

Harvard University  
Expos. 20, Spring 2023  
12:00 PM - 1:15 PM Tu Th

# The Ruling Class

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Office Hours (on Zoom or in person): by appt.

Course web site: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/116581>

## Course Overview

The United States certainly has an upper class, but does it have a *ruling* class? And if the U.S. does have a ruling class, how does it rule in a country that is ostensibly a democracy? In this course we will examine the identity, politics, and social role of the American upper class. We'll begin by considering how scholars have variously conceptualized the upper class: is the upper class defined by money, power, prestige, pedigree or something else? In unit 1, we'll consider the character of the ruling class in contemporary American society with a particular focus on the role of elite education in shaping the cultural outlook of the upper class. In unit 2 we'll turn our attention to Wall Street, which many scholars have argued is a key venue for both the socialization of the ruling class and for its exercise of power. Finally, in unit 3 we'll research how elites understand their privileged positions in a society that (at least officially) celebrates ideals of democracy and equality. The course readings are largely drawn from the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and history. Some of our main texts are Shamus Khan's *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*, Karen Ho's *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*, and Rachel Sherman's *Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence*.

An equally important goal of the course is to develop your ability to write clear, engaging, and coherent analytical essays of the sort you will be asked to produce frequently at Harvard. With this in mind the class is structured to give you the opportunity to work in a sustained and systematic way on improving your writing. During the semester you will write three essays, each of which tackles a different

## *The Ruling Class*

aspects of the experience of class and is designed to highlight different writing skills. The thematic units and their associated writing assignments are described below.

### **Description of Units**

ESSAY I: THE RULING CLASS UNDER NEOLIBERALISM  
(testing a theory, 4-5 pages)

In his book *Capitalism Alone*, the economist Branko Milanović argues that the contemporary American upper class differs from the upper class in earlier forms of capitalism. In particular, among other features, the contemporary upper class is richer, more closed to outsiders, and, unlike most capitalist classes, has significant income from work. In order to explore these claims, we will consider Shamus Khan's *Privilege*, an ethnography of St. Paul's School, an elite New England private boarding school. To what extent does St. Paul's School, as described by Khan, socialize its students to be members of this liberal-meritocratic elite described by Milanović?

*Focal Writing Skills:* Introductions, arguable theses, using evidence, integrating sources.

ESSAY II: WALL STREET AND RULING CLASS FORMATION  
(analytical essay, 5-7 pages)

Each year, students graduating from elite private secondary schools head to elite colleges, particularly the Ivy League. And each year students graduating from elite colleges head to jobs at Wall Street financial and consulting firms. In this unit we will consider Wall Street as a site of ruling class formation and political action. How do Wall Street firms both shape and embody the political and economic interests of the upper class? How do Wall Street bankers understand their work and their place in the American economy and society? Our main source for this unit will be Karen Ho's *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*.

*Focal Writing Skills:* Problematizing arguments, presentation of evidence and analysis, argument structure, counterargument.

ESSAY III: PRIVILEGE IN A DEMOCRACY  
(research paper, about 10 pages)

For the research paper students will design their own research project that explores some theme related to the American ruling class. Students will devise their own original research question, collect and/or analyze primary data of some sort, and identify their own secondary sources. As inspiration for their research, student will read selections from Rachel Sherman's *Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence*, which

## *The Ruling Class*

explores how wealthy New Yorkers understand their own positions of privilege in an increasingly unequal society.

### **Course Readings**

All of the course readings will be posted on the course website. Will be reading most of *Privilege, Liquidated, and Uneasy Street*, so if you prefer to read paper books you should consider purchasing these texts.

### **How the Course Works**

The main goal for the course is for you to produce an original, compelling, and analytically sound essay for each of the three units of the course. Such essays are not written on the fly; they take time, continual re-working, and critical reflection. The writing requirements outlined below are designed to provide you with the techniques for constructing good essays.

Class time will be split between grappling with the course readings and in-class work directed at improving some aspect of your writing. You should come to class with the relevant readings completed and ready to participate actively in discussion.

