Overview: Susan Sessions Rugh gives an in-depth “cultural history” of the family road trip from 1945 to the 1970s. Through studying the family vacation, Rugh not only provides the reader with a detailed explanation of the road trip and what it entailed during its “golden age,” but also gives insight into middle-class family life during this time period: “Looking at ordinary people and how they chose to spend their money and time helps us understand what they valued for themselves and their children.” In discussing the middle-class, it is of course necessary to mention African Americans and what their family vacations looked like, which—as can be expected—were very different from the white middle-class family.

Rugh begins the history of the family road trip with the increase of family car ownership after World War II. Rugh clearly shows the correlation between the popularity of the family vacation and the increase in car ownership through her intense study of car advertisements. To sell their cars, companies such as Ford, capitalized on the growing desire of families to take vacations by explaining how their car would be ideal for the family road trip. Rugh goes on to explain that due to this increase in travel, roadside attractions, motels, and fast-food restaurants also gained in popularity. From there, Rugh details four of the most popular family vacations of the time period. The first type of vacation, “heritage travel,” consisted of “Americans visit[ing] the authentic sites of

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2 Rugh, 6
3 Rugh, 21
historic events, presidents, and patriots." Heritage travel was especially important during this time because it insured citizens of the superiority of America during the Cold War period. The second vacation, which stemmed from the popular television shows of the time period, was the vacation out West. This could include authentic trips to dude ranches or more virtual experiences at themed amusement parks such as Disneyland’s Frontierland. The third and fourth types of vacation experiences brought families back to nature, either camping in wildlife parks or resting in the countryside. To conclude the golden age of the family vacation, Rugh explains – although somewhat briefly – that the 1970s saw a decrease in the family vacation due in part to the oil embargo of 1973 as well as the growing radical youth movement.

Though at times Rugh can be somewhat repetitive in her examples as well as her arguments, she gives an extremely concise and clear analysis of the family vacation. One way that Rugh captures such a detailed history is through the many sources that she uses throughout the book. From company advertisements, to family accounts, to camping guides, to oil company map publishers, Rugh is able to give a thorough account of all aspects of the family vacation. Plus, Rugh is unique in the fact that she looked at the family vacation from a new time period than her predecessors. Other historians had focused on family vacations before World War II, whereas Rugh wanted to study the family vacation within “a modern consumer culture.”

How this work can be applied to American Studies: This is an ideal book for someone hoping to gain an in-depth knowledge about the average American family vacation, along

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4 Rugh, 41
5 Rugh, 42
6 Rugh, 180
7 Rugh, 6
with the American desires that influenced those vacations, after World War II. *Are We There Yet?* could contribute positively to American Studies 214: Politics and Culture in the United States Since 1917 taught by Professor Catherine Stock. *Are We There Yet?* also contributes to the field of African American studies by providing a better understanding of the hardships faced by African American families during segregation and how those hardships influenced the Civil Rights Movement.