Black children’s lives matter. That is the central premise of this course. Our goal is to understand how black children’s lives have mattered over the past two centuries.

Toward this end, we pursue several lines of inquiry. First, what have the diverse lives of African American children been like since the nineteenth century? How have African American children experienced family, education, play, work, and activism? How have they been affected by social structures, particularly schools and the criminal justice system? How have they enacted agency and resistance? How have their experiences changed over time? Second, how have African American children been useful to large-scale racial politics? How, for example, have abstracted ideas about African American children, as well as individual African American children, been useful to abolition, to New Negro politics, to the Civil Rights Movement, and to #blacklivesmatter? And third, how have African American children represented themselves, particularly in writing? What kinds of texts have African American children made, and how might we analyze these texts? And how have African American adults spoken to black children through writing and art?

Our study of African American children in life, in politics, and in texts proceeds chronologically. We aim, of course, to learn about African American children and childhood—but as we do so, we enable ourselves also to re-examine adults and adulthood. By looking at and through childhood, what might we learn about mothers, fathers, teachers, religious leaders, and other community members? How might
African American history, literature, and politics look different if we re-view these subjects through the lens of children and childhood?

Requirements:

Discussion co-leadership (varying dates) 20%
Thoughtful, engaged, prepared, and respectful classroom participation 30%
Mid-semester assignment, due Friday, March 4, 3pm 10%
Prospectus for final paper, due Friday, April 1, 3pm (graded full credit/no credit) 5%
Final paper, due Wednesday, May 4, 3pm 35%

General information:

All books are on reserve at Lamont Library and for sale at the Harvard Coop.
Each student will co-lead one class discussion.
Each student will complete a substantial final paper that relates clearly to the topics, ideas, or materials in this course. Undergraduates’ papers should run 10-15 pages; graduate students’ papers should run 20-25 pages.
Late assignments will be docked one third of a letter grade for each day or partial day overdue. Please note that failure to complete any assignment can lower your final grade in excess of the stated percentage.
Professor Bernstein’s office hours vary week to week. Please sign up at <http://wgs.fas.harvard.edu/hours>.

With a student’s consent, meetings during office hours will be “walking meetings.” The professor and student will talk while strolling around campus. Any student may opt for a traditional, “sitting meeting” instead. If you opt for a sitting meeting, you need not offer any explanation, and no questions will be asked. We will of course stay inside during inclement weather. For more information about the intellectual and health benefits of walking meetings, see Nilofer Merchant, “Sitting is the Smoking of Our Generation,” Harvard Business Review 14 January 2013 <http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2013/01/sitting_is_the_smoking_of_our_generation.html>. On the intellectual benefits of walking (not necessarily during meetings), see Ferris Jabr's “Why Walking Helps Us Think,” The New Yorker, 3 September 2014 <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/walking-helps-us-think>.

Any student needing academic adjustments or accommodations should present a letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor as soon as possible. All discussions will remain confidential, although AEO may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation.

This course adheres to Harvard University policy on permitted collaboration, which reads as follows:

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any
help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc), you must also acknowledge this assistance.

**Required Books** (all on reserve at Lamont Library and for sale at the Harvard Coop):

Zetta Elliott, *A Wish After Midnight* (Skyscape, 2010)
Wilma King, *African American Childhoods: Historical Perspectives from Slavery to Civil Rights* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

Recommended films (on reserve):
*Let’s Get the Rhythm: The Life and Times of Miss Mary Mack*, dir. Irene Chagall, 2014
*Four Little Girls*, dir. Spike Lee, 1997
*To Be Heard*, dir. Amy Sultan et al, 2010

**SCHEDULE:**

**January 26: Introductions**
- Read in class: selections from *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938.*
February 2: What was it like to be an enslaved child?

February 9: Freedom and Literacy
- Wilma King, Chapter 5
- Selection of writing by students in the 1830s in the New York African Free School.

February 16. Reconstruction and Segregation
• RECOMMENDED: Wilma King, Chapter 9

**February 23. Literature Addressed to Black Children: The Brownies’ Book**

• *The Brownies’ Book*: read ALL of January 1920 and December 1920 issues, online at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=rbc3&fileName=rbc0001_2004ser01351page.db>. Note that the Library of Congress offers the full run of *The Brownies’ Book* as a single file. January 1920 runs p. 1-35 and December 1920 runs p. 375-410 by the LOC file’s pagination (the pagination of the magazine itself is different). Plain text, plus some images, is also available at <http://childlit.unl.edu/topics/edi.brownies.html>.

**March 1. Respectability and Citizenship**

• Silas X Floyd, *Floyd’s Flowers or Duty and Beauty for Colored Children* (New York: Hertel, Jenkins & Co., 1905): selections TBD. Online at <http://archive.org/stream/floydsflowersord00floy#page/n5(mode=2up)> or <http://ia700503.us.archive.org/7/items/floydsflowersord00floy/fl oydsflowersord00floy.pdf>

**FRIDAY, March 4, 3pm: MID-SEMESTER ASSIGNMENT DUE!** Please submit your paper to Robin Bernstein’s mailbox in the Department of African and African American Studies, Barker Center.

- Wilma King, Chapter 10

March 16. SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS.


- Zetta Elliott, *A Wish After Midnight*
March 29. Black Children as Text-Makers, 1930s-the Present

- RECOMMENDED: *To Be Heard*, dir. Amy Sultan et al, 2010

**FRIDAY, April 1, 3pm: PROSPECTUS FOR FINAL PAPER DUE** to Prof. Bernstein’s mailbox, Department of African and African American Studies, Barker Center

April 5. School

• RECOMMENDED: Peruse http://blackyouthproject.com/


**April 12. School to Prison**


**April 19: Boys, Men, Love, Danger**

• Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Penguin, 2015)

• Javon Johnson, “cuz he’s black,” 2013 National Poetry Slam semifinals. Online at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9Wf8y_5Yn4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9Wf8y_5Yn4)

**April 26: Two Hundred Years of Play**


• RECOMMENDED: Camille A. Brown, *Black Girl: Linguistic Play*  
  http://www.camilleabrown.org/black-girl-linguistic-play/  . See also  
  http://www.npr.org/2015/09/22/442536371/black-girlhood-takes-center-stage-in-a-work- 
  thats-serious-about-play

**Wednesday, May 4, 3pm**: Final papers due to Prof. Bernstein’s mailbox in the Department of  
African and African American Studies, Barker Center.

*Enjoy your summer!*