

TENTATIVE DRAFT OF SYLLABUS

CHILDHOOD IN AMERICA



Nine-year-old newsgirl, Hartford, 1909; photograph by Lewis Hine/ Shirley Temple, circa 1934

Course Description and Rationale:

This is an innovative and exciting course, one that will engage you with an important historical and contemporary subject, introduce you to a number of fascinating materials, and raise enduring questions about the structure of childhood in America.

By studying key texts and topics in the history of childhood in the United States over two centuries, we will encounter a rich variety of historical issues, methods, and sources. We will examine the changing construction of childhood and experiences of children (emphasizing preadolescence) from the early nineteenth century to the present. We will focus particularly on how childhood and children are *valued*—economically, emotionally, morally, and symbolically—in changing economies and cultures from plantation slavery through industrial production to the development of a modern consumer society and a changing global economy.

In the process we will persistently ask several key questions: What is the relationship between what the sociologist Viviana Zelizer calls the emotionally priceless, economically useless, middle-class child, on the one hand, and the economically valued, emotionally vulnerable child worker, on the other? Has this split been resolved in modern consumer culture, and, if so, on what terms? How are children valued today?

OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, EVENTS, AND ASSIGNMENTS:*

1. Introduction: The Values of Childhood (Aug. 21, 23, 26)

Readings:

- Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*[†] (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), Prologue.

2. Changing Conceptions of Childhood in Life, Death, and Afterlife: From Puritan New England to the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class (Aug. 28, 30)

Readings:

- Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, chapter 1, "Children of the Covenant," and chapter 4, "Inventing the Middle-Class Child."

3. Sacrificing Childhood: The Economy of Slavery in the Antebellum South (Sept. 4, 6, 9, 11, 13)

Readings:

- Harriet Jacobs [Linda Brent, *pseud.*], *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself** (1861), chapters 1 "Childhood" through chapter 21 "New Perils."
- Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, chapter 5, "Growing Up in Bondage."

Exercise #1: How was the experience of childhood shaped by slavery? How were slave children valued? What difference did gender make in the experience of enslaved childhood and youth? Please answer these questions in an essay of roughly 500 words, focusing on a textual analysis of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents*. Papers are due in class on September 11.

4. Romancing the Condition of Homeless Boys (Sept. 16, 18, 20, 23, 25, 27)

Readings:

- Horatio Alger, *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York with the Boot-Blacks** (1868).
- Charles Loring Brace. *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work among Them* (1872), chapter 9, "Homeless Boys," 97-113; and chapter 10, "Street Girls," 114-122 (available on Blackboard site).
- Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, chapter 8, "Save the Child."
- Elizabeth Gudrais, "Unequal America: Causes and Consequences of the Wide—and Growing—Gap between Rich and Poor," *Harvard Magazine* (July-August 2008), available at:

* This schedule is subject to change as circumstances may dictate. Students will be given ample notice of any changes, if at all possible. The final examination will be held at the scheduled time.

[†] A title marked with an asterisk has been ordered at Student Stores.

<http://harvardmagazine.com/2008/07/unequal-america-html>
(or see link on course web site).

Alan Feuer, "Homeless Families Cloaked in Normality," *New York Times*,
February 3, 2012
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/05/nyregion/ordinary-families-cloaked-in-a-veil-of-homelessness.html?_r=1&hp=&pagewanted=print

See also:

<http://video.nytimes.com/video/2012/02/03/nyregion/100000001332917/timescast--the-invisible-homeless.html>

Exercise #2: Responses (roughly 500 words) to question on social inequality and opportunity in *Ragged Dick*, due in class September 25.

5. Images and Ambiguities of Childhood in Art and Photography (Sept. 30, Oct. 2, 4, 7, 9, 11)

Readings:

- David S. Lubin, *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), chapter 5, "Guys and Dolls: Framing Femininity in Post-Civil War America" (on reserve in Undergraduate Library).

On Oct. 2 and 4 we will study prints and photographs depicting aspects of childhood from the Ackland Art Museum. On these dates, please meet at the Ackland promptly at 11 o'clock.

Exercise #3: Analytical description and interpretation of a print or photograph from the Ackland's collection, based on the instructions in class handout, "Interrogating Images" (approximately 400-500 words), due in class Oct. 9.

6. The Emotional Economy of the March Family: Alcott's *Little Women* (October 14, 16, 21, 23, 25)

Readings:

- Louisa May Alcott. *Little Women** (1868), Part 1.

Film clips from various Hollywood and musical versions of *Little Women*.

Exercise #4: Responses (roughly 300-400 words) to individual questions on *Little Women* due in class Oct 23.

7. The Changing Economy and Morality of Child Labor (Oct. 28, 30, Nov. 1)

Readings:

- Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*,* chapters 2-3, pp. 56-112 (also available on Undergraduate Reserve).

- Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, chapter 7, "Laboring Children."
- Peter Seixas, "Lewis Hine: From 'Social' to 'Interpretive' Photography," *American Quarterly* 39 (Autumn 1987): 381-409 (available through link below or on course web site).
<http://www.jstor.org/pss/2712885>

Jeffrey Alexander and Lewis Hine, *Child Labor in the Carolinas* (New York: National Child Labor Committee, 1909), selections; available at link:
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/childlabor/menu.html>

Silent film short, *Children Who Labor* (Edison, 1912), made by the National Child Labor Committee (13 minutes), to be shown in class.

