

Childhood and Family in American Culture

American Studies 420
California State University, Fullerton
Fall 2008
Tuesday 4:00-6:45
EC-011

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 10:00-11:00; Thursday, 4:00-6:00; & by appointment

Course Description

This upper division course introduces students to some of the major questions and approaches in the interdisciplinary study of American children and families. Using a range of primary and secondary sources, we will analyze and contextualize the varied meanings of "childhood" and "family" at different historical moments. In addition, we will survey different research methods that are used to study the everyday experiences of children and families, both past and present. Course topics include the following: childhood play; education and the hidden curriculum; child labor practices; debates about childrearing; mother and home as cultural icons; the changing culture of reproduction; fertility and national identity; childhood and family in political campaigns; the meaning of family and childhood as shaped by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and region.

Required Texts

Howard Chudacoff, *Children at Play: An American History*

Ann Arnett Ferguson, *Bad Boys: Public Schools and the Making of Black Masculinity*

Elva Trevino Hart, *Barefoot Heart: Stories of a Migrant Child*

Frank Chin, *Donald Duk*

Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land: Childless America and the Pursuit of Happiness*

Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it Has Undermined All Women*

All books are available for purchase at Little Professor bookstore, 725 N. Placentia Ave (near the corner of Nutwood and Placentia).

Course Assignments and Grading Standards

Because this is an interdisciplinary American Studies course, the writing assignments will be varied and will allow you to explore different modes of analysis and expression. There are four required assignments:

--Complete an oral history project in which you interview someone of an older generation about his/her childhood play and then write a paper comparing and contrasting that experience to your own childhood play

--Write a short response paper to the book *Bad Boys* in which you evaluate the author's argument and propose solutions to the problem she identifies

--Write a short story about childhood (either fictional or autobiographical)

--Write a critical analysis of the meaning of "family" as depicted in an American cultural document (film, TV show, advertisement, news report, etc.)

More specific guidelines for these assignments will be handed out separately in class.

Grading:

Generational Play	20%
Response Paper	20%
Once Upon a Childhood	20%
The American Family	30%
Participation	10%

For this course, +/- grading will be used. No extra credit will be offered. Keep all graded work so that any discrepancies can be easily and fairly straightened out. An assignment is considered late if it is not turned in at the beginning of the class session in which it is due. Late assignments will be lowered one mark **per day** (NOT per class meeting) after the due date (for example, C to C-). Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis for legitimate reasons and only when a student asks for an extension at least 24 hours before an assignment is due.

A+ 97-99; A 94-96; A- 90-93; B+ 87-89; B 84-86; B- 80-83; C+ 77-79; C 74-76; C- 70-73; D+ 67-69; D 64-66; D- 60-63; F 0-59

Participation

Attendance and class participation make up 10% of your final grade. Upper-division seminars work best when students are actively engaged with the classroom community, concepts, and coursework. I encourage you to envision this course as a collaborative process of dialogue and inquiry. Please come to every class prepared to 1) describe the central argument or theme of the assigned reading; 2) assess the reading for its relative strengths and limitations; 3) raise questions about the reading; 4) connect the readings to one another; 5) connect the readings to your broader understanding of contemporary and historical issues in American culture; 6) relate the readings to your own experience and/or areas of expertise. Attendance is required at every class meeting.

Graduate Students

See me to discuss additional requirements for graduate credit.

Student Accommodations

CSUF complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act by providing a process for disclosing disabilities and arranging for reasonable accommodations. On the CSUF campus, the Office of Disabled Student Services has been delegated the authority to certify disabilities and to prescribe specific accommodations for students with documented disabilities. DSS provides support services for students with mobility limitations, learning disabilities, hearing or visual impairments, and other disabilities. Counselors are available to help students plan a CSUF experience to meet their individual needs. Prior to receiving this assistance, documentation from a qualified professional source must be submitted to DSS. For more information, please contact DSS in UH 101; phone 714-278-3117.

Academic Integrity

Integrity is an essential component of all students' academic experience. Students who violate university standards of academic integrity are subject to disciplinary sanctions, including failure in the course and suspension from the university. Since dishonesty in any form harms the individual, other students, and the university, policies on academic integrity are strictly enforced. I expect that you will familiarize yourself with the academic integrity guidelines found in the current student handbook. [<http://www.fullerton.edu/handbook/>]

Cheating is defined as obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for work by the use of any dishonest, deceptive, fraudulent, or unauthorized means, or helping someone commit an act of academic dishonesty. (UPS 300.021). Examples include, but are not limited to:

Unacceptable examination behavior: communicating with fellow students, copying material from another student's exam or allowing another student to copy from an exam, possessing or using unauthorized materials, or any behavior that defeats the intent of an exam.

Plagiarism: taking the work of another and offering it as one's own without giving credit to that source, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form.

Unauthorized collaboration on a project, homework or other assignment where an instructor expressly forbids such collaboration.

Documentary falsification, including forgery, altering of campus documents or records, tampering with grading procedures, fabricating lab assignments, or altering medical excuses.

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

Date	Topic	Due
T, Aug. 26	Introduction to Course	
T, Sep. 2	Theory and Method	Steve Mintz, 'The Five Myths of Childhood, from <i>Huck's Raft</i> (handout)
T, Sep. 9	Children at Play	<i>Children at Play</i>
T, Sep. 16	Children at Play	Generational Play assignment
T, Sep. 23	Children at School	<i>Bad Boys</i>
T, Sep. 30	Children at School	Response Paper assignment
T, Oct. 7	Children at Work	<i>Barefoot Heart</i>
T, Oct. 14	Children at Work	
T, Oct. 21	The Family in Fiction	<i>Donald Duk</i>
T, Oct. 28	Childhood and Family in Election '08	Once Upon a Childhood assignment
T, Nov. 4	The Family in History	<i>Barren in the Promised Land</i>
T, Nov. 11	<i>NO CLASS: Veterans Day</i>	
T, Nov. 18	The Family in Popular Culture	<i>The Mommy Myth</i> , Introduction and Chs. 1-6, 9-10, Epilogue
T, Nov. 25	<i>NO CLASS: Thanksgiving</i>	
T, Dec. 2	The Family on Film	
T, Dec. 9	Conclusion of Course	The American Family assignment