

## American Studies 420

### Childhood and Family in American Culture

AMST 420-01 #19904  
California State University, Fullerton  
Fall 2013  
Wednesdays, 4:00-6:45  
Room: UH-319

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#### Course Description

This upper-division American Studies elective 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 myths about children and families that circulate in U.S. media and popular culture. Throughout the semester, we will also pay close attention to the everyday lived experiences of children and families and the ways in which their experiences are shaped by age, gender, race, class, sexuality, region, ability, and religion.

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#### Required Texts

##### Books

- Elva Trevino Hart, *Barefoot Heart: Stories of a Migrant Child*. Bilingual Press, 1999.  
Anna Mae Duane, *Suffering Childhood in Early America: Violence, Race and the Making of the Child Victim*. University of Georgia Press, 2010.  
Rebecca de Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America's Long Struggle for Racial Equality*. University of North Carolina Press, 2009.  
Jo B. Paoletti, *Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America*. Indiana University Press, 2012.  
Ayelet Waldman, *Bad Mother: A Chronicle of Maternal Crimes, Minor Calamities, and Occasional Moments of Grace*. Anchor, 2010.  
Erik Klineberg, *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone*. Penguin, 2013.

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

##### Films

- The Sandlot* (1993, dir. David Mickey Evans)  
*Bully* (2011, dir. Lee Hirsch)  
*Capturing the Friedmans* (2003, dir. Andrew Jarecki)  
*Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood* (2008, dir. Adriana Barbaro and Jeremy Earp)  
<http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/consuming-kids/>

Unless otherwise noted, you are required to view these films in advance of our scheduled discussion [see course schedule]. We will be screening *The Sandlot* in class. *Bully* and *Capturing the Friedmans* 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.

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### American Studies 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 American cultural production in a geopolitical context
- 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

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### Course Assignments

You will write three papers for this course. Each paper will challenge you to demonstrate your understanding of key concepts and apply them independently to analysis of primary source material.

#### Paper #1: The Metaphorical Child

There are two parts to this paper.

Part I (3-4 pages): So far in this course, we have focused on two main themes:

- 1) Ideas about childhood change over time
- 2) Ideas about childhood are not applied in equal measure to all children.

In the first part of your paper, define the following three ideas about childhood: the suffering child, the revolutionary child, and the innocent child. For each, give an example from history that shows how these ideas were not applied in equal measure to all children. In other words, how can race, gender, and/or class influence our cultural assumptions about childhood? You must use both *Suffering Childhood* and *If We Could Change the World* in your response.

Part II (2-3 pages): Analyze an idea of childhood (suffering, revolutionary, or innocent) as depicted in a contemporary cultural document of your choice. You should select a news story about a current event, a film, a television show, or a novel (work of fiction) you have read. Briefly summarize the document you have chosen, describe how it communicates a particular idea about childhood, and critically analyze this image of childhood.

#### Paper #2: Kids' Stuff

Length: 6-8 pages.

For this assignment, you will interview two people from an older generation (at least 20 years older than you) about the clothing they wore as a child and the toys they played with as a child.

In your paper, provide background information on your interviewee (age, gender, race, region where they grew up, etc.). Describe the clothing they wore and the toys they played with. Be sure to

integrate some direction quotations from your interview (I recommend you record your interview; recording equipment is available for check out by students in the Center for Oral and Public History on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Pollak Library). Then, analyze each interviewee's experience with clothing and toys by drawing on our course materials (especially *Pink and Blue*) and class discussions. To what extent was their experience of dress and play shaped by gender or other social factors? Does their experience match up to the styles and cultural shifts discussed in Paoletti's book? If so, how? If not, why do you think it doesn't?

You should conclude your paper with a brief description and reflection on your own childhood dress and toy play. How does it compare/contrast with the people you interviewed? What accounts for the similarities or differences?

### **Paper #3: American Families**

There are two parts to this paper.

Part 1 (3-5 pages): Analyze the image of "family" in *Bad Mother*, *Capturing the Friedmans*, and *Going Solo*. To what extent does each challenge or reinforce traditional ideas about the American family?