8. Smiling through the Great Depression: Childhood in the 1930s (Nov. 4, 6, 8, 11, 13)

Readings:

- Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, chapter 12, "Coming of Age in the Great Depression."
- "Pewee's Progress" [cover story on Shirley Temple], *Time*, 27 (April 1936), 36—38 (available on course web site) or through link:
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,770157,00.html>.
- Robert A. Cohen, *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression** (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), selections.

Excerpts from Shirley Temple movies, to be shown in class.

Exercise #5: Choose a letter from a child to Mrs. Roosevelt, and in an essay of roughly 400-500 words, say how and why it is an important historical document. Responses due in class on Nov. 11.

9. Home Alone: Recent Pressures on Childhood (Nov. 15, 20, 22, 25, Dec. 2, 4)

Readings:

- Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, chapter 16, "Parental Panics and the Reshaping of Childhood," and chapter 17, "The Unfinished Century of the Child."
- Annette Lareau, "Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families," *American Sociological Review* 67 (Oct., 2002): 747-776 (available through JSTOR; or see link on course web site).
<http://www.jstor.org/pss/3088916>
- Madeline Levine, "What Price, Privilege?" *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 25, 2006 (see link on course web site).
http://articles.sfgate.com/2006-06-25/living/17299069_1_disorders-depression-teens/17

- Andrew Solomon, *Far From the Tree: Children, Parents, and the Search for Identity* (2012), selections.

Exercise #6: This exercise will concern either class and opportunity in the lives of children or issues of diversity and challenge within American families. Exercises are due in class on Nov. 25.

Final Examination: Friday, Dec. 6, at 12 noon.

Written Assignments, Examinations, Grades, and Other Diabolical Tortures:



1. Written Exercises:

Students will write six short exercises addressing problems of historical evidence and interpretation.

Grades on written exercises = 60 % of grade for course.

2. Class Participation:

This is a seminar. Let's take advantage of it. Although I enjoy lecturing, I wish here to do everything possible to enhance class participation. I will provide contexts for the topics under study and offer interpretations for you to consider (though not to swallow whole). Yet the life of the class should be discussion, and discussions are collective enterprises that, to function successfully, demand every member's preparation, attendance, and participation. Although students will vary in their conversational styles, learning to participate in discussion involves social and intellectual skills that are an essential part of education. These include: listening to others and learning to absorb and synthesize their remarks; learning to respond constructively and analytically to others' ideas; learning to develop and articulate positions of one's own; responding to criticism; and learning to modify or discard an argument in favor of another, more satisfactory one. Together, we can be a lot smarter than any one of us alone. You should come to class well prepared and eager to exchange ideas about the topics under study, ready to speculate and to question and also to ask for explanations and clarifications. (Often these are the very best questions.)

Periodically, students will be invited to post questions for discussion on our Sakai site.

Quality of oral class contributions: 15% of grade

Postings on Sakai: 5% of grade

3. Final Examination:

The final examination will be an essay. Questions will be distributed in advance before the Thanksgiving holiday. Answers are due at the scheduled examination time of Friday, December 6, at 12 noon. We will meet in class for final discussion and reflection at that time. Late papers cannot be accepted.

Grade on final examination = 20% of grade for course

4. Attendance Policy:

You have a lot of demands on your time, but *please* don't cut corners by missing class arriving late, or leaving early. (Still, I'd rather have you late than not at all.) . Students will be penalized for unexcused absences beyond the first three at the rate of **one-fifth** of a letter grade for each absence. A student who accumulates a total of six or more unexcused absences will fail the course.

To minimize distractions and to enhance everyone's concentration, please put newspapers and crossword puzzles away, turn off cell phones laptops, and other devices.. You may be in the habit of multi-tasking, but class demands your full and complete attention. A student disregarding these elemental guidelines will be **counted as absent** for the class meeting.

Please let me know *in advance* if possible when you will be absent, and please discuss unforeseen absences with me as soon as possible. It is *your responsibility* to sign the roll for each class and to make a note on it in timely fashion when you wish an excused absence to be noted. Explanations provided substantially after the fact cannot be honored.

Keeping in Touch:

I wish to get to know each of you, and I welcome your visits. Please feel free to see me during my office hours (or by appointment) to discuss a specific matter about the course, to talk about your ideas, questions, concerns in general--or simply to chat.

Office: Hamilton 473

Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:30-2:30, and by appointment.

Telephone: 962-5004

E-mail: jfkasson@email.unc.edu

A Note on Plagiarism and a Reminder about the Honor Code:

Plagiarism is a violation of the Honor Code and of academic integrity. As the American Historical Association states, "Plagiarism...takes many forms. The clearest abuse is the use of another's language without quotation marks and citation. More subtle abuses include the appropriation of concepts, data, or notes all disguised in newly crafted sentences, or reference to a borrowed work in an early note and then extensive further use without attribution." The AHA statement adds, "The plagiarist's standard defense--that he or she was misled by hastily taken and imperfect notes--is plausible only in the context of a wider tolerance of shoddy work. A basic rule of good notetaking requires every researcher to distinguish scrupulously between exact quotation and paraphrase. A basic rule of good writing warns us against following our own paraphrased notes slavishly.

When a historian simply links one paraphrase to the next, even if the sources are cited, a kind of structural misuse takes place; the writer is implicitly claiming a shaping intelligence that actually belonged to the sources.” For the full text of this statement, see: Plagiarism:

<http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/professionalstandards.cfm>

For more on plagiarism and how to avoid it, visit the link to Plagiarism prepared by the UNC Writing Center:

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/citation/plagiarism>

Students should also feel free to contact me about any questions or concerns

All students are asked to support the honor system in this and all their university work. Please let me know if you have any questions as to its application at any time.