**AMS 311s (Unique #: 30770)**

**Popular Culture and American Childhood**

**Spring 2012**

**Instructor: Rebecca Onion,** [**rebeccaonion@gmail.com**](mailto:rebeccaonion@gmail.com)

**Class Meetings: MWF 2-3 pm, Garrison 0.132**

**Office hours: MW, 3:15-4:45, at Cafe Medici on the Drag**

**Course Website: americanchildhoods.com**

**Course Description:** This course will look at the development of popular culture associated with children and adolescents in the United States in the twentieth century. Using cultural objects made for and by children and youth, we will ask larger questions about the relationships between children and adults, while addressing topics common to American Studies, including media, consumption, citizenship, class, race, and gender. We will approach these themes through diverse primary sources, looking at literature, advertising, websites, video games, films, television shows, and toys. Because childhood is often perceived as “timeless”, this class will focus on situating these cultural objects chronologically, continually asking how culture for children and youth relates to larger social questions and movements.

**Course Objectives:** By the end of this class, the student will have encountered a wide variety of primary documents, as well as scholarship and popular writing about childhood. Through contributing to the class blog, the student will learn how to connect news items to class themes, how to analyze primary sources, and how to pose fruitful questions for class discussion. These blog posts will also teach the student how to use the WordPress publishing platform, and help the student practice frequent and informal writing for the web. The final paper will help students practice shaping research questions into larger projects; the process of writing this final paper, which includes research workshops and instructor and peer feedback before the production of the final essay, will sharpen skills of planning and revision.

**Readings:**

Two books (both available on Amazon Marketplace for cheap, or find in Half Price Books, or download to your Kindle):

M.T. Anderson, *Feed* (2004)

David Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (2008)

Course packet, available at Jenn’s Copies, 2518 Guadalupe (the location near Madam Mam’s, not the one under the Scientologists)

**Writing Flag Statement:**

*This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work.*

**Assignments:** Students will contribute five posts to the course blog over the semester. We will discuss the expectations for these posts, and talk about blogging as a form of academic writing, in depth during the first full week of class. (Note: For students worried about online privacy, pseudonymity will be an option. We will discuss this more before the first assignment is due.)

In order to encourage attendance and continuous reading for the course, I will administer four surprise reading quizzes over the course of the semester. These quizzes will contain questions that will be easy to answer if you a) are in class when the quiz is popped and b) have done the reading.

*A note on quizzes and makeups: If you miss class without arranging your absence with me beforehand, there will be no makeups for any quiz that you miss. If you email me before class, letting me know that you will be absent and why (sickness, other serious conflict), and we end up having a quiz that day, you may write an extra blog post (of any category) to make up for the quiz you missed.*

Students will turn in a graded paper proposal, which will include ideas for sources and major research questions, prior to writing their final paper.

We will have a “speed dating” peer review workshop to talk about our final papers’ introductions and thesis statements; you will need to bring a completed introduction/thesis statement to this workshop.

Finally, students will write a 2000-word (about 8 pages) final paper.

Rubrics for these assignments will be provided.

**Grading:**

Five 250-word blog posts, spread across the three post categories (responses to reading questions, “in the news” contributions, and primary source analyses), at 8% each: 40%

Four Reading Quizzes, at 5% each: 20%

Final paper proposal, 250 words: 10%

Final paper peer review participation: 5%

Final paper, 2000 words: 25%

**Policies:**

**Attendance/Lateness/Preparedness:** In lieu of taking attendance, I will administer four unannounced reading quizzes over the course of the semester.

Arriving to class late is strongly discouraged. I will often go over administrative issues in the first few minutes of class, or use that time to set up the day’s discussion; your late arrival annoys your fellow students and myself, and jeopardizes your grasp of the mechanics of the course. Therefore, every three late arrivals (between 5-15 minutes late) will equal one missed reading quiz, or 5% off your final grade.

