

American Studies 420

Childhood and Family in American Culture

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American Studies 420-01, #10128

Childhood and Family in American Culture

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Wednesdays 4:00-6:45 • EC-011

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Office Hours: Mondays 2:30-5:30, & 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 both primary and secondary sources, we will analyze and contextualize the varied and contested meanings of “childhood” and “family” at different historical moments. In addition, we will survey different popular stories that are told about children and families in U.S. film, literature, news media, and television. The course also will focus in-depth on two contemporary issues that deeply affect the lives of American children: education and consumerism. Throughout the semester, we will pay close attention to how the concept of “childhood” is both a *cultural myth* that is historically constructed, and a *social reality* that is shaped by race, class, gender, age, sexuality, religion, and region.

Required Texts

Books

Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*

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

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

Juliet B. Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*

All books are available for purchase at Little Professor bookstore, 725 N. Placentia Ave

Additional Readings will be available under "Course Documents" on Blackboard site.

Films

Stand By Me (1986, dir. Rob Reiner)

Capturing the Friedmans (2003, dir. Andrew Jarecki)

You are required to view these two films in advance of our scheduled discussion [see course schedule]. They are available on reserve in the library, or you may acquire them on your own through DVD-rental services. You will be expected to discuss these films in your written assignments.

Learning Goals

- Students will analyze and evaluate a variety of primary and secondary sources, and synthesize these sources in meaningful ways
- Students will imaginatively and critically forge connections among diverse cultural and historical themes and problems
- Students will develop an interdisciplinary interpretive framework for studying the concepts of childhood and family
- Students will be able to independently apply this interpretive framework to complicated cultural problems and issues from both historical and contemporary perspectives
- Students will develop skills in oral and written communication

Course Assignments

Assignment #1: Analyzing Historical Documents

For this paper, you will analyze two primary documents in the history of childhood. I will provide you with the documents, each from a different time period. You should use *Huck's Raft* to construct a relevant historical context for the documents and assist you in your analysis. For each document, you must analyze its component parts: offer a close reading of the *content* and *intended audience*, and connect it to a broader historical and/or cultural *context*. Ultimately, you should make a case about the *significance* of the document and what it potentially tells us—and does not tell us—about the history of childhood.

Length: Undergraduate Students: 6 pages • Graduate Students: 6-8 pages

Assignment #2: Interpreting Popular Stories

In this paper, you will first analyze the depiction and meaning of “childhood” and “family” in *Barefoot Heart*. Then, you must analyze the depiction and meaning of “childhood” and/or “family” in a cultural document of your choosing—a television show, book, film, or news media report. Be sure to summarize your chosen document before analyzing it.

Length: Undergraduate Students: 6 pages • Graduate Students: 8-10 pages

Assignment #3: Addressing Contemporary Issues

For the third paper, you will reflect on the issues and problems raised by the books *Bad Boys* and *Born to Buy*. First, summarize the *argument* and *methodology* of each book. Then, you should respond to the problems raised by ONE of the authors (pick ONE issue—education or consumerism). Your response should be both *personal* and *proactive*. For the “personal” section: What was your experience with education or consumerism growing up? Reflect on this. For the “proactive” section: Do you agree with the author that these are problems? What should be done to address these issues? Do you have solutions, big or small? Is there anything you personally could do to address these issues?

Length: Undergraduate Students: 6-8 pages • Graduate Students: 8-10 pages

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. Please come to every class prepared to 1) describe the central argument or theme of the assigned text; 2) assess the reading/film for its relative strengths and limitations; 3) raise questions about the reading/film; 4) connect the readings/films to one another; 5) connect the readings/films to your broader understanding of contemporary and historical issues in American culture; 6) relate the readings/films to your own experience and/or areas of expertise.

Attendance is required at every class meeting.

Additional assignment for graduate students

M.A. students are required to read one additional book for the course, selected in consultation with the instructor from the list below. You will be required to make a 20-30-minute presentation to the class on your book on a specific day (see course schedule). Your presentation should include a *visual or audio aid* and an *interactive* component with classmates. Following the presentation, you must write 5-page response paper that 1) analyzes the author's main argument and methodology; 2) ties the book into larger themes examined in the course; 3) reflects on the strengths and “next steps” of your class presentation.

Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Kansas Charley: The Boy Murderer*

Julia Mickenberg, *Learning From the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States*

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

Beverly Lyon Clark, *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America*

Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*

Lisa Delpit, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*

Daniel Thomas Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood*

Grading Standards

	<u>Undergraduates</u>	<u>Graduates</u>
Assignment #1	30%	20%
Assignment #2	30%	30%
Assignment #3	30%	30%
Participation	10%	10%
Book Presentation/Paper (Graduates)	N/A	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

A Note to Graduate Students

In keeping with university-wide requirements for graduate study, graduate students enrolled in this 400-level course will be expected to demonstrate, in both written and oral performance, quality higher than that expected of an undergraduate. Graduate students should demonstrate an advanced level of competence in interdisciplinary cultural analysis and synthesis.

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 657-278-3117.

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
W, Aug. 25	Introduction to Course	
W, Sep. 1	Theories and Methods in the Study of Childhood and Family	<u>Read:</u> <i>Huck's Raft</i> , Preface and Prologue; Allen Guttman, "The Progressive Era Appropriation of Children's Play," and Peter N. Stearns, "Defining Happy Childhoods: Assessing a Recent Change" (available on Blackboard)
	<i>PART ONE: THE HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD & FAMILY IN AMERICA</i>	
W, Sep. 8	The Colonial Child <u>Discussion:</u> <i>Huck's Raft</i>	<u>Read:</u> <i>Huck's Raft</i> , Chs. 1-3
W, Sept. 15	Republican Motherhood and the Antebellum Child <u>Discussion:</u> <i>Huck's Raft</i> <u>Lecture:</u> The History of Christmas	<u>Read:</u> <i>Huck's Raft</i> , Chs. 4-7
W, Sept. 22	Progressive Reform and the Century of the Child <u>Discussion:</u> <i>Huck's Raft</i> <u>Lecture:</u> The History of Progressive Education <u>Grad Student Report:</u> <i>Kansas Charley</i>	<u>Read:</u> <i>Huck's Raft</i> , Chs. 8-11
W, Sept. 29	Depression, War, and Abundance <u>Discussion:</u> <i>Huck's Raft</i> <u>Lecture:</u> The Cold War and American Childhood <u>Grad Student Report:</u> <i>Learning from the Left</i>	<u>Read:</u> <i>Huck's Raft</i> , Chs. 12-15
W, Oct. 6	Postmodern Childhood <u>Discussion:</u> <i>Huck's Raft</i>	<u>Read:</u> <i>Huck's Raft</i> , Chs. 16-17

	<i>PART TWO: POPULAR STORIES ABOUT CHILDHOOD & FAMILY</i>	
W, Oct. 13	Popular Stories: The News Media <u>Discussion:</u> Analysis of selected news stories <u>Grad Student Report:</u> <i>The Mommy Myth</i>	<u>Due:</u> Assignment #1
W, Oct. 20	Popular Stories: Literature <u>Discussion:</u> <i>Barefoot Heart</i> <u>Grad Student Report:</u> <i>Kiddie Lit</i>	<u>Read:</u> <i>Barefoot Heart</i> (all)
W, Oct. 27	Popular Stories: Film <u>Discussion:</u> <i>Stand By Me</i> and <i>Capturing the Friedmans</i>	<u>View:</u> <i>Stand By Me</i> and <i>Capturing the Friedmans</i>
W, Nov. 3	Popular Stories: Television <u>In-class screening and discussion:</u> Selected episodes of family TV shows	<u>Due:</u> Assignment #2 by MONDAY, Nov. 8, in American Studies office, UH-313, 4 PM.
	<i>PART THREE: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES</i>	
W, Nov. 10	Race, Class, & the Hidden Curriculum <u>Discussion:</u> <i>Bad Boys</i> <u>Grad Student Report:</u> <i>Other People's Children</i>	<u>Read:</u> <i>Bad Boys</i> , Chs. 1-4, and "The Invisible Knapsack"
W, Nov. 17	Desegregation and Resegregation in U.S. Schools <u>Discussion:</u> <i>Bad Boys</i> <u>Grad Student Report:</u> <i>Savage Inequalities</i>	<u>Read:</u> <i>Bad Boys</i> , Chs. 5-8
W, Nov. 24	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break	
W, Dec. 1	The Commercialization of Childhood <u>Discussion:</u> <i>Born to Buy</i> <u>Grad Student Report:</u> <i>The Commodification of Childhood</i>	<u>Read:</u> <i>Born to Buy</i> , Chs. 1-5
W, Dec. 8	Selling the Cute and the Cool <u>Discussion:</u> <i>Born to Buy</i>	<u>Read:</u> <i>Born to Buy</i> , Chs. 6-10
M, Dec. 13		<u>Due:</u> Assignment #3 in AMST office, UH-313, by 4 PM.