Black Class: Race and Consumption From the Harlem Renaissance to Hip Hop

Dr. Psyche Williams-Forson
pwforson@umd.edu

Office: Holzapfel 2103
Office hours: Tues 12 –3:30 Phone #: 3/ 405-6931

Required Texts
Elizabeth Chin, Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture
Gloria Naylor, Linden Hills
Frederick Douglas Opie, Hog and Hominy: Soul Food From Africa to America
William Rhoden, Forty Million Dollar Slaves
Noliwe Rooks, Ladies’ Pages
August Wilson, Radio Gulf

• Additional readings are available on ELMS and/or online or through RESEARCHPORT
• Films (listed on the Class Schedule).
• People Like Us, A Raisin in the Sun, ATL, Malibu’s Most Wanted, Lift – Hornbake/Blockbuster

Course Description: This course offers an interdisciplinary investigation into race, class, culture, identity, and consumption using material culture as the lens. To study material culture is to use objects—works of art, household utensils, and interior decorations—to study the beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of particular communities or societies at a given time. In this course, we will use film, photography, literary fiction, folklore, economics, and history, among other avenues to consider the ways that material evidence inform us about African American class identities of the past and the present. These narratives enable us to discover the meanings people placed on objects and the meanings that objects held for those who created and consumed them. NOTE: You are responsible for all texts—those assigned, read, viewed, listened to, discussed (directly and/or indirectly) during and outside of class.

Three main thoughts motivate this class:
First, it takes an interdisciplinary approach. Most methods in American Studies are not confined by the traditional disciplinary boundaries. As a result, we are better able to examine and interpret significant values, events, ideas, and cultural phenomena that have shaped our understanding of American society. No single academic discipline and no single subject matter fully illuminates these and related issues, rather bridging traditional categories of knowing enables us to more thoroughly comprehend the objects of our study.

Second, by intersecting class status with consumption, this course investigates physical manifestations and representations of African Americans expressive culture. Throughout history, social factors like class, race, and gender have played crucial roles in determining who will vote, attend certain schools, work in
certain jobs, and live in a particular place—essentially, who participates in the “American Dream.” The power to access various opportunities is not distributed equally resulting in tensions between American ideals and American realities. At the same time, African Americans (like other racial and ethnic groups) have often found ways to circumvent these boundaries.

Third, this course will consider the ways in which African American materialism was critically related to the quest, fulfillment, and/or realization of citizenship. It argues for a deeper examination of how this materialism was and continues to be complicated by intraracial class disparities.

A Word about WIKIs
"Wikis" are a flexible web/information page that any of us can make additions to (without knowing web programs like Dreamweaver, etc.)—There’s a guide on the menu bar that tells you how to work with this platform.

Assignments & Expectations:

Readings: Read everything, and come to class prepared to talk about what you have read. Be an active reader: mark your text, underline important ideas, and make notes in the margins.

Class Discussions and Activities: Take responsibility for your education by being an active learner. To encourage this attitude, class participation will count for 10% of your final grade! Attend class regularly, be prepared to present portions of the class content, either online or orally. Participate in exercises held in class and again be prepared, be prepared, be prepared. Contribute to class discussion, offer an insight, amplify a point, raise a question, explain, and/or disagree. At all times remain critically engaged with the discussion or lecture.

Attend Class: If you choose to miss class, please let me know in advance and meet with me immediately after you return. Please note: You cannot earn credit for work missed in class. If you miss class, it is up to you to discover what went on that day. "I didn't know because I wasn't in class" is never an acceptable excuse.

Quizzes: Expect quizzes to be given several times during the semester and to address the reading. Format (i.e., short answer, fill in the blank, etc.) will vary.

Extra Credit: During the semester, there will be films, performances, lectures, and other events. For each one you attend, write up a 2-page analytical response and hand it in no later than 1 week after the event. By "analytical response," I do not mean a mere summary or report of what you've seen; instead, I expect you to critically engage the material in question. Each analytical response can earn you a maximum of 20 points (equivalent to a quiz grade but only 1 EC assignment can be substituted for a quiz grade).

Essays: There will be two essays and a final project. Detailed descriptions of both are attached.
**Final project:** There will be a final project that will bring together course readings, insights, and arguments. A detailed description is attached and it will be discussed throughout the semester.

**Film Screenings:** Most films will be viewed in class but there are a few that cannot be; they are required. You are responsible for viewing the film before we discuss it in class. All films are available on at Hornbake and some can be gotten from Blockbuster.

**Code of academic integrity:** All students enrolled in AMST 498P are expected to abide by the university's Code of Academic Integrity, which is reprinted in the Undergraduate Catalog. In particular, academic dishonesty (cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism) will not be tolerated. The definitions for these offenses are printed in the Schedule of Courses and we urge you to familiarize yourselves with them. "Academic dishonesty is a serious offense which may result in suspension or expulsion from the University."

**Students with disabilities:** Please identify yourselves to us early in the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements for you through the Office of Disabled Student Services.

**Additional Things to Consider:**
Late policy: Late papers receive lower grades. We reserve the right not to accept papers later than one week except in cases of documented illness or family emergency.

