

**CHILD LABOR:
Work, Education, & Human Rights in Global Historical Perspectives
GCC 3035 & GCC 5035**

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Department of History – University of Minnesota

Spring 2020
3 credits

Tues/Thurs 1 - 2:15 pm in Blegen 317

Contact information:



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Course description

It seems obvious that we should oppose child labor. Or should we? This course challenges students to think critically about the many angles that need to be considered in deciding whether any particular type of children's work should be opposed or permitted. Drawing on contemporary and historical scholarship in the interdisciplinary arena of childhood and youth studies, this course takes on ethical and human rights as well as economic analyses; it reflects upon child development and legal perspectives; it examines cases ranging across the globe and across recent centuries. It may very well change the way you think about kids, forever.

Historians find evidence of many different kinds of "childhoods," as well as changing notions of what work is appropriate for children. Coming from social-scientific and policy studies approaches, analysts and critics of contemporary global policies affecting child labor argue that the presumed superiority of "modern Western childhood" needs rethinking. This course will also look at tensions between the presumption that schooling should be the only or primary occupation of childhood years and competing ideas child labor can be valuable and justifiable in many settings ... including, for example, American farm families.

Looking at child labor from comparative global and historical perspectives will encourage and enable students to address some important questions: What types of "work" have children done in various modern historical and contemporary settings? When and how is work arguably bad, or good, for children and their families? Under what conditions is schooling better than work, or vice-versa? Who gets to decide "what's best for children"? How should governments intervene, and how does intervention differ when children work for their family as opposed to other employers? What forms of regulatory measures or political activism have changed policies and practices regarding child labor in the past and present?

This course focuses on the most common and economically central forms of child labor such as farm work, vending, domestic work, apprenticeship, or factory work, rather than what the International Labour Organization defines as the "Worst Forms" of child labor (such as slavery, prostitution or pornography, trafficking of drugs, warfare), although we do touch upon some of these.

Things about this course that you might not expect:

- ***Both instructors will be in class, all the time!*** Well, we might have a day or two where one person misses due to illness or conference travel, but otherwise this really is team-taught.
- ***Your work experience has value.*** Many students have worked on a variety of tasks/jobs before taking this class. Those work experiences not only inform how you understand course material, they can also help inform other class members' understandings.
- ***An exhibit of photographs of child workers*** from around the world, taken by Dr. David Parker, will be coordinated with this class.
- ***Weekly 2-minute evaluations*** allow you to update us anonymously about what is and is not working for you about class.
- ***Graduate students define their own class projects***, with the assistance of the instructors.

This course fulfills the following requirements:

- Student Learning Outcome: Understand diverse philosophies and cultures (see below)
- Liberal Education Theme: Global Perspectives (see below)
- Humphrey School MPP concentration requirements in Social Policy and Policy Analysis, Economic & Community Development, and Global Policy.

For undergraduate students:

Student Learning Outcome met by this class:

Understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies

The course readings and syllabus organization center on cross-regional and cross-temporal comparisons. Moreover, since the focus is on varying policies and practices of child labor, cross-class comparison and recognition of power differentials within cultures are also key analytic foci. For example, readings about the choice between work and school – whether in 19th-century France or 21st-century Tanzania – require students to address the unequal benefits of schooling for poor vs. elite children. Readings about policies that regulate child labor push students to question how global power relations affect whose perspectives and understandings of childhood get written into laws, and whose perspectives are marginalized.

Every week the students will read cases drawn from different world regions and/or time periods. When they write weekly reflections about the readings, prompts will ask them to compare critically across cases. Questions on the two undergraduate essay exams will also require informed comparisons across time, cultures, and global regions.

Liberal Education theme met by this class: **Global Perspectives**

The course examines policies and practices of child labor over time and across cultures. We discuss and critique often divergent concepts of childhood and children's work as they have been developed and applied nationally and transnationally. In terms of geographic focus, the readings and other course materials are drawn from research on Latin America, Europe, Africa, and South Asia between 1750 and the present.

The course relies explicitly on cross-regional as well as cross-temporal comparisons. For example, in discussing the place of children's work in different types of family economy, we compare historical research on children's work in the agricultural economy of southern France with an ethnographic account of the place of work in childrearing in Highland Peru. In discussing policies affecting child labor, we compare regimes across regions and scales ranging from nation-state regulation in Sweden, to imperial policies affecting British West Africa, to international regulations promoted by the United Nations and the International Labor Organization. Throughout the course, students will make geographic and temporal comparisons that will require them to examine their own notions of childhood and the ethics of child labor.

Course requirements and grading:

Detailed instructions will be posted for each assignment. Some assignments will differ for the 3000-level and 5000-level students. Grading standards will be level-specific.

