AMERICAN FAMILIES

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines the evolution of American families from colonial times to the present. We will consider the impact of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation on family formation and culture and will explore such issues as representation, memory, and the ideology of family life. Readings, film, photographs, and discussions will emphasize an interdisciplinary approach to the development of American familial culture and will include both primary and secondary sources.

LEARNING GOALS:

The Junior Seminar will focus on providing students with preliminary training in analytical and methodological skills needed to pursue a research project in American Studies. As a result, we will devote special attention to learning how to identify and frame engaging and significant questions, locate sources, interpret and deploy evidence, draw from useful analytical and methodological approaches, develop persuasive narrative strategies, and revisit and sharpen ideas through the writing of multiple drafts.

REQUIRED TEXTS (listed in order of assigned readings)


**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

The design of this course has been developed with assistance from John Gillis and Philip Greven of the Rutgers-New Brunswick Department of History, Jan Lewis of the Rutgers-Newark Department of History, Al Nigrin of the Rutgers Film Co-op, Charles Silver of the Museum of Modern Art Film Study Center, Marc Stein of York University, and Susan McKinnon of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Virginia.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Instructional materials for this course are available for download at [http://sakai.rutgers.edu](http://sakai.rutgers.edu). Any communications with me should be sent directly to my e-mail address: duus@rci.rutgers.edu.

All papers must be submitted to me in hard copy on the date assigned. Penalties for lateness may include lowering of the grade for the assignment. Help on acknowledging sources and guide to footnotes and endnotes may be found on the American Studies website.

**Full attendance and Class Participation = 30%**. This is a seminar, that is, a small group of students engaged in the exchange of ideas, and therefore its success depends on your active and informed participation in weekly discussions. Attendance is required at all class meetings (one unexcused absence will be permitted without penalty), and class participation constitutes an important part of your final grade. To have an absence count as “excused,” you must provide appropriate documentation. Missing more than four class sessions will result in automatic failure of the course. If you miss a screening, you are responsible for arranging with Media Services to make it up.

Participation in class discussion (10% of final grade)

Each student will be primary moderator of one class and assistant moderator of another (10% of final grade)

Five one page responses to assigned reading for each week. You may choose the weeks on which you write these papers. They will be graded on the basis of clarity and analytic skill. They should be posted on the Discussion and Private Messages section of the Sakai course web site. (If there should be a technical problem with that procedure, e-mail a copy to me at duus@rci.rutgers.edu by 10:00 a.m. on the morning of the day the class meets.) Responses should include a question that will help stimulate class discussion. (10% of final grade)
Paper due Wednesday, January 27 (10% of final grade)

The world of families, the social policies that shape and sustain them, the biological acts that produce them, the cultural meaning we attach to them, have all changed in the last generation. Complicated family issues appear constantly in the popular media and not always in just the ways we expect. The intent of this assignment is to help you learn to read for family issues and to give you some experience in the kind of close analysis of sources that will be helpful in the development of your final paper.

For this paper, you will go to the New York Times for the week of your birthday forty years ago and find a story on a family issue. You can search for such topics as adoption, divorce, adultery, welfare mothers, family therapy, and generation gap, among others. Look at all sections of the paper. You should summarize the issues raised and explain what idea about “family” is present in the article you have chosen. What assumptions are made about the nature of family? What questions does the article raise? How have such assumptions changed in the last four decades? What does the story tell us about the concerns of 1970? What does the story reveal about the kinds of tensions between cultural ideals of the family and the real world in which people operate that historian John Gillis has described in A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 7:

We must be careful not to confuse the family that we live by with the families that previous generations actually lived with. Until quite recently, historians also failed to make this distinction, but in the last two decades demographic and social history research has revealed a very different picture of families past, one that suggests much more continuity between families past and present in actual behavior than anyone would have imagined. It seems that the fragmentation, instability, and discontinuity that we feel so keenly today have been part of the European experience of family life since at least the Middle Ages.

Your paper should be about two pages long. You should include the full citation for the article you analyze and a printout of the article image and of the page map of the page on which the article appears. In your analysis, consider the way in which the placement of the story helps determine its relative importance for the reader.

