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THE HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF AMERICAN CHILDHOOD

Jane Eva Baxter*

ABSTRACT

The United States is a relatively young nation, having been established less than 250 years ago, but in this brief time the country has undergone dramatic growth and significant transformation. Children always have been central in American culture, and historical and popular sources acknowledge the power and importance of children in families, communities, and the nation as well as their substantial role in influencing intergenerational change. Archaeological work focusing on children is becoming increasingly common and illustrates how children shaped and reflected values and ideals within families and the nation as a whole. Domestic sites, institutions for children, and mortuary studies are prominent areas of current work and future prospects in the archaeology of childhood in the United States.

Keywords: United States; Childhood; 18th-20th Centuries.

*DePaul University. Department of Anthropology. 2343 North Racine Avenue. Chicago, IL 60614
773-325-4757 jbaxter@depaul.edu.

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A ARQUEOLOGIA HISTÓRICA DA INFÂNCIA NOS ESTADOS UNIDOS

RESUMO

Os Estados Unidos é uma nação relativamente jovem, tendo sido estabelecida há menos de 250 anos, mas, neste breve período, o país passou por um crescimento dramático e uma transformação significativa. As crianças sempre foram centrais na cultura americana, e as fontes históricas e populares reconhecem o poder e a importância das crianças nas famílias, nas comunidades e na nação, assim como seu papel fundamental em influenciar a mudança intergeracional. O trabalho arqueológico focado nas crianças está se tornando cada vez mais comum e ilustra como as crianças moldaram e refletiram os valores e ideais dentro das famílias e da nação como um todo. Sítios domésticos, instituições para crianças e estudos mortuários são áreas proeminentes do trabalho atual e das perspectivas futuras na arqueologia da infância nos Estados Unidos.

Palavras-chave: Estados Unidos; Infância; Séculos XVIII-XX.

LA ARQUEOLOGÍA HISTÓRICA DE LA INFANCIA EN LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS

RESUMEN

Los Estados Unidos es un país relativamente joven que se formó menos entre los últimos 250 años. Pero en su poco tiempo con un país independiente los EEUU ha crecido en una manera significativa y transformativa. Los niños siempre han sido central a la cultura estadounidense y los fuentes populares e históricos reconocen del poder e importancia de los niños entre la familia, la comunidad y nación. Además el niñez tiene un rol substantivo en influir los cambios intergeneracional. Estudios arqueológicos que enfoquen en el niñez han sido más común y demuestren como los niños se formaban y reflejaban los valores e ideales entre familias y la nación. Sitios domésticos, instituciones para niños, y contextos mortuorios son áreas prominentes para investigaciones corriente y futuros en la arqueología de la niñez en los EEUU.

Palabras clave: Estados Unidos; Niñez; Siglos VIII-XX.

INTRODUCING AMERICAN CHILDHOODS

Historians have grappled in recent years with the idea of an “American Childhood”¹, and considered what might make childhood in the United States different than childhoods elsewhere. This is a challenging endeavor. Ideas of nation and national identity are often articulated in broad, sweeping narratives, rhetoric, and imagery, but are internalized and personalized in more intimate relationships of community, household, and family, and made manifest in the quotidian actions of everyday life. These historical studies both problematized the social construction of the idea of “America” as well as wrestled with the geographic, social, and historical forces that have shaped the experiences of everyday people (CHUDACOFF, 2007; FASS, 2016; MINTZ, 2004; RINEY-KHERBORG ;2014). Working across these scales of national and interpersonal is a necessary challenge that confronts archaeologists as well, as we seek to extrapolate essential elements of intangible culture through the mundane material remains of daily life. An overview of the historical archaeology of childhood in the United States has some transferable value, therefore, as other scholars seek to build similar bridges in their own research on childhood in the past.

