

Professor Thompson

Spring 2019
AFR 372C (30525)
The Black Middle Class

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; the new black aesthetic; the politics of affirmative action and the price of integration.

Required Texts

Amiri Baraka, *The Dutchman* (1971)
ISBN: 0688210848
Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)
ISBN: 9780149186864
Ellis Cose, *Rage of a Privileged Class* (1994)
ISBN: 0060925949
Nella Larsen, *Quicksand and Passing* (1928)
ISBN: 9780813511702
Tarell Alvin McCraney, *Choir Boy* (2015)
ISBN: 9781559364683
Andrea Lee, *Sarah Phillips* (1985)
ISBN: 9781555531584
Dominique Morisseau, *Pipeline* (2018)
ISBN: 9781559365871
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.

Quizzes

There will be five multiple-choice quizzes that cover the major themes, concepts, characters, authors and theories discussed in the course. The quizzes will not only test whether you are completing the assigned reading, but also assess your comprehension of the lecture and class discussions. You must complete the quiz before class on the date that it is listed. It will cover the assigned material prior to and on that day.

Essay

You will write a 6-8 page critical essay that compares the rendering of the black middle class in two texts chosen from two different sections of the course. 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), and doubled-spaced with one-inch margins. Submit essays by the deadline as no late work will be accepted. Please note: no incompletes or extensions will be granted without my prior written permission.

Group Research Project: Essay & Presentation

Each group will conduct research and write a paper on a topic (chosen in consultation with me) that explores an aspect of the black middle class not covered in class. Suggested topics, as well as additional guidelines for the research project, proposal, essay and presentation, will be posted on Canvas and discussed in class. Each group must submit 7-10 page critical essay including proper citations and a properly formatted works cited page. Groups will also deliver a brief (5-10 minute) presentation based on their research project and essay. Students are strongly encouraged to use their creativity to present their findings. I encourage you to create a video, short skit, website, Wikipedia Page, Tumblr, Instagram, PowerPoint or another presentation tool to share your subject. The point of this exercise is to learn about and then teach your classmates about an aspect of the black middle class NOT explored thoroughly in class. Use this as an opportunity to refine your oral presentation skills. Focus on working collaboratively, writing clearly, and presenting in ways that 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 (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.

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

Participation	15%
Quizzes (5)	25%
Essay (6-8 pages)	30%
Group Research Project & Presentation	30%
Extra Credit*	05%

*Please note, extra credit will only be applied towards your participation grade. Opportunities to attend a one-time only event and write a one-page critical review for extra credit will be announced via Canvas. These will be sparse opportunities scheduled for the early part of the term. Students are only allowed to submit only one extra credit essay which is due one week after the event occurred.

Course Schedule

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

Tuesday, January 22

Introduction: The Black Middle Class in the US

“Are you in the American Middle Class?” Pew Research Center, September 6, 2018.*

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

Thursday, January 24

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

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

Tuesday, January 29

Two Nations of Black America (1998)

Mary Patillo, “The Black Middle Class: Who, When, Where.” (1999)*

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

Suggested: “Angela Hanks, Danyelle Solomon, and Christian E. Weller, “Systematic Inequality: How America's Structural Racism Helped Create the Black-White Wealth Gap.” (2018)*

Thursday, January 31

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

Tuesday, February 5

Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)
Kevin Gaines, "Uplift, Dissemblance, Double-Consciousness, and the Ideological Dimensions of Class." (1996)*

Quiz 1

Thursday, February 7

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

Racial Suspects: The Black Bourgeoisie

Tuesday, February 12

Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928)

Thursday, February 14

Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928)
Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." (1926)*

Tuesday, February 19

Amiri Baraka, *The Dutchman* (1971)

Thursday, February 21

Amiri Baraka, *The Dutchman* (1971)

Quiz 2

Tuesday, February 26

Andrea Lee, *Sarah Phillips* (1985)

Thursday, February 28

Andrea Lee, *Sarah Phillips* (1985)
Lisa B. Thompson, "Sex, Travel and the Single African American Girl: Andrea Lee's *Sarah Phillips*."*

Tuesday, March 5

August Wilson, *Radio Golf* (2005)

Thursday, March 7

August Wilson, *Radio Golf* (2005)

Tuesday, March 12

August Wilson, *Radio Golf* (2005)
Group Research Project Groups Assigned

Quiz 3

Thursday, March 14
Research Groups Meetings

March 16-24
Spring Break

Black Middle Class Rage, Suburban Angst & the Post-Integration Blues

Tuesday, March 26
Dominique Morriseau, *Pipeline* (2018)
Ellis Cose, *Rage of a Privileged Class* (1994), Introduction & Chapter 1.

Thursday, March 28
Dominique Morriseau, *Pipeline* (2018)
Arah Iloabubichukwu, “Not Every Black Girl Survives Private School.” (2018)*

Tuesday, April 2
Screen: Dirs. Joe Brewster and Michéle Stephenson, *American Promise* (2013)
Ellis Cose, *Rage of a Privileged Class* (1994), Chapter 2 & Chapter 7.
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 4 **Quiz 4**
Dirs. Joe Brewster and Michéle Stephenson, *American Promise* (2013)
Danzy Senna, “Admission.” (2011)*
Kayrn Lacy, “How Middle-Class Blacks Fit into American Suburbs.” (2018)*
Ellis Cose, *Rage of a Privileged Class* (1994), Chapter 3.
Due: Group Research Project Proposal

Tuesday, April 9
Tarrel Alvin McCraney, *Choir Boy* (2014)
Carvell Wallace, “How Tarell Alvin McCraney Moved from *Moonlight* to Broadway — and Beyond.” (2019)*

Thursday, April 11
Tarrel Alvin McCraney, *Choir Boy* (2014)

Tuesday, April 16

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

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

Thursday, April 18

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

Ellis Cose, *Rage of a Privileged Class* (1994), Chapters 4-6.

Tuesday, April 23

Dir. Barry Jenkins, *Medicine for Melancholy*

Group Research Presentation Workshop

Quiz 5

New Research on the Black Middle Class

Thursday, April 25

Group Research Presentations (1-3)

Tuesday, April 30

Group Research Presentations (4-6)

Thursday, May 2

Group Research Presentations (7-8)

Tuesday, May 7

Course Evaluations

Thursday, May 9

Conclusion

Due: Essay