

Saucers (frisbees) than they bought Shindana's Black Wanda career dolls or Milton Bradley Company's nonsexist figures in Our Helpers Play People. Children have been and are agents in their own play and their use of playthings, and it is difficult to discern how much they appreciated and amused themselves with new, radical toys.

Goldberg has fashioned an important and enlightening study. His prose is free of jargon and highly readable, though he occasionally weights down his narrative with extra-long sentences. The documentation is full, and the bibliography includes a comprehensive list of primary and secondary sources. Goldberg also peppers the narrative with useful illustrations. *Radical Play* opens a new window onto toy culture, but more analysis of how children created their own toy and play culture is needed.

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—Howard P. Chudacoff, *Brown University, Providence, RI*

### **Dolls of Our Lives: Why We Can't Quit American Girl**

*Mary Mahoney and Allison Horrocks*

New York: Feiwel & Friends, 2023. Contents, introduction, acknowledgments, and images. 249 pp. \$28.99 cloth. ISBN: 9781250792839

As The Strong National Museum of Play's curator of dolls, I was responsible for the museum's acquisition of more than one thousand artifacts related to the American Girl doll series. The donor began collecting in 1986 when Pleasant Rowland launched the line of eighteen-inch dolls representing an era of America's past paired with

historical narratives and reproductions of accessories and clothing. I quickly understood that American Girl presents complicated messages about history, race, class, gender, and ethnicity. I was interested to see how historians Mary Mahoney and Allison Horrocks presented these topics in *Dolls of Our Lives: Why We Can't Quit American Girl*.

Mahoney and Horrocks began their American Girl dialog in the form of a podcast back in 2019, and the book reads much like a podcast transcript. It crosses between history, travelogue, and memoir to explore the American Girl brand. The book leads with a brief introduction and includes a section titled "Meet the Original-Generation-American Girls," which provides an overview of the six dolls that the authors were aware of during their own childhoods. Chapter 1, aptly called "Meet Us," continues with a lengthy discussion of what led Mahoney and Horrocks to write the book. It is evident that the authors intended to make history accessible and digestible, but much of the information in this chapter adds little value to the narrative, and the tone depreciates their scholarship and the aptitude of their readers. For example, the authors end the chapter with fictitious social media profiles for six of the historical dolls.

In the following chapter, the authors detail what they refer to as a "sentimental (and literal)" (p. 33) trip to Colonial Williamsburg to better understand one of the places that inspired Rowland to create American Girl. The most compelling discussion in chapter 2 relates to how Rowland's work and media appearances positioned her as a curator of good morals through positive influences. In a com-

parison of Colonial Williamsburg and American Girl, the authors noted that “Pleasant was also inspired by a desire to share a patriotic vision of history with children. . . . The development of these dolls, outfits, accessories, and stories reflects a similar impulse to curate, or choose what to share, and therein lies the common instinct toward ‘selective fantasy’ using history” (p. 48). A deeper exploration of this thesis could have carried the book, but instead Mahoney and Horrocks conclude the chapter with “Top Tips for Visiting a Historic Site Like Us.”

In chapter 3, Mahoney and Horrocks look at how Rowland built the brand, and they explore the catalogue, dolls, clothing, and accessories with other fans in chapter 4. Each of the book's six chapters contain compelling observations related to how the American Girl brand, with its high price of entry, taught kids to value and practice consumption and engage in racial blindness. American Girl sanitized the past. For example, the doll Kirsten and her stories focused on the empty frontier lands, which we should know were not free, unoccupied spaces, but Indigenous homelands. The doll Felicity represented a wealthy girl living in Virginia during the early years of the American Revolution. In a blatant act of tokenism, Felicity's story included her Black friend. Unfortunately, the engaging, contextualized history was often interrupted with irrelevant pop culture snip-its, a series of unpolished photographs and scans, and attempts at witty banter turned problematic, such as a reference to a JonBenet-themed birthday party hosted by the authors.

Mahoney and Horrocks set out to answer questions about American Girl

and girlhood. But the book is not cohesive, and I find it unclear who the audience is for *Dolls of Our Lives*. I suppose it consists of the same people who enjoy listening to their podcast, which serves as a space for community and friendship.

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—Michelle Parnett-Dwyer, *The Strong National Museum of Play, Rochester, NY*

## Juggling

Stewart Lawrence Sinclair  
Durham, N.C.: Duke University  
Press, 2023. Acknowledgments and  
references. 136 pp. \$15.95, paper. ISBN:  
9781478019602.

In 2023 more than two hundred sports books were published in the United States, not including self-published titles. One notable addition to this extensive collection is Stewart Lawrence Sinclair's *Juggling*. The book is particularly engaging because of its unique descriptions of the physical skills and artistry of one of the world's oldest performance arts and sports. For example, Sinclair explains the significance of mathematics in juggling's early history when it was the primary means used to describe a sequence of throws. He provides a basic understanding of the relationship between “duration and height,” and readers will be intrigued by statements such as, “For a ball to stay airborne three times as long, it must be thrown nine times as high” (p. 10).

Sinclair also describes fundamental juggling skills such as trajectory, symmetry, pattern, apex, parabola, and cascade in user friendly terms, to assist first-time