Scholarly historical narratives of American Childhood begin around the time of the colonization of America in the 17th century and focus primarily on European-American childhoods and to a lesser degree the childhoods of enslaved Africans and African-Americans and Native Americans. These works are characterized by a marked tone of declension, where childhood is being diminished and lost to social forces in the contemporary world that undermine essential elements of what childhood, “should be”. Some scholars embrace this idea of decline wholeheartedly (CHUDACOFF; 2007), while others present this narrative because it is what is present in the source material they study (FASS, 2016; MINTZ, 2004). I have argued (BAXTER, 2019) that these narratives of declension are important because they offer a causal historical model for American childhood, and also because they provide an understanding of the formation of ideals and myths about American childhoods that were developed early in the nation’s history. This historical perspective and rhetoric of decline are revealing, because they illuminate often unarticulated ideals about childhood that are held in the popular consciousness: the most essential elements of an ideal childhood are often only mentioned once they are deemed lost. Reviewing these historical works on American childhood allowed for the identification of five themes of what might make a childhood particularly American, and what ideals of American childhood may be being “lost” over time (BAXTER, 2019).

The first of these themes is the interplay of freedom, risk, and opportunity. The United States has always touted itself as a land of opportunity, and the ability for self-determination was a particularly definitive aspect of childhood in the earliest years of the colonies and nation (FASS, 2016). Unlike in other places at the time, American children were empowered to choose different career paths than their parents, to obtain their own land, and to begin new ventures of their choosing. With this freedom and opportunity came risks, however, as children lost the security and stability of intergenerational households, established family enterprises, and strong community networks. The tension of allowing children to maximize their independence in pursuit of opportunities while also protecting them from risk has been a discourse surrounding childhood throughout the nation’s history, and many argue that the perceived need to protect

¹ It is understood that using the name America to refer to the United States of America is not considered appropriate in many international and hemispheric dialogs. In this case, however, the term America is used to situate this work in an existing body of scholarship that explicitly uses the terms America and American in the study of childhood. Where possible and appropriate in this article, I use the term United States or United States of America instead.

children has gradually overtaken the entrepreneurial opportunism that once characterized American childhood (*e.g.*, CHUDACOFF 2007).

A second theme is diversity. Diversity in American childhoods has been the norm since the very inception of the colonies when different groups of Europeans arrived along with enslaved Africans from diverse cultures and encountered an array of Native American tribes. New waves of immigrants have continually come to America since its founding, creating a highly diverse population in terms of ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds. These encounters have not only shaped the nation, but also brought together many fundamentally different ideas about children and childhood, such as: Which members of a cultural group are children, and what is expected of a person identified as a child? And, what are adult obligations to children? Diversity was and is not always welcome by all segments of the American population, and historically dominant groups have created publications, legal regulations, and institutions such as orphanages, boarding schools, and public schools that deliberately targeted children to move them away from their family's cultural traditions and into the "mainstream".

Diversity in the United States is not confined to typical lines of social distinction, but rather also includes the regional identities and experiences enabled by the vast geographic variation encompassed within the country's boundaries. It has been argued that geography was and is the single most defining aspect of childhood in America (RINEY-KHERBORG, 2014). The location where one is raised provides not only certain limitations and opportunities, but also imparts particular identities and regional culture that emerge from the social act of placemaking. The abundance of space and the ability to obtain land and a place of one's own has consistently been a reality for and an expectation of children growing up in America, and such abundance creates a particular sense of self and nation as well.

Abundance in America also applies to material things, and the relationship between children, material culture, and consumer culture is another defining theme in the history of American childhood (CALVERT, 1992). The United States was a very young nation when the Industrial Revolution made mass-produced goods available to wide segments of the population. Children have increasingly become the targets of mass-marketing and advertisers' efforts to set agendas for parental spending both on goods for children and for the entire household (CROSS, 2004; SCHULTZ, 2018). A prevailing ideal of childhood innocence has traditionally extended into children's freedom from desire for material things, yet simultaneously there is pressure to keep children accessorized with the latest and best items. The attention to children's material goods has been heightened in the United States because public education was mandated for all children early in the nation's history. Children left the home and became independent ambassadors for families, and their material goods were an important part of what messages were communicated to those outside the family sphere. Public schools also created spaces dominated by peer cultures, where ideas of what was in fashion could be determined and reinforced in the absence of adult intervention and input (CROSS, 2004).

