

FAMILY

Setting:

Fall 2009
T, R 4:55-6:10 p.m.
715 B'way, Rm. 401
K10.0035

Instructor:

Patrick McCreery
patrick.mccreery@nyu.edu
Tel.: (212) 998-7351
Office hours M 3-6 p.m. or
by appointment
Office: 715 B'way, Rm. 529

DESCRIPTION

We will attempt a lot in this First-Year Seminar.

First and foremost, we will conduct a critical examination of “family”—focusing particularly on the ways that academics, politicians, journalists and private individuals in the United States have understood that term over the past 150 years. As we will see, the legal, social and personal definitions of family are fluid and contested. It is not our job as a class to construct one definition of “family” upon which all of us can agree. Instead, we will identify which social forces have attempted to define the term, and under what circumstances those various definitions have been established and abandoned, limited and expanded.

At the same time, we will examine the concept of family through particular disciplinary lenses. For example, what can the field of history tell us about the family? For that matter, what *is* “history”? What are its particular research methodologies, and what types of knowledge do those methodologies produce? We will ask these questions about all the disciplines we encounter.

By the end of the course, you should have a comprehensive understanding of the many conceptualizations of family in the United States. You should also have a deeper knowledge of several academic disciplines and of interdisciplinary research—knowledge you can use as you begin to build your own Gallatin concentration.

BOOKS/READINGS

The following books are required reading:

- Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986)
- J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* (1911; Penguin Classics Edition, 2004)
- Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (Basic Books, 2000 ed.)
- Dorothy Nelkin and M. Susan Lindee, *The DNA Mystique: The Gene as a Cultural Icon* (Univ. of Michigan Press, 2004 ed.)

The books are available in the basement textbook section of Shakespeare & Co., across Broadway from Gallatin. Readings will be posted on the course's Blackboard site. **THESE YOU MUST PRINT AND BRING TO CLASS.**

ASSIGNMENTS

You are responsible for the following:

- Reading and being prepared to discuss all books, essays and short stories
- Writing three 5- to 7-page essays

For each of the first and second essays, I will give you three questions, and you will pick which one you want to answer. I will hand out these assignments at least one week before they are due. For the third essay, you will need to compare / contrast a subject or theme of your choice as it pertains to *Peter Pan* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. Here you may engage one or more additional texts from the syllabus, but that is not required.

The purpose of all these assignments is to give you the opportunity to demonstrate the following: your knowledge of the readings; your understanding of the (dis)connections between authors' arguments and methodologies; and your ability to express yourself clearly and succinctly. (I will hand out specific guidelines with each assignment.)

PARTICIPATION & ATTENDANCE

Because this course is a seminar, you should participate fully in discussions. You need to prepare for that: Read everything closely; underline points that interest you and write out a few questions that you want to raise; in discussions, expand on points with which you agree and ask questions about statements or points of view you think are unclear. Of course, you may also disagree with some of the readings or with my comments or those of the other students, but please do so in a way that respects others.

Attend class, be on time, and stay for the entire meeting. You are allowed one unexcused absence; additional absences may require written documentation, such as a doctor's note. Repeated absences and/or chronic lateness will result in lowered grades.

GRADING

I will grade you according to this formula:

- Three Essays - 25% each
- Participation/Attendance - 25%

In general, I will grade you on how well you articulate, develop and support your arguments. This includes keeping your arguments relevant to the question or issue at hand.

INCOMPLETES / PLAGIARISM

I follow Gallatin's policy on incompletes. This means that I strongly discourage incompletes and give them only for *well-documented* reasons. If I do agree to give you an incomplete, we will set a deadline by which you should complete all the work. (This most likely will be only an extra few weeks.)

Another word of warning: Students whose essays contain plagiarized material will flunk the course. Please contact me prior to submitting an essay if you have any questions as to what constitutes plagiarism.

CONCLUSION

Be assured that I want you to learn and to receive the good grades you deserve. So please make an appointment with me if you feel you are having difficulty in the course.

READING & DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE: Introductions to the course and each other

- Tues., Sept. 8 You, Me, the Syllabus...
- Thurs., Sept. 10 Laurel George, "Like Family to Me': Families of Origin, Families of Choice, and Class Mobility" (2001), 16 pp.

