in pencil, "Manifesto," Holograph and Draft A, BSP; Dorothy Plohn, "Whither the Third Party?" *The New Democrat*, Summer 1972, 34–5; Milton Viorst, "Meet the People's Party Candidate," *New York Times Magazine*, 4 June 1972, 42–58; Jessica Mitford, *The Trial of Dr. Spock, the Reverend William Sloane Coffin, Jr., Michael Ferber, Mitchell Goodman, and Marcus Raskin* (New York: Knopf, 1969); Bloom, 41, 189, 234–5, 239–43, 252–7, 281, 284–8, 303–22, 329–32, 337–40; Morgan and Spock, 96–7, 159–77, 195, 197–205, 211–9, 263, 265–6; Robert Richter, *Ben Spock: Baby Doctor*, film, 57 min. (Richter Productions, 1994).

25. Spock, *Decent and Indecent: Our Personal and Political Behavior* (New York: McCall, 1969).

of the same sex. This contradiction leads children to feel guilt about their hostility, to recognize their complete dependence, and to abandon their hopeless rivalry. In what Freud held to be the “normal” course of development, children repress their feelings of sexual attraction and hostility into their unconscious minds and sublimate (unconsciously redirect) the energy of those feelings into constructive pursuits that transcend the family.²⁶

According to Freud, however, childish notions about the difference between male and female genitalia lead little boys to develop differently from little girls. During the Oedipal stage, Freud asserted, a boy discovers that a girl lacks a penis, and because sexual difference and function remain a mystery to him, he imagines that she must have lost her penis through some injury. He proceeds to worry that he may lose his penis as well and so suffers from what Freud described as “castration anxiety.” This anxiety intensifies the Oedipal rivalry boys feel with their fathers; the stakes are higher in a boy’s imagined contest with his father because boys have something to lose. This leads boys to repress their feelings and sublimate their energies more vigorously than girls, which, Freud argued, helps explain why men devote their lives to more abstract concerns and to careers outside the home.²⁷ When a little girl discovers that some people have penises, Freud averred, she feels inferior, resentful, and envious, and she will remain psychologically crippled until she transforms her desire to have a penis into a desire to have a child.²⁸

In *Decent and Indecent*, Spock psychoanalyzed President Johnson

26. See for example Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 15 October 1897, SE, 1: 265; *The Interpretation of Dreams*, SE, 4:260–6; “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,” SE, 7:56–7; *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, SE, 7:226 n, 227–9; “‘A Child is Being Beaten’: A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions,” SE, 17:192–3; “The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex,” SE, 19:173–82; *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, SE, 22:128–30.

27. See for example Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, SE, 7:195; “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,” SE, 17:25; *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, SE, 22:85–7, 124–5.

28. See for example Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, SE, 22:101, 125–9, 132; “On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism,” SE, 17:129–32.

and the American body politic to uncover the psychological origins of the United States war in Vietnam. Spock followed Freud in arguing that the Oedipal rivalry coupled with castration anxiety resulted in a recurring need among men to prove their virility. In fact, “the adequacy of their virility” is “a core problem for men” persisting “throughout boyhood and manhood” and intensifying the impulse “to dominate,” which Spock called “the power drive.” Briefly reviewing the history of the Vietnam War, Spock argued further that Americans ascribed their “own hostility” to the Vietnamese communists, relieving their uncertainties and guilt by effectively blaming the victim in a “mental maneuver” called “projection.” Spock wondered whether “there will ever be a clearer example of how a nation lets itself in for war—through power striving and the paranoid projection of its own aggressiveness—than in America’s involvement in Vietnam.” Spock argued that “the most significant reason” for Johnson’s escalation of the war “was his excessive need to prove virility and to save face.” Spock believed that “capitalist imperialism has been immediately responsible” for United States aggression in Southeast Asia, but he concluded that “we have to admit that it is ultimately an aspect of the power drive latent in every individual and in every group of men.” In short, “it is criminal egotism on a monstrous scale.”²⁹

Spock’s Freudian perspective led to a more conservative argument concerning the growing feminist movement. Retelling the Oedipal drama, Spock noted that “in the rivalry with her mother” a little girl “does not feel nearly the degree of awe that the boy does for his father” because “she is not as subjected to the fear of future injury as he.” Because her sublimation is correspondingly less intense, “she is not as apt . . . to become fascinated with such particularly abstract subjects as mathematics and, later, physics and law,” and she is “less preoccupied . . . with trying to become a great artist, inventor, discoverer.” Spock surmised that women “have more passivity in the inborn core of their personality” and are “more compliant” and less “striving,” which meant that “women are usually more patient in working at unexciting, repetitive tasks.” Added to their “realism, sensibleness,” and “personalness,” such

29. Spock, *Decent and Indecent*, 52, 54, 110–1, 106, 108–9, 121, 125, 126, 159.

qualities made women “indispensable as wives, mothers, nurses, secretaries.” Spock deplored “the competitive type of feminism” which exaggerated “the rivalry between sexes” and he claimed “that psychologically the most vehement feminists were motivated not so much by altruism toward their own sex as by an unusually fierce envy of men.” Spock believed in equal pay for equal work, but he felt “it would be fairer” if society would place equal value on women’s traditional roles.³⁰

As a result of his encounter with Steinem and other feminists, Spock reexamined his beliefs as well as his role in perpetuating oppressive gender stereotypes, and in the early 1970s he changed his mind. He rewrote much of *Decent and Indecent* and became more thoughtful and vigorous in his political support of women’s rights. In 1976 Spock completed the fourth edition of *Baby and Child Care*. In this revision he dropped his assumption that mothers were primarily responsible for children, he reversed his suggestion that parents consciously reinforce gender identification, and he struggled to balance his use of gendered pronouns. In July 1982, the tenth anniversary edition of Steinem’s *Ms.* magazine listed Spock as one of their “male heroes” of feminism.³¹

The first generation of children raised “according to Dr. Spock” are now, many of them, grandparents, and still mothers and fathers are reaching for *Baby and Child Care*. Along with practical information, they imbibe the principles of psychoanalysis inherent in Spock’s advice. In the post-World War II era, references to psychoanalytic concepts have proliferated throughout United States culture; psychoanalysis has grown from an academic and clinical discourse into a broadly shared set of values, metaphors, and narratives through which Americans conceptualize personal and national development. In Spock’s work, we can begin to discern what this new way of thinking has clarified for us and what it has obscured.

30. *Ibid.*, 25–6, 45–6, 48, 58, 71, 61, 34.

31. Spock, “Male Chauvinist Spock Recants—Well, Almost,” *Sexual Behavior* (March 1972): 16–20; “Ms. Heroes,” *Ms.* (July/August 1982): 104; Spock, *Baby and Child Care* (New York: Pocket Books, 1976).