

## **Books for American Children**

**Prof. Barbara Hochman**

2 pt MA Course

Spring semester

Fiction designed for children tends to endorse social norms, including assumptions about what children are and how they should behave. Examining diverse picture books and young people's fiction published between the 1860s and the 1920s, this course will ask how social, moral, and educational agendas are implicit in the language and illustrations of a text. We will focus on books that were popular in the U.S. when first published and are still being reprinted. However, some of these books were controversial when they initially appeared; others have become controversial since. Considering variations in reception over time we will ask how children's literature shapes and reflects governing assumptions about age-appropriate behavior, family, gender norms, race, ethnicity, nations, and literary value.

### **Required Fictional texts:**

#### **Novels:**

Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1868)

Horatio Alger, *Ragged Dick* (1868)

Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884)

#### **Stories and Picture Books:**

Rudyard Kipling, "Rikki Tikki Tavi" (1894)

Helen Bannerman, "Little Black Sambo" (1899; American edition 1900)

Johnny Gruel, *Raggedy Ann Stories* (1918)

Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit* (1922)

### **Criticism (some articles and book-chapters will be required):**

Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America*

Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*

Caroline F. Levander & Carol J. Singley, eds. *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*

Steven Mailloux, "The Rhetorical Use and Abuse of Fiction: Eating Books in Late-19<sup>th</sup> Century America" *boundary 2* (Spring, 1990), pp. 133-157.

Karen Sanchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*

Barbara Sicherman, "Reading *Little Women*: the Many Lives of a Text" in *U.S. History as Women's History* Linda Kerber, et al eds. (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Press, 1995; reprinted in Sicherman, *Well-Read Lives: How Books Inspired a Generation of American Women*. Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2010

Sanjay Sircar, "Little Brown Sanjay and Little Black Sambo: Childhood Reading, Adult Rereading, Colonial Text and Postcolonial Reception," *The Lion and The Unicorn* (Jan. 2004): 131-156.

### **Other Requirements:**

Active class participation - 10%

One 500-word written assignment (20%).

Paper Proposal plus short Bibliography, presented in class toward end of semester; later submitted in writing. Approximately 500 words (20%)

Final paper approx. 2500 words, 10 pages - 50%.

### **OR**

Seminar paper, approx. 5,000 words, 20 pages- 60%. (In this case, the first written assignment would count for 10% of grade.)