Part II (2-3 pages): Analyze an image of the American family as depicted in a contemporary cultural document of your choice. You should select a news story about a current event, a film, a television show, or a novel (work of fiction) you have read. Briefly summarize the document you have chosen, describe how it communicates a particular idea about family, and critically analyze this image of the American family. Does it challenge or reinforce traditional ideas about the American family? How?

### **Participation**

Attendance is required at every class meeting. 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.

### **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, and write a 6-8-page response paper that 1) summarizes AND evaluates the author's main argument and methodology and 2) ties the book into larger themes/issues/questions examined in the course. This paper is due no later than November 20.

- Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Kansas Charley: The Boy Murderer*
- William S. Bush, *Who Gets a Childhood? Race and Juvenile Justice in Texas*
- Anne Arnett Ferguson, *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*
- Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*
- Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land: Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness*
- Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*

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## Grading Standards

	<u>Undergraduates</u>	<u>Graduates</u>
Paper #1	30%	20%
Paper #2	30%	30%
Paper #3	30%	30%
Participation	10%	10%
Supplemental Book Paper (MA students)	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 93-96; A-90-92; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C- 70-72; D+ 67-69; D 63-66; D- 60-62; 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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### **Campus Emergency Procedures**

Students should be familiar with campus **emergency procedures:**

[http://www.fullerton.edu/emergencypreparedness/ep\\_students.html](http://www.fullerton.edu/emergencypreparedness/ep_students.html).

**Course Schedule (subject to revision)**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Due</b>
W, Aug. 28	Introduction to Course	
	<b><i>MYTHOLOGY</i></b>	
W, Sep. 4	<i>The Sandlot</i> and the Myths of American Childhood	
W, Sep. 11	Counter-memory: <i>Barefoot Heart</i>	<u>Read:</u> <i>Barefoot Heart</i> (all)
	<b><i>HISTORY AND METAPHOR</i></b>	
W, Sept. 18	Colonial Kids: The Suffering Child and the Depraved Child	<u>Read:</u> <i>Suffering Childhood</i> , Introduction and Ch. 1
W, Sept. 25	Early American Kids: The Revolutionary Child	<u>Read:</u> <i>Suffering Childhood</i> , Chs. 3 and 4
W, Oct. 2	Progressive Kids: The Innocent Child and the Right To Childhood	<u>Read:</u> <i>If We Could Change</i> , Introduction, Ch. 1, Appendix A and B
W, Oct. 9	Postwar Kids: The Adultified Child and the Politics of Childhood	<u>Read:</u> <i>If We Could Change</i> , Chs. 2, 3, Afterword, Appendix C
	<b><i>MATERIAL CULTURES</i></b>	
W, Oct. 16	Born to Buy	<u>Watch:</u> <i>Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood</i> (2008)  <u>Due:</u> Paper #1
W, Oct. 23	Dress, Play, and Gender	<u>Read:</u> <i>Pink and Blue</i> , Introduction and Chs. 1-3
W, Oct. 30	Cool Kids	<u>Read:</u> <i>Pink and Blue</i> , Chs. 5-7  <u>Watch:</u> <i>The Merchants of Cool</i> (2001)

	<i>DEVIANTS AND DEVIATIONS</i>	
W, Nov. 6	Mean Kids	<u>Watch:</u> <i>Bully</i> (2011)
W, Nov. 13	Mommy Myths	<u>Read:</u> <i>Bad Mother</i> , Introduction, Chs. 1-5  <u>Due:</u> Paper #2
W, Nov. 17	Having it All. Or Not.	<u>Read:</u> <i>Bad Mother</i> , Chs. 6-18
W, Nov. 20	Home Movies	<u>Watch:</u> <i>Capturing the Friedmans</i> (2003)
W, Nov. 27	<i>NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break</i>	
W, Dec. 4	Rise of the Singleton	<u>Read:</u> <i>Going Solo</i> (all)
W, Dec. 11	Redefining Childhood and the Family in American Culture	
TBD		<u>Due:</u> Paper #3