

**The Black Middle Class**  
AFR 372C/30637—AMS 321/31129—WGS 340/47991—TD 357T/26843  
Spring 2014  
MWF 11-12, JES A217A

Professor Lisa B. Thompson

**Course Description**

During this term we will embark on an interdisciplinary exploration of the African American middle class in the US from 1900 to the present, with a particular emphasis on post-Civil Rights era developments. We will use literature, film, history, theatre, cultural studies, music, television, and sociology to examine how the black middle class has been imagined, defined and represented. By examining the debates within and about the black middle class, we will complicate constructions of race in America. The course is particularly interested in investigating the following: the concept of racial uplift; the construction of the “race man” and “race woman;” the idea of class privilege for a racially marginalized group; conflicts between the black middle class and the working class; the role of the black middle class in policing black sexuality; the notion of middle class rage; the rise of the black nerd (or blerd); assertions of racial authenticity; the new black aesthetic; and the politics of affirmative action.

**Required Texts**

Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)

ISBN: 0393934144

Ellis Cose, *Rage of a Privileged Class* (1994)

ISBN: 0060925949

Nella Larsen, *Quicksand and Passing* (1928)

ISBN 0813511704

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)

ISBN: 0679755314

Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977)

ISBN: 9780786508075

Stew, *Passing Strange* (2008)

ISBN: 155783752X

Lydia Diamond, *Stick Fly* (2008)

ISBN 0810125358

All course materials are available at the Co-op.

**Course Requirements**

**Attendance & Participation**

Students are expected to complete all reading before class and participate fully in discussions and activities (presentations, quizzes, in-class writing and group projects). Remember to bring texts to class because we will be reading excerpts and doing close readings of passages. Also please be advised that prompt and regular attendance is expected. Tardiness is disrespectful to me and to your classmates. Missing two classes and/or excessive tardiness will result in your grade being lowered.

### Midterm Examination

There will be an exam featuring multiple-choice, fill-in, short answer and short essay questions that cover the major themes, concepts, characters and theories discussed in the course up to the midterm point. The exam will not only test whether you are completing the assigned reading, but also assess your comprehension of the lecture and class discussions.

### Essay

During the semester you will write a critical essay. The essay will be a research project of your own choosing (in consultation with me) that considers texts and/or topics not covered in class. You will write a proposal that includes a tentative bibliography that includes 5-7 sources (primary and secondary). Additional guidelines for the proposal and research paper will be distributed in class. I encourage you to consult with me at any stage in your writing process. Make sure you argue a strong thesis and carefully proofread your papers for clarity and grammatical errors. I expect your essays to adhere to either the *MLA Style Manual* or the *Chicago Manual of Style* for formatting and documentation. All work must be typed in a 12-point academic font (Times, Palatino, Times New Roman), stapled, and doubled-spaced with one-inch margins. Submit essays in paper (NOT electronic) format by the deadline unless instructed by me to do otherwise. It is incumbent upon you to keep a personal copy of all submitted work. Please note: no incompletes or extensions will be granted without my prior written permission.

### Research Presentation

Each participant will deliver a brief (3-5 minute) presentation based on her/his final research project. Students are strongly encouraged to use PowerPoint or another presentation tool. The point of this exercise is to teach your classmates about an aspect of the black middle class NOT covered thoroughly in class. Use this as an opportunity to refine your oral presentation skills and showcase your expertise.

### Documented Disability Statement

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at (512) 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone) or reference SSD's website for more disability-related information: [http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/for\\_cstudents.php](http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/for_cstudents.php)

Final grades will be calculated as follows (plus and minus grades will be used):

Participation	10%
Midterm Exam	25%
Research Essay Proposal (2 pages)	15%
Presentation (3-5 min)	20%
Research Essay (7-8 pages)	30%

**Course Schedule**  
**Important Dates**

Wednesday, February 19  
Midterm Exam

March 10-15: Spring Break

Friday, March 21  
Due: Research Paper Proposal  
Research Paper Proposal Workshop

Wednesday, April 23-Friday, May 2  
Research Presentations

Friday, April 25  
Due: Research Essay