“Not One Looks like My Daughter!”: How American Girl Makes History Hegemony

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Abstract
American Girl markets dolls and books toward girls. Their original product line, which features historical characters, mobilizes history to teach moral lessons. This paper breaks down these morals to search for hegemony, a discourse that marginalizes minority readers. In this quest to uncover hegemony, the paper deals with issues of narrative perspective and socialization. Regarding narrative perspective, the paper asks, “Whom do these books deem normal in America? Whom do these books deem other in America?” Regarding socialization issues, this paper asks, “What value and behaviors do these books condone as part of acceptable American Girlhood? What values and behaviors are deemed totally aberrant and unacceptable?” In establishing normative perspectives and trajectories, the books raise issues about race, socioeconomic class, gender roles, religious identities, and nationalism. Given this particular line of questioning, this paper falls under the contemporary historical pursuit to problematize the very idea of historical accuracy, to uncover excluded voices from the traditional canon. The paper concludes that American Girl use history to perpetuate hegemony over young women in the United States.

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An Iranian-American girl, interviewed for an academic book on tweenhood, said she was “highly embarrassed and shamed” by a teacher’s screening of the film. Nooshin* — an Iranian-American journalist from Florida who asked to remain anonymous — was in middle school when a teacher showed the film for a social-studies class. I didn’t watch Not Without My Daughter for the first time until a few months ago. I’d best describe it as Iranian culture through the looking glass, distorted and stripped of all its warmth. Growing up, my only connection to the movie was that I could count on Sally Field’s face provoking a vocal, unhappy reaction from my parents, a sentiment that’s familiar among Iranians. “I remember that!” Aslan laughs. The American Girl Dolls institution should try to be a good role model — just like the characters in the American Girl Dolls books! This article was posted on Friday, January 11th, 2008 at 7:39 pm and is filed under American Girl Books, American Girl Dolls, Books & Stories, Countries & Cultures, Dolls, Me Dolls, Parenting, Toys, USA. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. My daughter started out with the less expensive Target brand doll. Then when she saved her money, she bought an American Girl doll which she absolutely loves. I’m really surprised at all the responses all over the internet about how mean the American Girl company is because they turned away a doll from the salon that was not made by their company.