What will be graded for undergraduate students

- Weekly reflections on readings
- Class participation
- Short (2-4 page) essay on labor force concepts, ~Week 3
- Take-home essay exam covering cumulative readings, Week 5
- Brief comments on ~5 graduate student project proposals, Week 5
- Questions for Dr. David Parker, Week 8
- Group presentation, 5 minutes, at GCC Classroom-to-Community Workshop ~Week 11
- Take-home essay exam covering cumulative readings, Finals week

What will be graded for graduate students (NOTE: assignments are sometimes similar to undergraduates' but instructions and expectations differ)

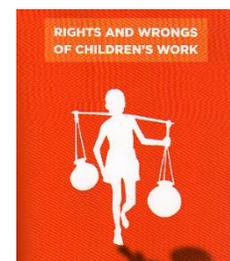
- Weekly reflections on readings
- Class participation
- Short (2-4 page) essay on labor force concepts, ~Week 3
- Take-home essay exam covering cumulative readings, Week 5
- Brief comments on ~5 graduate student project proposals, Week 5
- Questions for Dr. David Parker, Week 8
- Optional group presentation ~Week 11
- Project connecting class to own interests (see below)
 - Online proposal, one paragraph, ~Week 3
 - 2-minute pitch about topic in class, Week 5
 - Draft due, Week 11
 - Peer review of 2 other graduate students' drafts, Week 12
 - Final project due in finals week, along with peer feedback

Course website: There is a course website. [Details TBA]

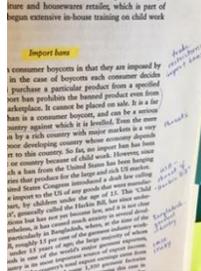
Required books:

Bourdillon, Michael, Deborah Levison, William Myers and Ben White (2010) *Rights and Wrongs of Children's Work*. New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Jessica Taft (2019) *The Kids Are in Charge: Youth Activism and Political Power*, NYU Press, about \$30.



Other required readings: All of the other course readings will be available either in the 2-volume course reader or on the class website for you to download and print out. The reader is available at Paradigm Course Resource, 720 Washington Ave SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414 (612-379-4590 or <http://www.paradigmcopies.com>).



Making marginal notations and/or highlighting as you read are good practices to help you understand and remember what you read. For this reason, and since we will be working with the readings in class, you are required to PRINT OUT HARD COPIES of the readings from the course website and bring your copies to class. You also need to BRING YOUR COPY OF THE READER to class each week.

Assigned readings. It is expected that all students will complete the week's required readings before the class meetings for which they are assigned. Careful reading of the assigned texts, and close and critical engagement with them through written responses and discussions, are at the core of the seminar's learning process. In most cases students are expected to read closely and carefully, rather than skimming. If skimming is acceptable, then that will be noted in the syllabus. **Please remember to bring the week's readings to class with you.**

Reflections on readings. To inspire timely reading of the articles and to ensure that students think about what they are reading, a very short commentary on readings will be required most weeks. This may apply to podcasts or online videos as well. Reflections on all readings, podcasts, etc. for the coming week should be posted to the web by **[day & time to be determined]**. Refer to specific items only by the last name of the first author, for clarity. (If the "reading" is marked with the dagger symbol †, students do not need to comment on it.) These postings will be slightly different for undergraduate and graduate students:

Undergraduates should write brief (2-3 sentences) comments that deal with the week's readings and address the "questions for discussion" posted in the syllabus for that week. Think about ideas in the readings that you find interesting, provocative, or even confusing – ideas or issues that you would like to discuss further in class.

Graduate students should write a paragraph or two (about 200-300 words) that will provide entry points into further conversation about the readings and the topics they address. These may address and/or go beyond the specific "questions for discussion" on the syllabus.

If for any technical reason you are unable to post, you may instead email your reflections to the instructors. Students are encouraged to read the reflections of other class members before class.

Reflections will not receive letter grades. They will be marked as check/check+/check-minus, in addition to instructor comments.

Paper/project assignment for graduate students. Each graduate student will be asked to complete a project based on the course themes. The format is flexible; this could be something useful for a student's particular graduate program, such as

- part of a thesis or dissertation;
- a syllabus or literature review that connects course themes with their graduate specialty;
- a background study for an upcoming internship;
- a short research paper.

In most cases the project will take the form of a written paper or report of some kind, but the instructors are open to other possibilities.

Class participation. Class participation is an important element of the course requirements. Elements of class preparation include attendance, lateness, participating in discussions, timely reading of and, where indicated, professional comments on other students' paper drafts, and respectful behavior toward your classmates and instructors.

A note on attendance: Missing classes and/or being late regularly will lower your class participation grade, regardless of whether you learn the material or not. (Exception: regular lateness because of dashing from another class – if you inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester.) Please contact the instructors – before class – if you are ill and cannot attend.

Grading of graduate students and undergraduates. Some assignments in this class will be undertaken by both graduate students and undergraduates, while other assignments will differ. When assignments are the same, expectations are higher for graduate students, and grading standards will differ accordingly.

