

The History of Childhood

Professor Steven Mintz

Spring 2022

Course Description

Children preoccupy contemporary western societies. Childhood is regarded as a special period of life that deserves all the attention adults can give it. Biographies emphasize individuals' early years as the key to understanding their personalities and subsequent development. Many of our most popular movies and television shows dwell on the joys and agonies of growing up. Contemporary politics emphasizes children's issues, such as education, teenage smoking and drinking, youth crime, and children's access to health care.

Adults envy young peoples' freedom and irresponsibility, yet they also fear youth gangs and juvenile delinquents; worry about disadvantaged and impoverished youth who grow up in environments that expose them to alcohol, drugs, crime, and violence; and express anxiety about whether young people are prepared to meet the technological challenges of the twenty-first century.

This course places contemporary educational, legal, policy, and psychological thinking about childhood and current concerns about children's well-being into sweeping historical perspective. The course will examine childhood both as lived experience—shaped by such factors as class, ethnicity, gender, geographical region, and historical era—and as a cultural category that adults impose upon children.

The class will place a special emphasis on public policy. Adoption, child abuse and neglect, children's rights, disability, juvenile delinquency, schooling, and social welfare policies are among the topics that this course will address.

Many current controversies rest on certain implicit assumptions about the history of childhood. Among the questions we will address are these:

- Were the spate of school shootings and the growth in the diagnoses of behavioral disabilities among children tragic anomalies or warning signs about adverse changes in children's lives?
- Is imaginative, self-initiated, improvisational play disappearing from the lives of over-scheduled and over-protected 21st-century kids, and, if so, is this having damaging consequences for their creativity, social skills, and resourcefulness?
- Are violent, sexist video games isolating and desensitizing children?

- Are aggressive marketers and social media platforms distorting children's body image and material aspirations?
- Is a heightened stress on early academic achievement and a test-driven school curriculum taking the joy and wonder out of childhood?

Course Requirements

- Contribute to nine discussion boards
- Complete five short papers (1–2 pages)
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page paper or project of appropriate rigor

Learning Objectives

- Demonstrate that childhood is not an unchanging biological stage of life, but, rather, a social and cultural construct that has changed radically over time.
- Strip away myths and misconceptions that contribute to pessimism about the young.
- Examine children's lived experience across lines of class, ethnicity, gender, race, region, religion, and historical eras, as well as shifts in the parent-child relationship.
- Show how the history of childhood is bound up with broader events in the life of the nation, including colonization, revolution, slavery, industrialization, immigration, and war, and how government's growth has been driven by concerns over children's well-being.
- Provide examples of how children have actively contributed to the evolution of American society, responded to adult efforts to domesticate and rationalize children's lives, and forge an autonomous and distinctive identity.

Class Schedule

Week 1: February 10: Introduction: Why the History of Childhood Matters

Readings

- N/A

Assignments

- Discussion Board One
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Week 2: February 17: American Childhood in Global Historical and Anthropological Perspective

Readings

- David Bill, "Children, Culture, and Folktales (18th c.)," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #202, Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City, chnm.gmu.edu/cyh. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.\)](#)
- L. Halliday Piel, "Play in Tokugawa Japan," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #116. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.\)](#)
- Beryl Rawson, "Roman Children's Sarcophagi," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #52. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.\)](#)
- Merry Wiesner-Hanks, "Orphans and Colonialism (17th c.)," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #84. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.\)](#)
- Donald Haase, "Grimms' Children's and Household Tales," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #109. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.\)](#)
- Christopher Corley and James Gillham, "Orphanage Records, Early Modern France," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #121. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.\)](#)
- Rutger Bregman, "The Real Lord of the Flies: What Happened When Six Boys Were Shipwrecked for 15 Months," *Guardian*, May 9, 2020. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.\)](#)
- Spencer Bokak-Lindell, "Why Is Raising a Child in the United States so Hard?," *New York Times*, October 19, 2021. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.\)](#)
- Joe Pinsker, "There's a Better Way to Parent: Less Yelling, Less Praise," *Atlantic*, March 2, 2021. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.\)](#)
- Jessica Grose, "A Brief History of Questionable Parenting Advice," *New York Times*, October 21, 2020. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.\)](#)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two
- Short Paper One due February 23
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Week 3: February 24: Children in Colonial America

Readings

- Steven Mintz, "Childhood and Transatlantic Slavery," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #57. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.\)](#)
- "A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison [Literary Excerpt]," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #400. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.\)](#)
- Tom Rushford, "Children and Witchcraft (16th c.)," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #281. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.\)](#)

- "Examination of Thomas Carrier, Jr. [Legal Document]," annotated by Tom Rushford, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #283. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.](#))
- "Examination of Sarah Carrier [Legal Document]," annotated by Tom Rushford, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #282. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.](#))
- Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Chapters 1–3, edited by Frank Woodworth Pine, Project Gutenberg, December 28, 2006. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.](#))
- Sarah Handley-Cousins, "A History of Childbirth in America," *Dig: A History Podcast*, August 15, 2021. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
- Final Paper/Project Question due March 2
 - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final paper or project will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, a brief description of your research plan, and a justification for why your particular paper or project is worth pursuing.

