Study Questions for David Nasaw, *Children of the City*

The following questions highlight the book’s main points and will help guide your reading. The number in parentheses is the chapter to which the question corresponds. If you are short on time, it is ok to skip or skim chapters 11-13. Do read the epilogue.

1. Describe some of the things you might see in a city at the turn of the 20th century. What attractions brought people into the city? (1)

2. How was life in the city for “the other half” different from the experiences of the wealthy and the middle class? Did they have any common experiences? (1)

3. Why is the phrase “poverty in the midst of plenty” a good description of the American city of 1900? (1)

4. What role did the streets play in children’s lives? Why did they consider lessons learned on the street more valuable than lessons learned in school? Were they right? (2)

5. What were some of the “rules” of the street? Why was the “block” an important division? (2)

6. Why did the “child savers” fail to make much progress with the street children? (2)

7. How were the children of the city different than the child laborers of an earlier time? (3)

8. What kinds of jobs did the children get? What were their favorite jobs? (4)

9. In what ways were the street traders also “performers” and “entrepreneurs”? (4)

10. How did life on the streets shape the children’s world view? (4)

11. Why was there such a demand for “newsies?” Why did children like being “newsies”? (5)

12. What did you have to do to become a successful newsie? What were some of the more shady “tricks of the trade?” (5)

13. Why did people complain about the newsies? What were the reformers’ worries? (5)

14. Why did children enjoy being “junkers?” How did one go about “junking?” (6)

15. How did little “junkers” help contribute to family survival? (6)

16. How did the children’s attitude about junking differ from the reformers’? (6)
17. How and why were girls’ experiences in the city different than boys’? Would you rather have been a boy or a girl? Why? (7)

18. Why was having money important for the children? How did they spend their money? (8)

19. How did having money give the children leverage over their parents? (9)

20. Why was having money important for working girls? (9)

21. What urban “corruptions” and “dangers” especially worried child welfare reformers? (10)

22. What steps did the children take to undermine the reformers’ efforts to “save” them? (10)

23. Describe the activities of the “newsboys courts.” Why did they work? (10)

24. How did life on the city streets shape an entire generation of Americans? (Epilogue)

25. How did the children of the city influence the entertainment industry? (Epilogue)

26. How did their childhood experiences help the street traders survive bad times as adults? (Epilogue)