A final, and perhaps surprising theme of American Childhood is warfare. War and its consequences have been an omnipresent aspect of American childhoods since the country's inception. The earliest documentary references to children in the American Colonies were as captives in the wars with Native American groups, and children served in combat beginning in the American Revolution and through the Civil War (Figure 1). Even when children were not directly engaged in warfare, the constant pattern of war in American culture has meant every generation of children has had to cope with war and its aftermath on the home front as communities as families adjusted to cope with the disruption and loss of war (TUTTLE, 1993).

Figure 1 - The grave marker of Edward Black (1853-1871) at Crown Hill Cemetery in Indianapolis, Indiana. Edward was a drummer boy and is youngest U.S. Army soldier on record as he enlisted at the age of 8 1/2. Young boys serving as drummers dates back to the American Revolutionary War, and it was common for children in such positions to be injured or killed as they marched alongside the regimental flag and officer corps. In 1862, President Lincoln banned the use of drummer boys in the United States Armed Forces. Edward re-enlisted in the infantry, was captured at the Battle of Baton Rouge, and later honorably discharged. He survived the war but, sadly, he died at the age of 18 from the injuries and trauma of war. Photo credit: James Dourney.



These themes taken from the historical record undoubtedly have shaped the lives of everyday people and are reflected in the archaeological remains recovered at historical sites. Some of these themes, such as space and material culture, are directly related to core aspects of archaeological research, while others are often interests that shape archaeological interpretation and questioning. Archaeological work on children in the United States can be placed into three broad categories based on site type: studies at domestic sites, studies at institutions for children, and mortuary studies of children's skeletal remains and grave markers (BAXTER, 2019). Each of these site types uniquely engages with the idea of America, and these varying themes. Together, they illustrate the potency and significance of children as subjects of archaeological and historical study.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CHILDREN AT DOMESTIC SITES

Domestic sites are among the most ubiquitous and most studied in American Historical Archaeology, which is not dissimilar from archaeology done in other times and places. Nearly every domestic site yields a small assemblage of children's artifacts,

particularly toys and playthings, but also clothing items and child-rearing devices. One of the earliest critiques of the study of children in Historical Archaeology (WILKIE, 2000) pointed to an overreliance on these easily identifiable children's objects. The use of historical sources to determine child-specific objects with certainty is a useful aspect of Historical Archaeology, but the presence of such objects has led to children being reported at domestic sites without interpretation and analysis. While nearly every domestic site bears evidence for children, the bibliography of archaeological studies actively interpreting children at home is relatively thin (BAXTER, 2019). Those published works that are available illustrate the potential of studying American childhoods through the domestic sphere (BUNOW, 2009; FITTS, 1999; GRIGG, 1999; MOORE, 2007).

The study of children at domestic sites is best understood along the urban/rural divide. The United States began to industrialize in the early 19th century, resulting in a significant population shift into urban areas. It was not always easy to define the difference between urban and rural areas well into the 19th century, particularly in smaller cities and towns (RINEY- KEHRBERG, 2014:41). In both types of places, many families lived without electricity, plumbing, or central heat, and livestock were prevalent. Populations in urban neighborhoods often retained the types of interpersonal connectivity and mutual reliance considered essential and common in rural areas. While age and gender certainly played significant roles in how activities were experienced and enjoyed, children were relatively unrestricted in terms of movement in both urban and rural communities, and peer relationships and the exploration and development of relationships to areas outside one's home were common. As urban areas grew and became more established, disparities in lifestyles became more pronounced.

Studies of children in American cities are concentrated in the northeastern United States, especially New York City, but significant work has also been published on studies in several San Francisco area communities and some Midwestern Cities such as Minneapolis, Minnesota (BAXTER, 2019; FITTS, 1999; GRIGG, 1999; YAMIN, 2002; MCCARTHY, 2001; YENCH, 2002). These studies focus on working-class, immigrant communities of differing backgrounds, and tend to emphasize how child rearing was connected to economic circumstances as well as negotiations of ethnic identity in burgeoning immigrant neighborhoods. Historical sources are consistent in illustrating how children were required to go to school by law, but in actuality spent much of their time working in factories, as material scavengers, and at home helping women in ancillary domestic industries such as laundry and sewing (Figure 2).