Q&A Session One: Tuesday, March 1 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 4: March 3: Revolutions in American Childhood: The Advent of Romantic and Urban Middle Class Childhood

Readings

- James Steward, Curator, *The New Child: British Art & The Origins of Modern Childhood, 1730–1830*, August 23–November 19, 1995. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 4 module.](#))
- "Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth (1791) [Literary Excerpt]," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #399. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 4 module.](#))
- Lucy Larcom, *A New England Girlhood*, Project Gutenberg, March 21, 2009. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 4 module.](#))
- "‘I Must Of Course Have Something Of My Own Before Many More Years Have Passed Over My Head’: Sally Rice Leaves the Farm, 1838 [Letters]," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #397. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 4 module.](#))
- Thomas B. Edsall, "It’s Become Increasingly Hard for Them to Feel Good About Themselves," *New York Times*, September 22, 2021. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 4 module.](#))
- "Raising Boys Who Have Empathy and Emotion," *New York Times*, August 21, 2021. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 4 module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
 - Short Paper Two due March 9
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 5: March 10: Black Children and Youth in Bondage and Freedom

Readings

- Stephen Mintz, ed., "Excerpts from Slave Narratives," Numbers 1–21. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 5 module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Five
 - Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due March 16
 1. Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor's feedback, AND
 2. Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final paper/project.
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Week 6: March 17: The Varieties of Childhood in Late 19th-Century America

Readings

- Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*, "'The Valley of the Shadow' [Literary Excerpt]," annotated by Julia Mickenberg, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #172. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 6 module.](#))
- Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*, "'Amy's Valley of Humiliation' [Literary Excerpt]," annotated by Julia Mickenberg, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #171. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 6 module.](#))
- "1879 Cleveland Protestant Orphan Asylum Annual Reports [Official Document]," annotated by Philip L. Safford, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #111. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 6 module.](#))
- "The Phoenix Indian School, 1896 [Newspaper Article]," annotated by Susan Douglass, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #295. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 6 module.](#))
- "Carlisle Indian School Students [Photograph]," annotated by Susan Douglass, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #291. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 6 module.](#))

- Hamilton Holt, ed., *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans: As Told by Themselves* (New York: J. Pott & Co., 1906). [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 6 module.\)](#)
- "Children's Lives: Comparing Long Ago to Today," IDCA, September 1, 2020. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 6 module.\)](#)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Six
- Short Paper Three due March 23
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Two: Wednesday, March 23 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 7: March 24: Making Childhood Modern

Readings

- "Age of Consent Laws [Table]," annotated by Stephen Robertson, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #24. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.\)](#)
- "Petition to Raise the Age of Consent (1887) [Petition]," annotated by Stephen Robertson, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #39 [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.\)](#)
- "'Review of the Age-of-Consent Legislation in Texas' [Magazine Article, 1895]," annotated by Stephen Robertson, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #40. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.\)](#)
- "1919 Cleveland Protestant Orphan Asylum Annual Report [Official Document]," annotated by Philip L. Safford, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #112. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.\)](#)
- "Little Mischief [Moving Image]," annotated by Miriam Forman-Brunell, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #43. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.\)](#)
- "Kissing Rudy Valentino: A High-School Student Describes Movie Going in the 1920s [Personal Account]," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #398. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.\)](#)
- "The Children's Charter [Government Document]," annotated by Kriste Lindenmeyer, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #124. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.\)](#)
- Paul Ringel, "Toys Are Ditching Genders for the Same Reason They First Took Them On," *Washington Post*, March 2, 2021. [\(A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.\)](#)

- Mary Katharine Tramontana, "Why Do We Still Have 'Girl Stuff' and 'Boy Stuff'?", *New York Times*, November 18, 2020. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.](#))
- Livia Gershon, "The Invention of Sibling Rivalry," *JSTOR Daily*, September 20, 2019. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
- Short Paper Four due March 30
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Three: Tuesday, March 29 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 8: March 31: Immigrant Children

Readings

- Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912). ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 8 module.](#))
- "Immigrating to America, 1905," EyeWitness to History, Ibis Communications, Inc., 2005. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 8 module.](#))
- "Immigrant Stories," Immigrant Voices, Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, immigrant-voices.aiisf.org. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 8 module.](#))
- "Immigrant Voices," Archive of Immigrant Voices, Center of Global Migration Stories, University of Maryland, archiveofimmigrantvoices.omeka.net. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 8 module.](#))

Assignments

- Paper/Project Preview due April 6
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper.
 - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
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Week 9: April 7: Childhood during the Great Depression and World War II

Readings

- "Children and the Great Depression," Digital History, University of Houston, digitalhistory.uh.edu/. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.](#))

