

Spring 2017
The Black Middle Class
AFR 372C (30240)/AMS 321 (30735)/WGS 340 (46970)
Flag: Cultural Diversity

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The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races.

W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth."

Since the black bourgeoisie live largely in a world of make-believe, the masks which they wear to play their sorry roles conceal the feelings of inferiority and of insecurity and the frustrations that haunt their inner lives. Despite their attempt to escape from real identification with the masses of Negroes, they cannot escape the mark of oppression any more than their less favored kinsmen.

E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*

"Negroland is my name for a small region of Negro America where residents were sheltered by a certain amount of privilege and plenty. Children in Negroland were warned that few Negroes enjoyed privilege or plenty and that most whites would be glad to see them returned to indigence, deference and subservience. Children there were taught that most other Negroes ought to be emulating us when too many of them (out of envy or ignorance) went on behaving in ways that encouraged racial prejudice."

Margo Jefferson, *Negroland*

Thirty years after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death, how have we reached the point where we have both the largest black middle class and the largest underclass in our history?

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Two Nations of Black America*

But truthfully, Papa wasn't a rolling stone, he was a dentist, Mommy was a businesswoman and librarian, we were solidly upper-middle-class. Besides, I remind myself, this is the 1980s. The day of the glorification of the stereotypical poor, pathological Negro is over. Just like the South, it is time for black bourgeoisie to rise again. I am a foot soldier in that army.

Jill Nelson, *Volunteer Slavery: My Authentic Negro Experience*

Course Description

This semester we will embark on an interdisciplinary exploration of the African American middle class in the US from early 20th century 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 and class 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; expressions of middle class rage; the rise of the black nerd (or blerd); assertions of racial authenticity; representations of African American tourism and leisure; the new black aesthetic; the politics of affirmative action and the price of integration.

Required Texts

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

ISBN: 0060925949

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

ISBN: 0679755314

E. Lynn Harris, *Invisible Life* (1994)

ISBN: 0385469683

Margo Jefferson, *Negroland: A Memoir* (2015)

ISBN: 0307473430

Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928)

ISBN: 9780813511702

Andrea Lee, *Sarah Phillips* (1985)

ISBN: 9781555531584

August Wilson, *Radio Golf* (2005)

ISBN: 9781559363082

All course materials are available at the Co-Op. Texts designated with an * can be found on Canvas.

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. Please be advised that prompt and regular attendance is expected. Missing two classes and/or excessive tardiness will result in your grade being lowered.

Midterm Examination

There will be a take-home exam featuring 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

You will write a 6-8 page critical essay that compares the depiction of black middle class life at least two of the texts explored in the class post-midterm. 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.

Group Research Project & Presentation

Each group will deliver a brief (5-10 minute) presentation based on a group research project that explores an aspect of the black middle class from any era. The presentation will be based on a research project of your own choosing (in consultation with me) that considers texts and/or topics not covered in class. Suggested topics as well as additional guidelines for the research proposal and presentation will be discussed in class. Students are strongly encouraged to use their creativity to present their findings. You can do a video, short skit, website, create a Wikipedia Page, PowerPoint or use another presentation tool to share your subject. 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 creativity, and 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

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

Participation	10%
Midterm	25%
Essay (6-8 pages)	30%
Group Research Project Proposal (2 pages)	10%
Group Research Project & Presentation	25%

Course Schedule

Tuesday, January 17

Introduction: Are you in the American Middle Class?

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/05/11/are-you-in-the-american-middle-class/>

Ideologies of Uplift: The Rise of the Race Man and Race Woman

Thursday, January 19

Screen: *Two Nations of Black America* (1998)

Tuesday, January 24

Two Nations of Black America (1998)

Margo Jefferson, *Negroland* (2015)

W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth." (1903)*

Thursday, January 26

Margo Jefferson, *Negroland* (2015)

Tuesday, January 31

Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928)

Kevin Gaines, "Uplift, Dissemblance, Double-Consciousness, and the Ideological Dimensions of Class." (1996)*

Thursday, February 2

Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928)

Tuesday, February 7

Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928)

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "The Female Talented Tenth." (1994)*

Racial Suspects: The Black Bourgeoisie

Thursday, February 9

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

Screening: *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961)

Tuesday, February 14

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

Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." (1926)*

Thursday, February 16

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

Tuesday, February 21

Andrea Lee, *Sarah Phillips* (1985)

Melvin L. Oliver & Thomas M. Shapiro, "A Story of Two Nations: Race & Wealth." (1995)*

Thursday, February 23

Andrea Lee, *Sarah Phillips* (1985)

Karyn R. Lacy, "Defining the Post-Integration Black Middle Classes." (2007)*

Tuesday, February 28

E. Lynn Harris, *Invisible Life* (1994)

Mary Patillo-McCoy, "The Black Middle Class, Who, When, and Where?" (2000)*

Thursday, March 2

E. Lynn Harris, *Invisible Life* (1994)

Midterm (Questions for the take-home exam will be distributed at the end of class)

Suburban Angst, Middle Class Rage & the New Black Aesthetic

Tuesday, March 7

August Wilson, *Radio Golf*

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

Due: Midterm Exam (at the start of class)

Thursday, March 9

August Wilson, *Radio Golf*

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

March 13-17 Spring Break

Tuesday, March 21

Screen: Dir. Barry Jenkins, *Medicine for Melancholy* (2008)

Trey Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic." (1989)*

Thursday, March 23

Dir. Barry Jenkins, *Medicine for Melancholy*

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

Tuesday, March 28

Screen: Dirs. Joe Brewster and Michéle Stephenson, *American Promise* (2013)

Group Research Project Groups Assigned

Thursday, March 30

Dirs. Joe Brewster and Michéle Stephenson, *American Promise* (2013)

Danzy Senna, "Admission." (2011)*

Tuesday, April 4

Screen: Selected scenes of *Black-ish* (2015-2016) and *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992)

Herman Gray, "The Politics of Representation in Network Television." (1995)*

Salamishah Tillet, "What TV Says About Race and Money."*

James Poniewozik, "Review: A Family Seeks Its True Colors on *black-ish*."*

Due: Group Research Project Proposal

Thursday, April 6

Screen: Selected episode of *Black-ish* (2015-2016)

James Poniewozik, "With Police Brutality Episode, *black-ish* Shows How Sitcoms Can Still Matter."*

Bethonie Butler, "How *Black-ish* Argues Eloquently for Police Brutality While Staying True to its Roots."*

Keertana Sastry, "*Black-ish* Recap: Hope."*

New Research on the Black Middle Class

Tuesday, April 11

Library Research & Group Research Meetings

Thursday, April 13

Visit Christian-Green Gallery for tour of *March On!* Exhibit.

Due: Essay

Tuesday, April 18

Joshua Holland, "The Average Black Family Would Need 228 Years to Build the Wealth of a White Family Today." (2016)*

Gillian B. White, "How Black Middle-Class Kids Become Poor Adults." (2016)*

Thursday, April 20

Group Research Presentation Workshop

Tuesday, April 25

Group Research Presentations (1-2)

Due: Research Project Presentation Outlines

Thursday, April 27

Group Research Presentations (3-4)

Tuesday, May 2

Group Research Presentations (5-6)

Due: Research Projects

Thursday, May 4

Conclusion