Archaeological evidence tells another story altogether. Working class immigrant families living in America's cities spent significant resources providing their children with material items that would have been considered ideal and appropriate for children of the day. While there certainly was variation among households and neighborhoods, children in poor neighborhoods had access to clothing and playthings that were often disproportionately expensive to other household items, suggesting these families made particular and deliberate investments in children (MATTHEWS, 2010:13). These investments would have enabled families to demonstrate their awareness of the values and norms operating in their new home nation, and to illustrate to those outside their neighborhoods of a family's aspirations for future generations (e.g., YAMIN, 2002; YENCH, 2009).

Figure 2 - Children working at night inside an urban tenement in New York City. Photo by Lewis Wickes Hine and captioned "7:30 P.M. January 29, 1912. Making violets, and they often work later. Pollinni family, 5 Carmine St., New York, NY, living in a rear tenement. The six-year-old helps some. The eight, ten, and twelve year olds work later than this at times. Brothers, 15 and 17 years old, work in factory." Courtesy of Preus museum; Library of Congress; National Child Labor Committee Collection.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Child_Labor_in_United_States_1912a.jpg



Archaeological studies of children in rural areas have found that mass-produced goods were making their way across the nation through catalog sales and railroad delivery. Children in rural environments worked alongside their parents in domestic and farm-related tasks, and much more of their play was incidental and integral to working out-of-doors than formal, structured play (CHUDACOFF, 2007; RINEY-KHERBORG, 2014). As many rural families made their own home goods and clothing, the presence of mass produced toys represents a particular investment in children (DECUNZO, 2004). The spatial distribution of toys at rural sites suggest children both sought privacy from adults and were socialized according to gender roles, despite reduced populations that limited the number of "appropriate" playmates (BAXTER, 2000).

Other studies of children at domestic sites have broken the reliance on the mere presence of mass produced goods to interpret the worlds of children. The first of these was the work of Laurie Wilkie (2000:103-4) at the former home of Ernest and Katie Cords in the city of Santa Monica, California. Excavations recovered a notable overrepresentation of broken doll parts, particularly intentionally destroyed doll parts, from a pit feature on the property. She interpreted many broken dolls as the actions of the family's eldest daughter, Irene Cords, who was 5-7 years when trash pit was in use. The destruction of dolls could have been an act of resistance by Irene towards her parents to protest events in her life beyond her control, such as the arrival of a younger sibling. A second study was the analysis of a pit feature found at the edge of a family farm in the Chicago suburb of Shabonna Grove, Illinois (DOZIER, 2013). The pit contained an odd assortment of objects that did not appear to be a typical episode of domestic trash

dumping in either its contents or location. Instead, the pit contained some children's toys, but also objects that children might have found interesting and stored and cached for play. The remote location of the pit suggests that children were seeking out remote areas for private play, and were repurposing discarded objects as playthings.

INSTITUTIONS

Archaeological evidence for children's lives is prevalent at domestic sites, but children's worlds are not tied exclusively to the home. In the United States, institutions have always played a critical role in the lives of children, particularly through mandatory public schooling. Earlier in the nation's history, orphanages and children's homes were common, not only for children who did not have living parents but also for those children whose parents were deemed unfit to raise them in a morally and economically appropriate manner. Archaeological projects also have found children's artifacts at institutions designed for adults, particularly poor houses and even prisons, suggesting many children were subjected to institutional confinement because of the circumstances of the adults in their lives.

Institutions are very revealing for archaeological study because they are generally founded with very deliberate and well documented goals and ideals behind them (CASSELLA, 2009; DECUNZO, 2006). These ideals and goals are transformed into regimens of surveillance, confinement, control, ritual, punishment, segregation, labor, and discipline among others, that can affect institutional design and prescribed daily activities (DECUNZO, 2006:167). While other disciplines can access information about intentional design and documented goals, archaeology is uniquely positioned to study acts of resistance by those subjected to institutional strictures (CASSELLA, 2009; DECUNZO, 2006). Institutions for children in the United States vary widely, but all tap into these elements of deliberate, foundational design and resistance by residents.