- "Children and World War II," Digital History. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.](#))
- "Japanese American Incarceration at Heart Mountain, Wyoming, Interview [Oral History]," annotated by Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #321. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.](#))
- "Japanese American Incarceration at Manzanar, California, Interview [Oral History]," annotated by Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #320. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.](#))
- "Japanese American Incarceration at Manzanar, California, Interview [Oral History]," annotated by Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #319. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.](#))
- "Japanese American Incarceration at Amache, Colorado, Interview [Oral History]," annotated by Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #318. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.](#))
- "Japanese American Incarceration at Amache, Colorado, Interview [Oral History]," annotated by Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #317. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.](#))
- "Japanese American Incarceration at Merced Assembly Center, California, Interview [Oral History]," annotated by Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #316. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.](#))
- "Japanese American Incarceration at Minidoka, Idaho, Interview [Oral History]," annotated by Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #315. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.](#))
- Paul Howe, "How US High School Culture Brought Teen Values to the World," Aeon, July 22, 2021. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.](#))
- Meryl Davids Landau, "What Do Police Know about Teenagers? Not Enough," *New York Times*, July 17, 2021. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Eight
- Short Paper Five due April 13
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Four: Tuesday, April 12 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 10: April 14: The "Golden Age" of American Childhood: Children during the 1950s and 1960s

Readings

- "Baby Sitter and the Man Upstairs [Urban Legend]," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #327. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.](#))
- "'Barbie Turns 21' [Magazine Article]," annotated by Miriam Forman-Brunell, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #310. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.](#))
- "'Jingle Bells, Batman Smells' [Folksong]," annotated by Mike Willard, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #333. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.](#))
- Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Dial Press, 1968) Chapter 10. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.](#))
- "Tags and Throws on a SoHo Side Street [Graffiti]," annotated by Joe Austin, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #309. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.](#))
- "Queens Rooftops, Seen from a Subway Platform [Graffiti]," annotated by Joe Austin, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #308. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.](#))
- "Bronx Schoolyard [Graffiti]," annotated by Joe Austin, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #307. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.](#))
- "Hash Masterpiece, Brooklyn Schoolyard [Graffiti]," annotated by Joe Austin, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #306. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.](#))
- Jean Twenge, "Why Today's Teens Aren't in Any Hurry to Grow Up," *Salon*, September 22, 2017. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.](#))
- Lydia Denworth, "The Outsize Influence of Your Middle-School Friends," *Atlantic*, January 28, 2020. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.](#))
- Lyz Lenz, "The Way We Used to Play," *New York Times*, July 21, 2020. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.](#))
- Jessica Grose, "The State of Play," *New York Times*, July 21, 2020. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.](#))

Assignments

- Rough Draft due April 20
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
 - Project: Submissions of the project rough draft will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.

Week 11: April 21: The Tumultuous End to the Century of the Childhood

Readings

- Carol Tavis, "A Very Model Moral Panic," *Wall Street Journal*, August 7, 2015. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.](#))

- Alan Yuhas, "It's Time to Revisit the Satanic Panic." *New York Times*, March 31, 2021. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.](#))
- Chris Glavin, "History of School Shootings in the United States," K12Academics.com, July 26, 2018. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.](#))
- Dave Cullen, "The Depressive and the Psychopath," *Slate*, April 20, 2004. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.](#))
- Dave Cullen, "The Four Most Important Lessons of Columbine," *Slate*, April 16, 2009. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.](#))
- Dave Cullen, "God I Want to Torch and Level Everything," *Slate*, April 16, 2009. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.](#))
- Dave Cullen, "Inside Columbine," *Slate*, April 16, 2009. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.](#))
- "Convention on the Rights of the Child [Official Document]," annotated by Kriste Lindenmeyer, in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #140. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.](#))
- Olga Khazan, "The New Question Haunting Adoption," *Atlantic*, October 19, 2021. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.](#))
- Lisa Belkin, "Adoption Used to Be Hush-Hush. This Book Amplifies the Human Toll," *New York Times*, January 22, 2021. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Nine

Q&A Session Five: Tuesday, April 26 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 12: April 28: Concluding Thoughts: Childhood in Our Time

Readings

- Joe Pinsker, "'Intensive' Parenting Is Now the Norm in America," *Atlantic*, January 16, 2019. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.](#))
- Matthias Doepke and Fabrizio Zilibotti, "The Parenting Gap," *Medium*, September 10, 2018. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.](#))
- Claire Cain Miller, "The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting," *New York Times*, December 25, 2018. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.](#))
- Danielle Kurtzleben, "The \$245,000 Price Tag For Raising an American Child, in 5 Charts," *Vox*, October 15, 2014. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.](#))
- Thomas B. Edsall, "'It's Become Increasingly Hard for Them to Feel Good about Themselves,'" *New York Times*, September 22, 2021. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.](#))

Assignments

- Final Paper/Project due May 4