

Child Advocacy Program
Art of Social Change:
Child Welfare, Education, & Juvenile Justice

Professor Elizabeth Bartholet
Lecturer on Law Jessica Budnitz

ASSIGNMENT PACKET for Session #5
October 7, 2010

Film Screening
"Family Affair"

Chico David Colvard
Director/Producer, Family Affair
Educator, University of Massachusetts, Boston

**Session #5
October 7, 2010**

Assignment

Speaker Biography

Session Description

Readings:

Pages *

Bartholet, *Nobody's Children*

NC 56-67,
81-110

Film Synopsis

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Film Reviews and Quotes

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Trailer of Film

- Prior to class, students should view the film trailer, which can be found on-line at: http://www.c-linefilms.com/c_linefilms.html

* NC refers to Nobody's Children pages: all other page numbers refer to this Assignment Packet

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Speaker Biography

Chico David Colvard was born in Augsburg, Germany, the son of a WWII German-Jewish mother and African-American father raised in the segregated south of Georgia. After pursuing a career in theatre arts, Chico received his J.D. from Boston College Law School and now teaches "race, law & media" related courses at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. He is a former Filmmaker-in-Residence at WGBH, a member of the Producer's Lab at Firelight Media and former Sundance Institute Creative Producing Fellow. FAMILY AFFAIR is Chico's feature-length documentary debut, which premiered in competition at Sundance and has since shown around the world. FAMILY AFFAIR has received Audience and Best Documentary Feature Awards and was the first film acquired by Oprah Winfrey for her new cable channel, OWN. FAMILY AFFAIR was selected by the International Documentary Association to Oscar qualify during the 2010 DocuWeeks Theatrical Showcase in L.A. and NYC.

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Session Description

Most filmmakers film others. Chico Colvard turned the camera on himself and his family to create what the *Boston Globe* called "one of the most psychologically complex movies ever made."

At 10 years old, Chico Colvard accidentally shot his older sister in the leg. This seemingly random act sparked a chain reaction that exposed secrets, which ultimately shattered his family. Thirty years later, Colvard breaks the veil of secrecy and silence again. As he bravely visits his relatives, what unfolds is a dramatic film that reveals the legacy of abuse and the nature of forgiveness. The film attempts to understand how children reconcile being the victims of abuse at their parents' hands with their continued longing for love and family. The film raises fundamental questions about inter-generational violence and abuse, the legacy of Jim Crowe, the meaning of family, resiliency, and ultimately survival.

The first film acquired by Oprah Winfrey for her new cable channel, "Family Affair" has received critical acclaim. For the film trailer, visit: http://www.c-linefilms.com/c_linefilms.html

The filmmaker, Chico Colvard, will be available after the screening to discuss the film, as well as his work more generally on race, law, media, and social change.

**“Family Affair”
Film Synopsis
from Director Chico David Colvard**

My mother is a German-Jew, born in Nazi occupied Bavaria just before the War. By stark contrast, my father is an African-American, raised in the segregated south of Georgia. My three sisters and I are a remarkable mix of our parents and were more affectionately referred to as "Army Brats" growing up. We were raised on military bases around the world – from Augsburg, Germany to Washington, D.C. But it was in Radcliff, Kentucky, a small, off-post civilian town outside of Fort Knox, where our lives were permanently changed forever.

Growing up I fantasized about being Chuck Connors in THE RIFLEMAN. At the age of ten I discovered my father's military rifles and accidentally shot one of my sisters in the leg. Believing she would die from her injuries, my sister revealed to my mother and later the police, that our father had sexually abused her and my other two sisters for years. I witnessed my father's arrest and the unraveling of our family. My parents divorced. My sisters and I were sent to foster homes and unwelcoming relatives, who blamed my mother for having their brother (my father) arrested. My father was found guilty of sexual assault in the 1st degree and sent to a Kentucky minimum-security prison on Valentine's Day, 1979. He was released less than one year later.

As I grew older and came to understand the full magnitude of what my father did to my sisters, I began to detest the man I once admired as a kind of "G.I. Joe" action hero. As a result, I cut off contact with my father for more than fifteen years. Surprisingly, all three of my sisters continued seeing my father immediately after he was released from prison, spending weekends and holidays at his home and even leaving their children (his grandchildren) alone with him from time-to-time. In 2002, while visiting one of my sisters in Kentucky, my father arrived at a Thanksgiving dinner and was warmly welcomed by a number of adoring family members, my sisters and friends. Although I did not know it at the time, this would be the start of my documentary FAMILY AFFAIR.

At first, this documentary ran the risk of turning into a crude indictment of my father, a figure the audience is sure to view as a "monster". While that assessment might be unavoidable, I do not want the audience to only view him or other pedophiles as a one-dimensional "monster-like" figure. In point of fact, in the USUAL SUSPECTS Kevin Spacey's character, Verbal Kint, a seemingly crippled con man, explains to one of the investigating officers that "Keyser Soze," an omnipotent, "monster-like" figure was, in fact -- *real*. Spacey tells the doubting detective that the greatest trick the devil ever played was convincing the world that he did not exist. Similarly, my father's health is ailing. Overweight and with the right side of his body atrophied from multiple strokes, he no longer resembles the menacing figure embedded in my childhood memories. And while he remains in denial about the unspeakable atrocities he committed against my sisters, I can't help but feel that the companionship my sisters share with him makes them complicit in his attempts to convince the world that he too is not a monster.

FAMILY AFFAIR does not attempt to mitigate the long-term dysfunctional impact of incest. Instead, this documentary reshapes the commonly held view that molesters are pushed to the margins of society, never to reconnect with their victim/survivors. In the end, the film focuses on the motives, accommodations and levels of forgiveness survivors make in order to maintain some semblance of family.

"Family Affair"

Film Reviews and Quotes

"This is one of the most psychologically complex movies ever made about either racial identity or abuse of any kind."

-- [The Boston Globe](#)

"In "Family Affair," first-time helmer Chico Colvard uses enormous sensitivity, as well as a plunderer's gift for seizing the revelatory moment in chronicling his siblings' incestuous plight and his father's crimes. The documentary he has made will shock even the most jaded audiences, disgust many and generate righteous indignation in an era when such sentiments might seem passe; it's a brave film."

-- [Variety](#)

"An incredibly moving testimony to the power of human resilience and an example of the child-like faith that can enable us to move beyond the worst of what can happen to us when we're vulnerable and small and at the mercy of the custodians that cross our paths. Or live under the same roof with us."

-- [Hammer to Nail](#)