Perhaps the most dramatic of these institutions in the United States were the Indian Boarding Schools designed to estrange Native American children from their families and their traditional cultures. The removal of children from their homes and into one of 100 boarding schools modeled on military-style living became mandatory in 1893 and was a, "internal colonialism policy" (SURFACE-EVANS, 2016:574) designed to assimilate Native Americans into patriotic and productive citizens who would live independently from government aid. Children wore uniforms, learned menial vocational skills preparing them for agricultural labor and domestic service, were not allowed to practice any of their traditional customs, and were banned from speaking Native languages (LINDAUER, 2009; SURFACE-EVANS, 2016).

Lindauer's (2009) work at the Phoenix School in the state of Arizona illustrated how institutions used material culture to socialize Native American children into European gender roles, and to emphasize individuality over collective identities that were culturally preferred in tribes. Uniforms had badges and medals to demonstrate and celebrate individual achievement, toys encouraged solitary play rather than group entertainment, and artifacts like dishes, utensils, and toothbrushes had children's names engraved on them to emphasize ownership and discourage sharing. This same project found forbidden artifacts hidden in floorboards such as fetishes, charms, and clan totems, and evidence that traditional skills, such as flint knapping, were being practiced. The Mount Pleasant School in the state of Michigan also yielded evidence for control and resistance (SURFACE-EVANS, 2016). Research at this school emphasized studies of landscape and how the architecture and layout of the school campus was designed to disorient Native students, but demonstrate order to outside observers and supporters. Evidence for alternative and subversive activities by children in residence was identified

through concentrations of marbles and buttons recovered from remote areas of the school grounds. Oral histories of former residents recalled secret pow-wows and pipe ceremonies held by students in areas outside staff surveillance, and a token such as a button or marble was the cost for participation. Both of these projects at Indian Boarding Schools speak to active programs of institutional assimilation that were being met with acts of resistance by children.

Public schooling, while far less aggressive in its reform strategies, also owes much of its prominence and popularity to 19th century assimilation efforts towards newly arrived immigrants (BERROL, 1992). Public schools gained popularity in the United States under a rhetoric that touted the importance of education for the future of a growing nation and for a strong democracy. These institutions are the most widespread in the United States and have been a part of the majority of children's lives for over 100 years. In the 19th century and before, individual communities constructed schools and operated them as local institutions, with state and national standards encroaching onto local efforts throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. The design of a local school was and is a very public statement of a community's investment in education and its children.

Archaeologically, hundreds of schools have been excavated across the country because they were a feature of nearly every town and settlement, but very few have been reported in published works (BEISAW, 2009; HELTON, 2010). Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly available excavation data for rural schools particularly, show a paucity of the child-specific artifacts that are most often used to interpret children through the archaeological record (BEISAW, 2009; BEISAW & BAXTER, 2017). Instead, most of what is found are architectural remains, some items relating to the use of sites for community gatherings, and educational items such as writing slate fragments and slate pencil pieces. Toys are actually quite rare and suggest children were not bringing toys to school, with the exception of those that could easily fit in a pocket such as jacks or marbles. Interpreting schools through the archaeological record relies much more heavily on architectural design, the choices that were made in how schools were laid out and accessorized, and how those choices compare to published ideals about how schools "should be." The archaeology of these sites is generally a multi-disciplinary effort with former students contributing oral histories, documentary remnants, and photographs from when the school was in operation, and points to the lingering importance of these institutions for individuals and community heritage efforts (BEISAW, 2009).

A final type of institution for children that flourished in the United States, particularly in the latter half of the 19th century after the American Civil War and with the influx of major immigrant populations, are orphanages (Figure 3). At this time, childhood became a more clearly delineated phase of life and the value of maintaining a child's innocence and purity became a cultural ideal. Institutions that provided care and training for children but kept them socially separate from potentially destructive adult influences became common (BAUGHER, 2001; MULLER, 2017; PRZYSTUPA, 2018). Destructive adult influences could include a child's own parents if reformers believed a family was morally and/or financially incapable of caring for their children. The American Civil War also disrupted families and required many communities to reorganize when men in the community didn't come home from war, leaving many children in precarious economic and social circumstances. Institutionalizing these children in orphanages where they could be raised "properly" was seen as an ideal solution.

