Course Title: History of the American Family
Lecturer: Dr. Susan Ouellette
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Required Readings:
Theda Purdue, Cherokee Women, Nebraska, ISBN: 978-0-8032-8760-0
Course Content and Objectives:
Perennially, politicians, clergy and welfare reform advocates have filled the airwaves with multiple renditions of “the American family is in trouble” sermons. Although their view of exactly what is troubling the American family (and their solutions) often differs—sometimes radically—all of these “family advocates” assume that their audience has a universal understanding of what constitutes “family.” Yet, do we Americans really agree in our definition of “family”? Do we really harbor nostalgia for the ideal family of the past? In this course students will explore the plurality of American families both past and present. They will examine the concept of “family” as an institution that has been constituted and reconstituted as demographic, social, political, gendered, or economic trends affected it. In the process, they will also examine our contemporary vision of “family,” including their own.

Learning Objectives for an upper level History seminar:

- Students will demonstrate the ability think, write, and speak critically and analytically about the past.
- Students will conduct research into the past by producing research papers and will correctly document the primary and secondary sources that inform that research.
- Students will be able to articulate the dynamic nature of historical change over time in several areas of the world, be able to interpret primary and secondary historical texts in an informed and critical manner.
- Students will describe the significant currents and forces that have helped shape world history.
- Students will use the tools and resources (digital, print, material) necessary to complete a significant research project in History.
- Students will be able to describe the major historiographical issues associated with the topics covered.

Course Activities:
Students will prepare assigned readings, prepare discussion questions for the group to consider, and will participate in threaded discussions. Participation is a regular, active, thoughtful and literal contribution to the class. In addition, students will write essays in response to questions posed by the instructor. A final “family history project” will be prepared and provided to the class.
Evaluation:
Students will write four 5-7 page papers (each worth 15%). They will also research and prepare a family history with various approaches including, but not limited to genealogy, oral history, and mapping exercises (15%). Students will also be responsible for preparing discussion questions on assigned reading and inaugurating as well as participating in threaded discussions (15%). Active and thoughtful participation will be required. Students will present the findings of their genealogical research at the end of the semester in the form of a Powerpoint with narration, YouTube, or Google map presentation made available to the class (10%). Students may also produce podcasts of important family interviews (Storycorps style). These presentations will be evaluated by the whole group as well as the instructor.

Course Schedule:

Week One: Introduction
Jan 15
Threaded discussion of genealogical research and family histories, instructions on how to navigate the modules, sources for research, etc.

Part One: The Colonial World

Week Two: Native American Family
Jan 22
Readings:
Perdue, Cherokee Women

Week Three: New England Family
Jan 29
Readings:
Demos, A Little Commonwealth, all

Week Four: Slaves and the South, Colonial era
February 5
Berlin, Generations of Captivity, pgs 1-96

Part Two: American Revolution

Week Five: Revolutionary Families
February 12
Film: Mary Silliman’s War
Readings:
Mayer, Belonging to the Army, all
Week Six: New Republic  
February 19  

Week Seven: Antebellum Slavery  
February 26  
Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, pgs 161-270

Week Eight: Post War South  
March 5  
Hall, *Like a Family*, part one (pgs 1-180)

Week Nine: Factories and Family  
March 19  
Readings: Hall, *Like a Family*, part two, (pgs 181-363)

Week Ten: Post War North  
March 26  
Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, all
Part Four: 20th and 21st century and modern family

Week Eleven: Cold War Families
April 2
Readings:
Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era, all

Week Twelve: Middleclass Nostalgia
April 9
Readings:
Coontz, The Way We Never Were, all

Week Thirteen: Toxic Poverty
April 16
Readings:
Ehrenreich, Nickel and dimed: on (not) getting by in America, all

Week Fourteen: New Family Forms
April 23
Readings:
Jon and Michael Galluccio, An American Family, all

Week Fifteen: Family Histories
April 30