Final grade breakdown, approximately:

Undergraduate students:

- 30% Weekly reflections on readings ... a big part of this class is the reading!
- 20% Class participation
- 5% Short essay on labor force concepts
- 15% Take home Week 5 essay exam
- 2% Comments on graduate student project proposals
- 5% Group presentation for GCC Classroom-to-Community Workshop
- 3% Questions for photographer David Parker
- 20% Take home final essay exam

Graduate students:

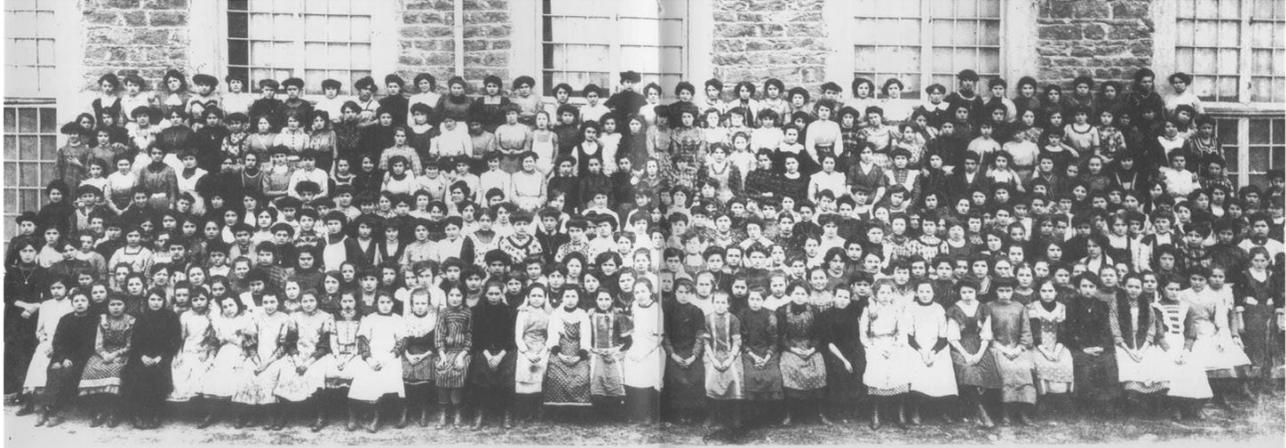
- 20% Weekly reflections on readings
- 20% Class participation
- 5% Short essay on labor force concepts
- 20% Take home Week 5 essay exam
- 2% Comments on graduate student project proposals
- 3% Questions for photographer David Parker
- 30% Project / paper, including peer reviews

Weekly Topics

Week 1, Tuesday – January 21 -- Introduction

Week 1, Thursday – January 23 – What work do children do?

Silk spinnery workforce, southern France, late 19th century



Week 2 – January 28 & 30 – The family economy & work that children do

Week 3 – February 4 & 6 – Children’s vs others’ perspectives on child work

Week 4 – February 11 & 13 – Framing childhoods and child labor

Week 5 – Tuesday, February 18 – The nation-state gets involved in regulating child labor

Week 5 – Thursday, February 20 – Graduate students pitch their projects to the class

Week 6 – Tuesday, February 25 – The colonial state gets involved in regulating child labor

Week 6 – Thursday, February 27 – Children as agents

Visitor: Professor Jessica Taft, University of California Santa Cruz, will Skype in to answer student questions about her book and her experiences with the movement of working children in Peru.

Week 7 – March 3 & 5 – International frameworks for regulating child labor

Visitor: Dr. Charita Castro, U.S. Department of Labor, on Skype [to be confirmed]

SPRING BREAK

Week 8 – March 17 – Harms and risks of child work

Week 8 – March 19 – Understanding child labor through photography

This week's class will be integrated with a photography exhibit organized by the instructors. Dr. David Parker is an occupational medicine doctor, researcher, and serious photographer. His exhibits and books feature workers, especially child workers, around the world. This particular exhibit includes photographs that Dr. Parker has donated to the UM's Archives; they were selected because they show children as subjects, objects, and agents.

Class will take place at the exhibit. Dr. Parker will do a walking tour of the photographs, answering questions posed by students.

Assignment: Before Monday's class, visit the David Parker Photography exhibit in Willey Hall. Post questions for Dr. Parker about five different photographs. See online instructions.

Week 9 – March 24 & 26 – How do people learn?

Week 10 – March 31 & April 2 – Learning, school, and work

Week 11 – Tuesday, April 7 – Group presentations on David Parker exhibit photography

Week 11 – Tuesday, April 7 evening – GCC Workshop

Week 11 – Thursday, April 9 – Microeconomics of child labor and poverty

Week 12 – Tuesday, April 14 – Child labor, business enterprises, and economic systems

Week 12 – Thursday, April 16 – Class activities day

Week 13 – April 21 & 23 – Policies, interventions, activism [DL at PAA on Thursday]

Week 14 – Tuesday, April 28 – Policies, interventions, activism

Week 14 – Thursday, April 30 – Last day of class