Late assignments will be marked down by half a letter grade for each day of lateness, including weekend days.

**Computers:** Please do not use laptops, tablets, smartphones, or dumbphones in the classroom, unless I explicitly ask you to bring your technology on a particular day. I am a person who is so highly distractible that I must pay a software program to lock me off the Internet when I need to get work done ([www.macfreedom.com](http://www.macfreedom.com), if you’re interested—works for PCs as well). This no-computer policy exists just in *case* you are as Internet-prone as I am.

**Contacting Me:** I will respond to emails from you within 24-48 hours of receiving your communication. Please read this syllabus and the assignment rubrics carefully before emailing me. I will be posting copies of all course documents on the course website. Using Blackboard, you can contact your peers with logistical inquiries.

For some small questions, email is a suitable forum. However, sometimes email is not the best way to get information. If you find you are writing a question for me that results in a very long email, it is probably an indication that this is a question that can be best dealt with in person. In these instances, you should come to office hours.

**Submitting Assignments:** You’ll submit blog posts using WordPress’ dashboard, which automatically time-stamps each post; these posts are due by 5 pm on their due date. Send me your non-blog writing assignments (the paper proposal and the final paper) attached to an email, in a Microsoft Word (.doc) document, by 5 pm on their due date. I will return the documents electronically, using Word’s comments function to input my feedback; because of FERPA’s strictures, I won’t be able to return your grades for these papers via email, but will instead make them visible on Blackboard at the same time I email you your comments. For all assignments, I judge whether or not you’ve fulfilled the length requirement by word count, not by the number of pages in the document, so there’s no need to use a specific font or format.

**Late Work:** For all assignments, late work will be penalized by a half letter grade for each day of lateness. (At 5:01 pm on the due date, your work is officially one day late; at 5:01 pm the day after the due date, it’s two days late; etc.)

**Undergraduate Writing Center:** The Undergraduate Writing Center, located on the second floor of the Flawn Academic Center (FAC 211), provides free, expert writing help for undergrads on a drop-in or appointment basis. It is an excellent resource, and I strongly encourage each of you to utilize their services. For an appointment or for more information, call 512-471-6222 or visit their website: http://uwc.utexas.edu.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a serious matter, and students caught plagiarizing will be penalized in accordance with the University’s academic integrity policy.Students are required to familiarize themselves with this policy, which can be found on the University’s website at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php>.

**Disabilities:** Accommodations for students with documented disabilities are available. Students with physical, mental or learning disabilities should consult the University’s Services for Students with Disabilities for more information. <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

**I reserve the right to change this syllabus and reading schedule if it proves necessary. If such a change occurs, I will alert you of it, and post a revised copy on the course website.**

**Schedule**

***Readings with asterisks (\*) are to be found in the course packet. Readings with two asterisks (\*\*) will be posted on Blackboard a week before their due date. Readings devoid of asterisks are books.***

Weds Jan 18: First Day of Classes: Syllabus, Introductions, The Usual.

Fri Jan 20: Read for Class: \*Stearns, “Intro”; “I’m Bored”.

Mon Jan 23: Read for Class: \*Zelizer, “From Useful to Useless.”

Weds Jan 25: Read for Class: \*Cross, “Modern Childhood, Modern Toys.”

Fri Jan 27: Read for Class:\*Segal, “As the Twig is Bent”; \*Billman, “The Rise of Series Fiction,” “Edward Stratemeyer.”

Mon Jan 30: In-Class Workshop Day (Bring Your Laptop): Blogging, part 1.

Weds Feb 1: In-Class Workshop Day (Bring Your Laptop): Blogging, part 2.

Fri Feb 3: **First Blog Post Due, by 5 pm.** Read for Class: \*Collins, “Boy Scouts: A Battle for Martial Values”; “Commercialism in War: Jobs for Juveniles and Toys for Tots”; “Advertising the War to Children.”