Figure 3 - An example of a 19th Century institution for children. Sister Irene and Children at the New York Foundling Hospital circa 1888. Photograph by Joseph Rhis. This image is available from the United States Library of Congress' Prints and Photographs Division and is in the public domain.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Children_at_New_York_Foundling_cph.3a23917.jpg



Like public schools, very little has been published on orphanages although many have been excavated as part of compliance archaeology projects. The best published orphanage operated at the Schuyler Mansion in Albany, New York (BAXTER, 2000; FEISTER, 2009). This orphanage, like most 19th century institutions, was operated by a charitable reform organization and not the government, in this case the Daughters of Charity. The orphanage operated in a modified 18th century mansion with several outbuildings added to accommodate the new institutional purpose of the former residence. Archaeological investigations at the site revealed that children in orphanages were not living in austerity, and that in addition to education children had time for play and leisure. The children wore quality, fashionable clothing, and had an abundance of toys. The variety of toys and clothing items suggest that children were given items based on individual needs and wants rather than homogenous, generic gifts and necessities (FEISTER, 2009). The prevalence of toys speaks not only to children's access to play and leisure, but also to the use of material culture as a tool to socialize children into individuals of appropriate moral, spiritual and social character. The spatial distribution of toys suggested that play was gender segregated and that young girls engaged in more sedentary and supervised play while young boys could roam more freely around the grounds (BAXTER, 2000). These distributions and the types of toys provided reflect the ideal types of play and recreation recommended by social reformers and child-rearing

publications of the day, and illustrate the power of community based reform and care efforts in the lives of children.

CEMETERIES AND BIOARCHAEOLOGY

While families and communities exercised an interest in children because they represented the future, many children never lived to see adulthood. Infant and childhood mortality was quite high in the United States into the early 20th century, and coping with the loss of children was a very common occurrence (BAXTER, 2019). Despite its frequency, archaeologists who study burial treatments, skeletal remains, and commemorations of children through monuments and ritual practices recognize that the death of a child is generally considered to be disruptive, against the natural order, and untimely (BAXTER, 2013; MAYS *et al.*, 2017).

Mortuary studies of children in the United States fall into two broad categories: studies of excavated burials (CRIST, 2005; ELLIS, 2014; MCKILLOP, 1995) and studies of the material culture found above ground in cemeteries (BAUGHER & VEIT, 2014). These different types of archaeological evidence reflect strong cultural divides in the country that keep some memorials and burials sacred, and others subject to disturbance if the space is needed as communities change. Middle and upper class families were able to bury children with durable headstones on grounds considered sacred, but this was not always true of poor families or for ethnic and racial minorities. It is illegal to disturb a known burial ground in the United States without significant public input and planning, but those sites that are subject to disturbance tend to belong to these latter categories of families. Archaeological studies of skeletal populations are quite rare generally because of these legal strictures, and studies of headstones and grave markers are far more common and span multiple disciplines.

A very prominent example of the study of children's skeletal remains comes from the African Burial Ground Project in New York City (BLAKEY, 1998; BARRETT & BLAKEY, 2011). The African Burial Ground was a cemetery that was in use from the later 17th century until the end of the 18th century and likely contained up to twenty thousand burials, mostly of enslaved Africans and African-Americans. The cemetery was disturbed several times in its history, and burials were being disinterred in the 1990s for a major redevelopment project. Community interest and outrage stopped the project, but it was decided that a scientific study of the human remains and burial goods that had been disinterred prior to the halting of the project should be conducted before reburial. Children were among the deceased who were removed from this site and they provided a graphic and personal picture of the effects of slavery.