WEEK TWO: The Cultural Politics of Family Life

- Tues., Sept. 15 Russell Shorto, "No Babies?" (2008), 8 pp.
Elaine Tyler May, "Barren to Infertile: Childlessness Before the Twentieth Century" (1995), 39 pp.
- Thurs., Sept. 17 Judith Levine, "Crimes of Passion: Statutory Rape and the Denial of Female Desire" (2002), 22 pp.

WEEK THREE: The Historical American Family, Part 1

- Tues., Sept. 22 Walter Johnson, "A Person with a Price" (1999), 18 pp.
& "The Chattel Principle" (1999), 26 pp.
- Thurs., Sept. 24 Kenneth T. Jackson, "Home, Sweet Home: The House and the Yard" (1984), 28 pp.
& "The Drive-in Culture of Contemporary America" (1984) 26 pp.

WEEK FOUR: The Historical American Family, Part 2

- Tues., Sept. 29 Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were* (2000), to Page 148
- Thurs., Oct. 1 Coontz, Pages 149-288

WEEK FIVE: The Mediated Family

- Tues., Oct. 6 **FIRST ESSAY DUE—Mid-Semester Check-in**
- Thurs., Oct. 8 Joshua Gamson, "Talking Freaks: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Families on Daytime Talk TV" (2001), 19 pp.

CLASS SCHEDULE (cont.)

WEEK SIX: The Family in Anthropology & Sociology

- Tues., Oct. 13 Philippe Bourgois, "Families and Children in Pain in the U.S. Inner Cities" (1998), 21 pp.
- Thurs., Oct. 15 Joan Weibel-Orlando, "Powwow Princesses and Gospels: Cross Generational Enculturation in American Indian Families" (1999), 22 pp.

WEEK SEVEN: Family: Biologically Determined?

- Tues., Oct. 20 Dorothy Nelkin and M. Susan Lindee, *The DNA Mystique* (2004), to Page 101
- Thurs., Oct. 22 Nelkin and Lindee, Pages 102-205

WEEK EIGHT: Law and the Legislated Family

- Tues., Oct. 27 Dorothy E. Roberts, "Punishing Drug Addicts Who Have Babies: Women of Color, Equality, And the Right of Privacy" (1995), 22 pp.
- Thurs., Oct. 29 Nancy D. Polikoff, "Raising Children: Lesbian and Gay Parents Face the Public and the Courts" (2000), 31 pp.

WEEK NINE: The Art of Family

- Tues., Nov. 3 Anne Higonnet, "Knowing Childhood" (1998), 33 pp.
Jessie Mann, "Before the Lens," (2001), 4 pp.
Jessie Mann, "Self-Possessed," (2006), 2 pp.
Richard Woodward, "The Disturbing Photography of Sally Mann" (1992), 7 pp.
- Thurs., Nov. 5 **Class canceled.**

WEEK TEN: A Conservative's View of Family

- Tues., Nov. 10 **SECOND ESSAY DUE—Pre-registration Discussion; Reading TBA**
- Thurs., Nov. 12 Martin Mawyer, "A Troubled Nation" (1995), 35 pp.

CLASS SCHEDULE (cont.)

WEEK ELEVEN: Psychology and Family Life

- Tues., Nov. 17 Erik Erikson, "Introduction to Part Three" (1950), 6 pp.
& "Eight Ages of Man" (1950), 28 pp.
- Thurs., Nov. 19 Henry Jenkins, "The Sensuous Child: Benjamin Spock and the Sexual Revolution" (1998), 22 pp.

WEEK TWELVE: Reading Week

- Tues., Nov. 24 Class canceled.
- Thurs., Nov. 26 **HAPPY THANKSGIVING!—No Class Meeting**

WEEK THIRTEEN: Literature and the Fantasy of Family, Part 1

- Tues., Dec. 1 J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* (1911), 236 pp.
- Thurs., Dec. 3 Barrie (cont.)
Jacqueline Rose, "Introduction" to *The Case of Peter Pan: Or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Rev. ed., 1992), 11 pp.
Alison Lurie, "The Boy Who Couldn't Grow Up: James Barrie" (1990), 17 pp.

WEEK FOURTEEN: Literature and the Fantasy of Family, Part 2

- Tues., Dec. 8 Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), 311 pp.
- Thurs., Dec. 10 Atwood (cont.)
Linda Kintz, "Sacred Intimacy" (1997), 37 pp.

WEEK FIFTEEN: Final Thoughts

- Tues., Dec. 15 **THIRD ESSAY DUE—Final Farewells**