Mon Feb 6: Read for Class: \*Kasson, “Behind Shirley Temple’s Smile.”

Weds Feb 8: Read for Class: Hajdu, chapters 1-4.

Fri Feb 10: Read for Class: Hajdu, chapters 5-8.

Mon Feb 13: **Second Blog Post Due, by 5 pm.** Read for Class: Hajdu, chapters 9-12.

Weds Feb 15: Read for Class: Finish Hajdu.

Fri Feb 17: Read for Class: \*Spigel, “Seducing the Innocent”; \*Bradbury, “The Veldt.”

Mon Feb 20: Read for Class: \*Chudacoff, “The Commercialization and Co-optation of Children’s Play.”

Weds Feb 22: Read for Class: \*Douglas, “Introduction,” “Fractured Fairy Tales,” “Mama Said.”

Fri Feb 24: **Third Blog Post Due, by 5 pm**. Read for Class: \*Paris, “Happily Ever After.”

Mon Feb 27: Read for Class: \*\*Morrow, \*\*Winn.

Weds Feb 29: Read for Class: \*Postman, “Introduction,” “When There Were No Children,” “The Beginning of the End.”

Fri March 1: Read for Class: \*Cross, “Spinning Out of Control.”

Mon March 5: Read for Class: \*Seiter, “Utopia or Discrimination.”

Weds March 7: Read for Class: \*Chin, “Hemmed In and Shut Out,” “Anthropologist Takes Inner-City Children on Shopping Sprees.”

Fri March 9: **Fourth Blog Post Due, by 5 pm.** Read for Class: \*Chin, “Ethnically Correct Dolls: Toying with the Race Industry.”

Mon March 12: No Class! Spring Break

Weds March 15: No Class! Spring Break

Fri March 17: No Class! Spring Break

Mon March 19: Read for Class: \*James, “Confections, Concoctions, and Conceptions.”

Weds March 21: Read for Class: \*Lipsitz, “The Hip-Hop Hearings.”

Fri March 23: Read for Class: \*Kelley, “Looking to Get Paid.”

Mon March 26: Read for Class: \*Boog, “The Military-Toy Industrial Complex”; \*Sirota, “How the ‘80s Programmed Us For War.”

Weds March 28: Read for Class: \*Orenstein, “Picture Books for Little Princesses,” “Does Stripping Gender From Toys Really Make Sense?”; \*\*Paoletti

Fri March 30: **Final Blog Post Due, by 5 pm.** Read for Class: \*Giroux, “Stealing Innocence.”

Mon April 2: In-Class Workshop Day (Bring Your Laptop): Research.

Weds April 4: In-Class Workshop Day (Bring Your Laptop): Citations.

Fri April 6: Read for Class: \*Kapur, “Free Market, Branded Imagination.”

Mon April 9: Read for Class: \*Louv, “Introduction,” “The New Relationship Between Children and Nature.”

Weds April 11: Read for Class: \*Nelson, “Introduction,” “Parenting and Technology.”

Fri April 13: **Paper Proposal Due.** Reading:Flex Day

Mon April 16: Read for Class: \*Jenkins, “’Complete Freedom of Movement’.”

Weds April 18: Read for Class: \*Davidson, “The Attention Deficit Society—And What We Can Do About It”; \*Carr, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”

Fri April 20: Read for Class: MT Anderson, *Feed,* 1-94

Mon April 23: Classes Canceled, Student Paper Conferences (we’ll sign up for these in class)

Weds April 25: Classes Canceled, Student Paper Conferences (we’ll sign up for these in class)

Fri April 27: Read for Class: MT Anderson, *Feed*, 95-207

Mon April 30: “**Speed-Date” Peer Review: Bring Intro/Thesis of Paper to Class.**

Weds May 2: Read for Class: MT Anderson, *Feed,* 207-end

Fri May 4: Last Day of Classes: Something Fun.

Weds May 9: **Final Paper Due**