Children in the African Burial Ground population showed a high rate of infectious diseases that was double that of contemporaneous English children (BLAKEY, 1998:56). Metabolic diseases, such as anemia, were evidenced in the skeletal remains of half the children in the population. Children in the 2 to 12-year-old age category often showed evidence of growth retardation, where dental development lagged approximately two years behind what would be considered typical or normal. Approximately 60% of children had defects in dental enamel reflecting bouts of malnutrition and disease (BARRETT & BLAKEY, 2011). Children's skeletons also revealed strained muscle attachments and compressed vertebrae due to a lifestyle of hard labor that taxed their developing bodies, and evidence of violent trauma was also found in the population.

While children in this population led difficult lives, they also were loved and cared for by members of their community. Archaeological evidence showed that children were carefully wrapped and shrouded for their interment, and some were accompanied by beads, amulets, and other objects reflecting their heritage and culture. This small glimpse

into the world of enslaved children and their families uniquely illustrates the hardships faced by this community, but also the endurance of their humanity in the face of profound adversity.

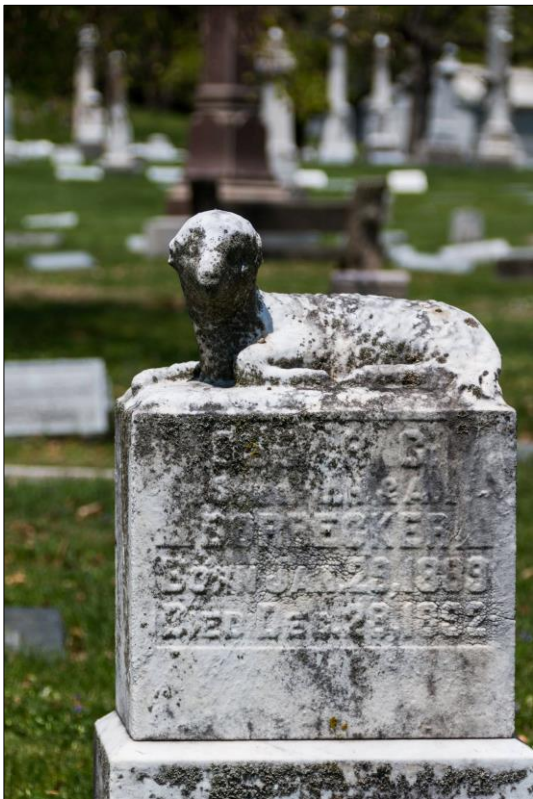
Studies of headstones and grave markers of children do not give us the same intimate look into individual lives or populations, but they do provide powerful examples of how children were commemorated and mourned by their families. Most studies of cemeteries in the United States focus on the 19th century when the rural garden cemetery movement resulted in the establishment of large cemeteries on the outskirts of cities and towns. These cemeteries were designed to provide a separation between the dead and the living due to concerns of health and hygiene, and also to provide urban dwellers a place to escape city living and return to god and nature (BAXTER, 2013). One of the most significant aspects of these spaces was that families could purchase plots as part of a designed landscape, and decide how their headstones would look, where they would be located, and who their eternal neighbors would be. This aspect of cemeteries was a way of reinforcing the family as a central organizing principle of American society at a time when industrialization, urbanization, and capitalism were straining American family life. Even in life children were seen as closer to god and heaven because they were not yet a part of the corrupt world of adults, and in death their innocence, purity, and special relationship to the divine were celebrated and accentuated (BAXTER, 2013).

The commemoration of children was often elaborate, but even simple markers represented an investment in a child after their death (Figure 4). The earliest markers were white to emphasize purity, and symbols of innocence, such as lambs, were particularly associated with children and incorporated into their headstones. Epitaphs emphasized sentiments of endearment and possession, with intimate nicknames and phrases like “our darling” being used to convey the particular loss of a beloved child (BAXTER, 2013). These epitaphs also used euphemisms of sleep and rest to refer to a child’s state rather than referring to their death, which was a popular convention of the time. Studies of children’s headstones in rural garden cemeteries have found that the most unique and elaborate graves that celebrate individual children and differentiate children’s deaths from those of adults occur in the earliest decades of a cemetery’s use when families were coming to a new area and becoming established. Once a family had set down roots and a burial plot was purchased, children’s headstones were designed to match those of other family members, reinforcing their place in the family rather than the particular loss of an individual child.