**Grading:**
Your grade will be calculated roughly on the following basis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper #1 – Talk Back Paper</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper #2 – Article analysis using Kopytoff/Carson</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article discussion</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Localvore Challenge &amp; Blog</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes (2 @ 20 pts each)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final ELMS WIKI Presentation (discussion and links)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final ELMS WIKI Design (graphics selection, layout, links)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final ELMS WIKI (content analysis, argument, works cited, etc)</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grades are calculated according to the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>950–1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A−</td>
<td>900–949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>870–899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>830–869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B−</td>
<td>800–829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>770–799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>730–769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C−</td>
<td>700–729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>670–699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>630–669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D−</td>
<td>600–629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0–599</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You are welcome to make an appointment to discuss the evaluation of your work.
at any time. Please stop in to see me if you’d like help with any aspect of your course performance.

**Class Schedule**
Remember to **always** bring to class the texts under discussion, including those on Blackboard

**Readings & Assignments are due on the date that they appear**

**Tuesday– 9/1**

**Introduction**
- Introduction to teaching lab
- Introduction to AMST/AASP 498 – Previous class pages
- What is American Studies?
- What is material culture?

**Thursday– 9/3**

**History of Social Class – Theories I**
- “Social Class in America” – Handout

**Tuesday– 9/8**

**Theories of Class II – Pierre Bourdieu, “Habitus,” “Cultural Capital” and “Privilege”**
- View People Like Us (Introduction, Parts 2 & 3), Hornbake

**Thursday, 9/10**

**Intersections of Class, Gender, & Race**
- View People Like Us (Part 4), Hornbake
- Mary Patillo, “Middle Class, Yet Black” – [Middle Class Yet Black.pdf](http://wps.prenhall.com/ca_ph_macionis_sociology_5/23/6031/1544047.cw/content/index.html)

**DUE: Tues – 9/15**
**Paper #1 – 3-page “talk back paper”**

**Tuesday– 9/15**

**Narratives of Class and Consumption: Case Study #1 – Food and foodways**
- Finish People Like Us (Part 1), Hornbake
Thursday– 9/17 – Class canceled due to Pres. Obama Talk

Extra Credit
Saturday, Sept 19

· College Park Community Center, 5051 Pierce Avenue, College Park, MD 20740

Lakeland Community Heritage Weekend 2009:

THEME: Always Meetn’ n’ Eatn’ in Lakeland

ASSIGNMENT: Choose either to attend

10:00 AM | Discussion: Always Meetin’ ‘n Eatin’

Bob Catlin, Moderator, will invite attendees to join a discussion about the role that foods play at different types of community and family gatherings such as holidays, athletic events, picnics, funerals, etc. Stories and types of special foods will help us identify meanings attributed to these occasions. Slides depicting feasts and foods at Lakeland events will be shown as background to the discussion. This event will be recorded.

OR

6:00 PM | Pot Luck Dinner – Please call (301) 345–3692 or email the names, people in your party, and type(s) of dishes you will bring (enough to feed 6 people please) to fstyler@verizon.net

Psyche Williams–Forson, PhD, a nationally recognized Foodways specialist, will provide a short talk on the cultural history and meaning of foods. Following her talk, Motown era classics will provide background music as we enjoy our potluck dinner. Everyone is welcome. A special acknowledgement will be given to the first 50 who reserve early. Please email or bring with you the recipe of your dish and related story. All recipes will be collected into a book to help tell this part of Lakeland’s story.

• 20 points – attendance with write–up of this event: what did you learn about race, food, and class? (see EC assignments above)

Tuesday– 9/22

Narratives of Class and Consumption: Food, con’t

• Williams–Forson, “Gnawing on a Chicken Bone In My Own House.pdf : Cultural Contestation, Black Women’s Work and Class”
• Opie, Hog and Hominy, Introduction – Chapter 3
• Opie, Hog and Hominy, Chapter 4 – 5
• In class viewing: George Tillman, Soul Food

Thursday– 9/24
Narratives of Class and Consumption: Food, con’t

- Opie, Hog and Hominy, Introduction – Chapter 6 – Epilogue

What is localvorism?
(Student-led discussion)
- http://www.localvore.co.uk/
- http://www.locavores.com/how/

Farm to Table – Local(ly)vores

- “Localvore Lessons” http://www.vpr.net/episode/32994/
- Edible Communities – http://www.ediblecommunities.com/content/
- CSAs and local foods
- The Localvore Challenge (a personal perspective)
- Blogging your experience

Sept 27 – Oct 1 - LOCALVORE Challenge
Localvore Challenge – Blog your experiences
(see instructions on Menu Bar or on paper syllabus)

Tuesday– 9/29
Narratives of Class and Consumption: Food and the Body

- Orser, “Materiality in the Practice of Race.pdf ”

Thursday– 10/1 – Localvore blog entries due
Studying Objects – How and Why

- Csikszentmihalyi, “Why We Need Things.pdf”
- Barbara Carson, “Interpreting History through Objects.pdf”
- Celia Lury, Consumer Culture.pdf, Chaps 1, 2, and 4

DUE: Tues – 10/20 on ELMS by 2:00
Paper #2 (5-pp) Kopytoff/Carson Artifact Analysis
Tuesday– 10/6 – (All of these readings are on ELMS)
Narratives of Class and Consumption: Case Study #2 – Tourism and Cultural Identity

Guest speaker: Ann Denkler, Shenendoah College, History Dept.

