

PAS 322
Fall 2009

Dr. A. Nama
Office: FOB 212
Office TBA

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY

Course Description:

Black scholars have asserted that the Black family is a barometer of the condition of the African American community in general. The implications of such a link are provocative. The state of the African American family has been the focus of a myriad of studies and conclusions. This course is committed to examining and mapping out the key developments, arguments and various sociohistorical dynamics that have facilitated the development and counter-development of this bedrock institution. The course examines historical and contemporary patterns exhibited in the form and function of the African American family.

Course Goals:

This course aims to build a solid understanding of the evolution and diversity of perspectives in characterizing the “African American family.” Many of these characterizations of the Black family, however, are articulated in the guise of “common sense” notions. Moreover such “common sense” ideas of what “the black family” is or should be are often only thought of in reference to the image of the black family expressed in popular culture through various Hollywood films and television shows. Accordingly, this class will spend a significant time examining the representation of the black family as well as the various myths, issues and perspectives regarding the Black family as an academic, political and sociological point of discussion and research. For students this means being exposed to and gaining a knowledge of how the “black family” is constructed in the American popular imagination as well as a comprehensive, concise, critical and substantive grasp of the major theories, concepts, social thinkers, cultural critics, as well as socio-economic/political/historical/cultural dynamics that have and continue to inform and construct the Black family.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Explain and analyze information and ideas concerning the family from multiple perspectives and apply core concepts covered in class.
2. Analyze and explain the multiple perspectives that underlie debates on important historical and contemporary issues concerning the African American family.
3. Apply appropriate social concepts to analyze, evaluate and explain the African American family.
4. Demonstrate an understanding of how social problems impact the black family.

Required Course Texts:

The use of the two textbooks is key to establishing the contours of such a broad and depthfull topic. This course, however is lecture intensive and involves committed note taking. In other words the texts are necessary to pass the course but not sufficient to excel in the course.

(1) *The Black Family*, Staples Ed. 1999, Wadsworth

(2) *Rituals of Blood*, Orlando Patterson

Course Calendar:

Below is an outline for each week's topic of examination. The titles are meant to give a thematic impression of what will be examined and is a partial preview of the nomenclature of sociology.

Week One

Academic Rituals: Introductions, Pedagogy and Perspective

The Family in Black and White: Form, Function and Ideology

Week Two

Myths and Science: Frazier, Moynihan and Pathology

Read: Staples, Moynihan Report

Week Three

Socialization and Enslavement: Norms, Folkways and Mores

Read: Patterson 1-50

Week Four

Post-Enslavement and its Legacy

Screening: Raisin in the Sun

Read: Patterson 50-100

Week Five

Countering Theorizing the Black Family: Critiquing Traditional Models

Week Six

Black Male and Female Relations

Week Seven

Review & Midterm

Week Eight

Social Economic Changes and the status of the African American Family

Read: Patterson 150-200

Screening: Roger and Me

Week Nine

Black Masculinity

Week Ten

Post-Industrialism and the Black Family

Reading: TBA

Week Eleven

Welfare Reform and the “cycle of poverty”

Week Twelve

Adolescent Development

Reading: TBA

Week Thirteen*

Criminal Justice System, Family Violence and Divorce

Reading: TBA

Week Fourteen

Which Way is Up?: Tying Up Loose Theoretical Ends & Review for Final

Course Requirements:

(1) Midterm and (1) Final Examination

Exams are a combination of multiple choice, fill-in, short answer questions.

(2) Writing Assignments: Deconstructing the African American Family

For your writing assignments you will deconstruct five different representations of the Black family that have in various decades reflected sociocultural trends and perceived cultural sensibilities appropriate for showing Black family dynamics. **Do not critique these films in terms of narrative, cinematography, editing, stereotypes, pacing or any other combination of audiovisual cues. I will evaluate the content of papers in your ability to meaningfully address themes portrayed in these films and their implication in relationship to the readings, lectures and discussions covered in class.** The goal is to employ the concepts, approaches, information and ideas examined in class to interrogate several key concepts and theories: racism, public policy, the nuclear family, the underground economy, domestic violence, matriarchal family structure, the notion of black pathology, economic stressors, promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, the single female headed household, Black masculinity and the extended family are a sample of the concepts at your disposal. The purpose of these writing assignments is for the students to engage in application and critical analysis that investigates below the surface of social phenomena by addressing these questions.

1. How is the Black family characterized in relationship to the literature i.e., pathological, normal, etc.?

2. How do external factors impact internal family dynamics?
3. Does the representation have merit given the “reality” of the Black family?
Why? Why not?
4. What gender role patterns are operating?
5. How does the ideology in the film fit the traditional notion of the family?

Each paper must be 3 full pages excluding bibliography. Type written, double-spaced, 12 point font, one-inch margins and thoroughly proofread.

Course Grading:

(1) Midterm	100pts
(1) Final Examination	100pts
(2) Writing Assign.	100pts (50pts each)
Total:	300pts

Grading Scale

300-281pts	A	282-268	A-
267-261pts	B+	260-250	B 249-238 B-
237-231pts	C+	230-220	C 219-208 C-
206-200 pts	D+	199-189	D 188-177 D-
176-below	F		

Policies:

ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE TURNED IN AT BEGINNING OF CLASS IN PERSON
 I DO NOT ACCEPT LATE MATERIAL.
 NO MAKEUP EXAMS (VERIFIED MEDICAL EMERGENCIES EXEMPTED)