

IDIS 375
The Black Family in America

Instructor:	Joseph C. Dorsey, Associate Professor of History
Class Meets:	Tuesday 1:30-2:25, Beering Hall B242
Office:	University Hall 023
Office Hours:	T & Th 3:00-4:30 or by appointment
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Course Description and Objectives

This course focuses on the history of ideas and approaches that have shaped and defined our understanding of Black families as social institutions. You will be introduced to historical and socio-cultural circumstances that affect the Black family within the context of the diversity of Black culture. You will understand and appreciate the strengths of the Black family by being exposed to a variety of the challenges that they face(d). Most courses that target "The Black Family in America" are presented through a sociological lens. However, while sociological methods and concerns are included in this course, greater emphasis will be placed on history and film studies. Through history and films, we will explore experiences of Black families from Africa to the United States. This course will also attempt to heighten awareness and sensitivity to the contemporary problems affecting the Black family and thus help discover and evaluate social policies and programs geared towards Black families. Discussions are also designed to encourage and stimulate critical thinking for the purpose of interpreting the dynamics of Black family structures.

Required Readings

Andrew Billingsley, Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African American Families

Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart

Maryse Condé, Segu

Required Film Viewings

African Families:

"Roots" (excerpts)

Slaves and Free People of Color:

"A House Divided"

"The Courage to Love"

"Feast of All Saints"

Contemporary African American Families

"Crooklyn"

"Jungle Fever"

"Raisin in the Sun"

"The Ritual"

Guidelines, Behaviors, Policies

(1) Regular attendance is expected. You are allowed two unexcused absences. Absences beyond this number will result automatically in the lowering of your final grade. Exceptions will be made for documented emergencies. Anyone whose absences exceed 20% of the course, six sessions, will receive a failing grade. Habitual tardiness will also be treated as a problem. If you cannot arrive on time, you should not enroll in this class. (2) Ongoing participation in class discussions is important. Thus, it behooves each of you to keep up with the readings in order to contribute to these discussions substantively, on a regular basis. (3) Pop quizzes are always possible, and quite likely if class discussion languishes. Grades will not be posted or reported by telephone or e-mail. Assignments will be graded according to the scale below. (4) Though voiced observations and commentary are central, neither insulting language nor outbursts of temper will be permitted. Each member of this class will have numerous opportunities to share views and opinions, but we must express ourselves respectfully and courteously in each instance—no matter how heated, controversial, or volatile the topic. (5) Please do not engage in private conversations during class time. Also, make sure that your cell phones are turned off. (6) With the exception of our first session, you are responsible for all assigned readings before class meets. Though some of you may feel confident in the strength of your memory, good note-taking is essential. In addition, in the infelicitous event of an absence, I advise that you not rely on briefings from classmates exclusively. You alone are responsible for all information disseminated in any given session, whether you are present or not. (7) Purdue University's policy against academic dishonesty is strong and long-standing. Cheating, purchasing papers, plagiarism, and other writing practices of dubious integrity will be punished to the fullest extent. This sort desperate behavior will result in your permanent separation from the school.

Grade Scale

100–90= A
89–80 = B
79–70 = C
69–60 = D
59– 0 = F

Grade Distribution

Three Short Papers	60%	(2-to-3-page essay)
Theme Paper	30%	(3-to-5-page essay)
Two Quizzes	10%	(multiple choice)

Reading Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings</u>
Jan 13	Precolonial Africa	Begin Achebe
Jan 15	West African Family Structures: Acephalous Societies	Cont. Achebe
Jan 20	Discussion of <u>Things Fall Apart</u>	Finish Achebe
Jan 22	West African Family Structures: State Societies	Begin Condé
Jan 27	Polytheistic State Societies	Cont. Condé
Jan 29	Islamic States Societies (clips from "Roots")	Finish Condé
Feb 03	Slave Families in the Americas (1st quiz)	Billingsley Pt. II
Feb 05	Slave Families and Free Families of Color	Pt. II cont.
Feb 10	History vs. Film; "A House Divided" shown (1st paper due)	Pt. II cont.
Feb 12	"A House Divided" continued	Pt. II cont.
Feb 17	History vs. Film; "The Courage to Love" shown	Pt. II cont.
Feb 19	"The Courage to Love" continued	Finish Pt. II
Feb 24	Black Families in Louisiana: Similarities and Differences	Film: "Feast"
Feb 26	"Feast of All Saints" continued	

Mar 03	"Feast of All Saints" continued	Film cont.
Mar 05	Tradition and Change	Billingsley Pt. I
Mar 10	Family, Community, and Society (2nd paper due)	Film: "Crooklyn"
Mar 12	"Crooklyn" cont.	Pt. I cont.
Mar 17	Spring Break	
Mar 19	Spring Break	
Mar 24	The Black Family and "Mainstream" Society	Billingsley Pt. III
Mar 26	Education, Family, and African American Advancement	Pt. III cont.
Mar 31	Family Choices, Military Choices	Pt. III cont.
Apr 02	New Changes, Challenges, and Differences (2nd quiz)	Billingsley Pt. IV
Apr 07	Matriarchy and Masculinity	Film: "Raisin"
Apr 09	"Raisin in the Sun" continued	Part IV cont.
Apr 14	Interracial Topics: "Jungle Fever" shown	Film : "Jungle"
Apr 16	"Jungle Fever" continued	Billingsley Part V
Apr 21	Family, Crisis, Resolution "The Ritual" shown	Part V cont.
Apr 23	"The Ritual" continued	Part V cont.
Apr 28	Course Review (3rd paper due)	Billingsley Part VI
Apr 30	Instructions for Final Paper	Billingsley Part VI
May 05	Theme Paper Due on or before this date	

Additional Comments

1. The syllabus above is subject to change, according to the dictates of class needs and the instructor's discretion.
2. In the event of a major campus emergency, including severe weather conditions, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages are subject to changes that may require a revised semester calendar or other adjustments. Here are ways to get information about changes in this course: Blackboard Vista web page, my email address: jdorsey@purdue.edu, my office phone: (765) 496-3523, and the African American Studies Program: (765) 494-5680.
3. This class appeals to those who are intellectually curious, academically engaged, emotionally mature, and psychologically stable. This is to advise that some scenes in some of the films and readings used in this class depict nudity, violence, and strong language. If you object to any of the three factors named—nudity, violence, and/or strong language—this class is not for you.