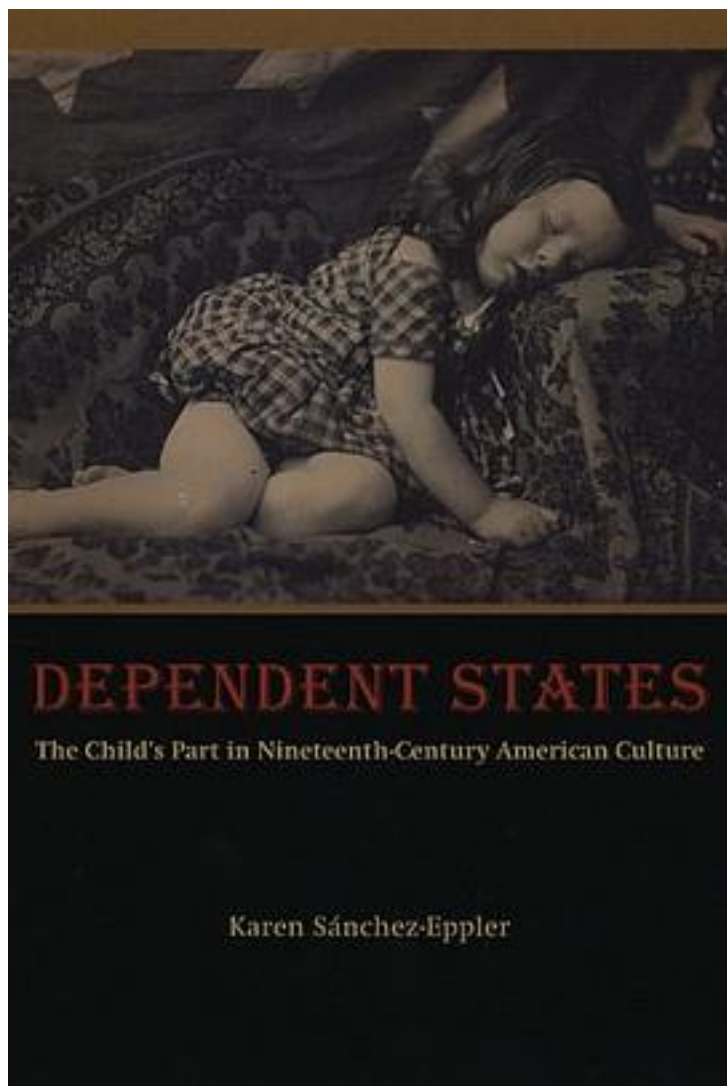


Dependent States



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出版者:Univ of Chicago Pr

出版时间:2005-9

装帧:HRD

isbn:9780226734590

Because childhood is not only culturally but also legally and biologically understood as a period of dependency, it has been easy to dismiss children as historical actors. By putting children at the center of our thinking about American history, Karen Sanchez-Eppler recognizes the important part childhood played in nineteenth-century American culture and what this involvement entailed for children themselves. *Dependent States* examines the ties between children's literacy training and the growing cultural prestige of the novel; the way children functioned rhetorically in reform literature to enforce social norms; the way the risks of death to children shored up emotional power in the home; how Sunday schools socialized children into racial, religious, and national identities, and how class identity was produced, not only in terms of work, but also in the way children played. For Sanchez-Eppler, nineteenth-century childhoods were nothing less than vehicles for national reform. Dependent on adults for their care, children did not conform to the ideals of enfranchisement and agency that we usually associate with historical actors. Yet through meticulously researched examples, Sanchez-Eppler reveals that children participated in the making of social meaning. Her focus on childhood as a dependent state thus offers a rewarding corrective to our notions of autonomous individualism and a new perspective on American culture itself.

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