A recent study by Murphy *et al.* (2015) placed many of these features of children’s commemoration in the context of immigration. They compared children’s graves dated from 1832 to 1871 in St. Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery in Lowell, Massachusetts to those in Friar’s Bush Cemetery in Belfast, County Antrim, Ireland. This comparison revealed some notable differences in children’s headstones. In St. Patrick’s Cemetery, 99% of the children’s epitaphs named the child buried, compared to only 79% in Friar’s Bush. The age of an individual at death and epitaphs that conveyed the sentiment that a child died “young” or “early in life” were found on 81% of the graves in Saint Patrick’s, which was double the percentage of graves containing such features in Friar’s Bush. The researchers concluded that the commemoration of an individual child, the details of their life and death, and a statement that they were taken “too soon” were all essential in the immigrant Irish community in Lowell. In Belfast, it was more important to convey that a child was a part of a family, and the personal details of their lives were far less important. They argued this divergence in burial practices reflected the particular concerns of an immigrant population where each new child symbolically and practically represented a

new start for a family in a new place. Where family continuity was longstanding, children were an important part of a family legacy, but not their survival into the future.

Figure 4 - Children’s grave markers became very elaborate in the 19th century as part of social movements around the “beautification of death” and the establishment of rural, garden cemeteries. The lamb (left) was a common symbol exclusively used for children to represent their innocence, purity, and connection to heaven. Some families invested extensively in highly personal monuments for individual children, such as this monument for Mary Ella McGinnis (1869-1875). Both of these monuments are from Crown Hill Cemetery in Indianapolis, Indiana. Photo credits: James Dourney.



REALIZED AND UNREALIZED POTENTIALS IN THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD IN THE RECENT PAST

This article has been a brief, selective summation of some of the recent work that has been done on the archaeology of childhood in the United States. While largely descriptive, the various types of archaeological research and the overarching context of how one might construct a particularly “American” childhood provide a means to think about how broad, cultural ideas become translated into the realms of interpersonal interactions and everyday practices. This relationship between intangible culture and daily lives is an enduring part of archaeological research, and the recent past offers documentary evidence that enables a greater understanding of abstract, immaterial ideas such as “American” that can then be explored using archaeological evidence.

The lens of childhood is a particularly useful and potent one to explore this relationship as families, communities, and societies tend to invest significant time and energy into raising children to be successful members of the next generation. The archaeology of domestic sites illustrated how families invested in children’s material culture to signal a cultural awareness and acceptance of childrearing ideals that were particularly American. Such sites also have offered an opportunity to see how children

shaped their own worlds in household contexts where they were not the primary decision makers in their day to day lives. The archaeology of institutions revealed deliberate attempts to shape and mold children by larger-scale community organizations, as well as the agency of children in resisting such attempts. Studies in mortuary archaeology illuminated the importance of children as members of families and communities, but also how children became potent cultural symbols particularly at times of cultural upheaval and change. These studies collectively underscore what scholars of childhood already know: childhood is central to the study of human communities as a whole because children are situated in essential relationships to adults, institutions, communities, ideas, and the environment (BAXTER, 2019).

These studies and others like them demonstrate the importance of studying children in the past to learn about their lives and the lives of those around them. This work also accentuates many missed opportunities as archaeologists still tend to overlook children or limit them to a mention based on a few artifacts, even with a robust documentary and historical record to enhance interpretations and analyses. Thousands of domestic sites have been excavated where children lived their lives and hundreds of institutions for children have been subjected to archaeological investigation, but the results of such work remains unpublished in technical reports and cannot be included in comparative studies or broader analyses.

There is hope, however, that childhood studies in archaeology are changing and growing in the United States. Current graduate students are working on dissertations focused exclusively on children, and are looking at domestic sites and institutions across broad geographic areas and cultural boundaries in ways that will move the archaeology of childhood forward significantly. Existing scholarship, such as the work presented here, will help to nourish and support this research, and in turn these students will teach us new and exciting things as the next generation of scholars.

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