• Denkler, “Tourism & the Battle....pdf”
• Mullins, “Race and the Genteel Consumer.pdf” : Class and African-American Consumption

Thursday– 10/8
Historical – Narratives of Class and Consumption: Gender & Beauty

• Rooks, Ladies’ Pages, Chaps. 1 & 2
• Walker, Style and Status, “Introduction” and “‘The Beauty Industry Is Ours’ Developing African American Consumer Citizenship in the 1920s and 1930s”

Tuesday– 10/13
Contemporary – Narratives of Class and Consumption: Gender & Beauty

• Rooks, Ladies’ Pages, Chap. 7
• Sherman, “Paradoxes in africanamerican.pdf”
• Handout – “Handout – The Business of Being Oprah.doc”
• “The Oprah Effect” – Live your best Life – http://www.oprah.com/index
• Handout – “Handout – Divanomics – Beyonce Brand.doc” – Beyoncé Branding

Thursday– 10/15
Historical – Narratives of Class and Consumption: Clothing

• Rooks, Ladies’ Pages, Chap. 3 & 4
• Robin Kelley, “Ch 7 Riddle of the Zoot in Race Rebels.pdf” : Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics during World War II” [You will have to turn turn article]
• White and White, Stylin’: African American Expressive Culture, “Ch 6 Strolling looking & 50s clothes in Stylin’.pdf” [You will have to turn turn article]

Tuesday– 10/20

**Paper #2 – Mounted on Wiki**

**Contemporary – Narratives of Class and Consumption: Clothing**

• NY Giants Brandon London on Athlete Brands [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clvc4da1eNE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clvc4da1eNE)
• Vanity Fair: MUSIC ISSUE: [Kings and Queens of Hip Hop.ppt](http://elevee.com/mens/index2.html)
• Newsweek, “[What Michelle Means to Us.pdf](http://www.cultureandmediainstitute.org/articles/2009/20090119212448.aspx)” (you may have to rotate document)

Thursday– 10/22

**Select presentations of paper #2**

**Narratives of Class and Consumption: The Fallacy of Wealth**

• Rhoden, Forty Million Dollar Slaves, Intro – Chapter 6

Tuesday– 10/27

**Narratives of Class and Consumption: The Fallacy of Wealth, con’t**


• Rhoden, Forty Million Dollar Slaves, Chapter 7 – Finish book

Thursday– 10/29

**Narratives of Class and Consumption: Youth & Purchasing Power**

• Chin, Purchasing Power, Chapters 1– 4
• HBO's "The Wire"

Tuesday– 11/3

**Narratives of Class and Consumption: Youth & Purchasing Power**

• Chin, Purchasing Power, Chapter 5 – Finish book
• View Lift, Hornbake or Blockbuster
Thursday– 11/5 – Class CANCELED – Annual Meeting of the American Studies Assoc.

EC Assignment
Mullins, "Racializing the Commonplace Landscape.pdf: An Archaeology of Urban Renewal Along the Color line"

Paul Mullins, Dept of Anthropology, Indiana Univ–Purdue Univ, Indianapolis
Monday, November 9, Department of American Studies
Time: TBA

Tuesday– 11/10
Narratives of Class and Consumption: Class Passing/Social Mobility/Film
• Foster, Class–Passing Social Mobility in Film and Pop Culture Ch. 1.pdf, Introduction
• ATL or Malibu’s Most Wanted or A Raisin in the Sun (Poitier or P. Diddy version)

Narratives of Class and Consumption: Is the American Dream Still Possible?
• Wilson, Radio Gulf

Thursday– 11/12
Narratives of Class and Consumption: No Place Like Home
• Rooks, Ladies’ Pages, Chapters 5 & 6
• Roell, “The Piano in the American Home.pdf”

Tuesday– 11/17
Narratives of Class and Consumption: No Place Like Home
• Naylor, Linden Hills, pp. 1 – 141
• In class viewing – Good Fences

Thursday– 11/19
Guest speaker: Fath Davis Ruffins, Curator Div of Home and Commun Life (NMAH)
Narratives of Class and Consumption: No Place Like Home
• Naylor, Linden Hills, Finish book
• In class viewing – A Place of Our Own http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/placeofourown/film.html
• A Place of Our Own – http://www.blackpublicmedia.org/catalog/prod/12

Thursday– 11/24 – Final Project Presentations Begin

Thursday– 11/26 – Thanksgiving Holiday – No Class
Tuesday– 12/1 –Final Project Presentations

Thursday– 12/3 –Final Project Presentations

Tuesday– 12/8 – Final Project Presentations and wrap up

Final Papers Due

Thursday, Dec 17 10:30pm–12:30pm, ELMS