

Brendan O'Farrell – Inquiry into “The Family”

Popular culture from the 1950s and present-day nostalgia might lead one to believe in “the ideal American family.” While shows like “Leave it to Beaver” or “Father Knows Best” depict this ideal as a two-parent, white structure, both our history and present-day reality reveal a diverse array of families that call this “ideal” into question. What happens when aspects such as race and income are varied? Can a healthy family persist in the face of poverty and racism? While mainstream America, today, is quick to rally in favor of a healthy pluralism that includes variation in both income and race, historically our country has not been so accepting. In this class, we will examine the acceptance of the family based on a number of variations, including race, class, and gender in contemporary and historical contexts. Our “texts” will include movies, essays, novels, and short stories. Through guided research we will develop a critical dialogue on the nature of the family and the myth of the “American Ideal.”