

Calvert, Karin (1992) *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600- 1900*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

*Children in the House* is an interesting overview of attitudes toward children and childhood in American History. Beginning in the seventeenth century and on into the 20th century, Calvert focuses on the differences in which childhood is viewed between those times and the period of transition in the mid-nineteenth century in the views of children and why this transition occurred.

Calvert's comprehensive study includes a remarkable amount of information and evidence about early American culture and views of childhood. Calvert limits herself to the topic of material culture but in doing so looks at a great deal of the psychological views and aspects of childhood in those times.

Calvert begins with colonial childhood and shows through objects, such as swaddling cloths and standing stools, that children were viewed as animalistic with a need to be straightened and shaped into "actual humans". Any activities that were seen as sub-human were discouraged - such as crying, grunting, crawling and playing. Lengths were taken to prevent such behavior was seen as the primary purpose of child care. The material culture demonstrates this 'shaping' with other items like walking stools, leading strings and cribs.

In the mid-eighteenth century children began to be viewed as what Calvert calls "the natural child." Children were no longer expected to be restrained and secluded but were allowed to be whatever they really were. Calvert references the reason of this to social theorists like Darwin and the rise of naturalism in all aspects of society. Children were now able to express themselves more freely and learn and grow naturally. Calvert shows this in the children's materials of the time.

For the first time toys for children began to be produced. Items such as balls, hoops, sleds, toy soldiers and horses for boys were the first toys that began to appear for boys. For girls; dolls, doll furniture, tea sets and dominoes. Eventually toys, like wooden blocks, were made to encourage learning through play. This mindset began to be adopted and play was no longer contained but encouraged and believed to help the learning process.

The book shows the development in child care from the 1600's and allows us to see our culture today in a better light. Today children are viewed as special with the need to be nurtured, cared for, and cherished. Children are allowed to develop and we see our primary roles as caretakers as that of assuring their proper development. Calvert's look at the material culture of Early America shows us the progression that history has taken and allows us to examine our culture through it.