Research proposal due Wednesday, February 10:

A research proposal and annotated bibliography is due on Wednesday, February 10, posted to Sakai and given to me in hard copy in class. Research topics are to be approved by me by February 3. The proposal should outline the research project in 500 words. Each paper must include an annotated bibliography that explains the relevance and usefulness of the material you have selected to provide evidence for your topic. Proposals should also specify a question or questions that you plan to explore. (10% of final grade)

First Draft of Research Paper

The first draft of your research paper is due Wednesday, March 24. The first draft should include an introductory paragraph with a clear thesis statement and at least one section of the paper.
Second draft of Research Paper:

The second draft of the research paper is due on April 7. It should be a rough draft of the complete paper, 10 to 12 pages long. (20% of final grade)

Final draft of Research paper:

The complete final version of the research paper should reflect comments made on the second draft and should include an annotated bibliography. It is due in class on April 28. If you would like the paper returned to you with comments, please provide a stamped self-addresses 9 x 12” manila envelope.

JENNIFER MITTELSTADT LECTURE, MONDAY APRIL 19 (ATTENDANCE REQUIRED)

Professor Jennifer Mittelstadt, Penn State University, will speak on “The ‘Army Family’ and Military ‘Welfare’: Soldiers, Spouses, and Children in America’s Volunteer Army.”

The lecture will be held at 7:00 p.m. at the Student Activities Center on the College Avenue Campus.

OFFICE: RAB 017B
OFFICE HOURS: Wednesday, 2:00-4:00 p.m. and by appointment

E-MAIL: duus@rci.rutgers.edu

IN CLASS FILM SHOWINGS:

Bathing Babies in Three Cultures (1954, 9 minutes) January 20
Why Can’t We Be a Family Again? (2002, 27 minutes)

The Mothering Heart (1913, 30 minutes) February 24

Family Gathering (1988, 53 minutes) March 3

An American Family Revisited (1983, 60 minutes) March 24


Paris Is Burning (1990, 76 minutes) April 28

FILMS PLACED ON RESERVE AT MEDIA SERVICES, MABEL SMITH DOUGLASS LIBRARY

All My Sons (1987, 122 minutes) Wednesday February 3 to Monday, February 22

A Raisin in the Sun (1961, 128 minutes) Wednesday, March 10 to Monday, March 29
READING ASSIGNMENTS:

(All readings available at Mabel Smith Douglass Reserve Desk and articles available on electronic reserve)

Week I  Wed., Jan 20  
Introduction: Workshop on Writing a Research Paper: Framing research questions and using film as primary source

Bathing Babies in Three Cultures  (1954, 9 minutes) and Why Can’t We Be a Family Again?  (2002, 27 minutes) shown in class

Week II  Wed., Jan. 27  
Workshop on drafting paper proposals and using visual culture Evidence


New York Times paper due in class

Week III  Wed., Feb. 3  

Last date to approve paper topic, Feb 3


ALL MY SONS (1987, 122 MINUTES) ON RESERVE AT MEDIA SERVICES, MABEL SMITH DOUGLASS LIBRARY, FROM WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3 TO MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22
Week IV  Wed., Feb. 10  **Workshop on bibliography, citations, paraphrasing and academic integrity**

**PROPOSAL DUE**


*First draft of research proposal due February 10, posted to Sakai in cut-and-paste format, not as an attachment, so that all Students can read it and make suggestions for additional sources. Hard copy in class for instructor. Must include annotated bibliography*


Excerpts from *All My Sons* (1962) shown in class.

Week VI  Wed., Feb. 24  **WRITING WEEK**

D.W. Griffith’s *The Mothering Heart* (1913) shown in class

*Individual meetings with instructor to be scheduled on Wednesday, February 24 and Thursday, February 25*


*Family Gathering* (1988) shown in class


Students should bring a family photograph to class

RA ISIN’ IN THE SUN (1961, 128 MINUTES0 ON RESERVE AT MEDIA SERVICES, MABEL SMITH DOUGLASS LIBRARY, FROM TUESDAY, MARCH 10 TO WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31

Week IX Wed., Mar. 17 SPRING BREAK


An American Family Revisited ( 1983, 55 minutes) shown in class


Raisin’ in the Sun (1961) discussed in class

Week XII, Wed. Apr. 7 Kay S. Hymowitz, “The Black Family: 40 Years of Lies,” City Journal (Summer 2005)


SECOND DRAFT DUE

Ugly Betty, Episode I (2006) shown in class

Second draft of research paper due on April 7. Bring hard copy To class. The second draft should be a complete rough draft of the 10 to 12 page paper


JENNIFER MIDDLESTADT LECTURE, REQUIRED APRIL 19, 7:00 pm, Student Activities Center, CAC
Week XIV  Wed., Apr. 21  


Week XV  Wed. Apr. 28  

**FINAL PAPER DUE**  
*Paris Is Burning* (1990, 76 minutes) shown in class

Final paper due in class. If you would like me to return the paper with comments, please provide a self-addressed 9 x12” manila envelope with your paper.