### **Writing and Revising**

- *Response Papers*: Before you compose an initial draft of each essay, you'll complete one or more response papers that focus on particular writing skills that are important for the relevant essay type. Check the unit assignment packet for specific instructions and due dates, etc.
- *Drafts*: You will submit a draft of each of the three essays. On each draft you'll receive detailed comments from the instructor (in writing and in conferences).
- *Draft Cover Letters*: Every time you hand in a draft, you'll include a cover letter in which you provide guidance to your reader about the aspects of the essay you are struggling with in addition to whatever other comments or questions you might have. I'll give you more specific instructions about writing draft cover letters over the course of the semester.
- *Draft Workshops*: Immediately after each draft is due we'll have an in-class draft workshop in which we work through two student papers (chosen by the instructor) and offer the writers constructive criticisms and suggestions for improvement. I will email you the essays I have chosen before each workshop. You will be expected to provide

## *The Ruling Class*

written comments (in the form of a letter) on each draft that we workshop together. I'll hand out more guidelines on draft workshops later in the semester.

- *Conferences:* After I've carefully read your draft, we'll meet (virtually) for a 15-20 minute conference in which we'll work together on strategies for revising the essay. You should also plan on taking notes during the conference. Missed conferences may not be rescheduled.
- *Essay Revisions:* You should expect to extensively revise each of your drafts before submitting it for a grade. I will provide written comments on essay revisions. Essay revisions must be submitted over email (not as hard copies), and I will also provide my comments in electronic form.

### **OTHER POLICIES**

#### **Grading**

I will grade only the revisions (that is, the last version) of your essays, not the drafts or response papers (although I may suggest, as an aid to interpreting my evaluations, what sort of grade a draft *would* receive if I were to grade it). Course grades will be determined as follows:

Revision of Essay 1	25%
Revision of Essay 2	30%
Revision of Essay 3	40%
Participation and exercises	5%

Grading will become more stringent as the semester progresses since I expect you develop as a thinker and writer. Please be advised that final grades (that is, grades on revised essays) are indeed final. I will not read or grade a further revision of a revision.

#### **Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Attendance**

The Writing Program attendance policy is intended to make sure that you get everything you can out of your Expos course. Because Expos has fewer class hours than some other courses; because the course is largely discussion-based; and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential to your learning in the course.

While I of course encourage you to be present every day in class, you are allowed two unexcused absences for the semester with no consequence. Some absences (religious

## *The Ruling Class*

holidays and medical situations) are automatically considered excused; some family circumstances may also be counted as excused absences. You are expected to notify me ahead of time about those absences unless circumstances make that impossible. If you miss a third class for unexcused reasons, I will ask you to meet with me to discuss your plan for catching up with any missed work, as well as issues that may be affecting your attendance or that might require attention or support from your advisers or from other College resources. If you miss a fourth class, your Resident Dean will be notified about those absences, so that your Dean can give you any support you may need to help you get back on track in the class. Missing four classes—the equivalent of two full weeks of the semester—puts you at risk for missing crucial material necessary to complete your work. Unless there is a medical or other emergency issue preventing consistent engagement with the class, students who miss four classes will receive a formal warning that they are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

In the case of a medical problem, you should contact me before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours; you should also copy your Resident Dean on that message. In the case of extended illness, you may be required to provide medical documentation. Absences because of special events or extracurricular involvement are not excused absences. If such circumstances lead you to want to miss more than two unexcused absences, you must petition the Associate Director of the Writing Program for permission.

### **Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Completion of Work**

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course (not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind). If you are unable to complete your work on time due to medical or family issues, please contact me before the deadline to discuss both the support you might need as well as a possible new arrangement for your deadline. Communication about your situation is essential so that we can determine how best to help you move forward. If we have not already discussed your situation and you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements and asking you to meet with me and/or your Resident Dean to make a plan for catching up on your work. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and if you have not documented a medical problem or been in touch with your Dean about other circumstances, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If you think you will require some flexibility in deadlines or participation in the course for reasons of a documented disability, please schedule a meeting with me early in the semester so we can discuss appropriate accommodations. (To be eligible for such accommodations, you need to have provided documentation to the Disability Access Office ahead of time. Please let me know if you are unfamiliar with that process.) The Disability Access Office works closely with Expos courses, and we will develop a plan that is appropriate for your needs. Please note that it is always your responsibility to consult with me as the need for those accommodations arises.

### **Policy on Electronic Submissions**

As you send or upload electronic submissions document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with Microsoft Word. It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty

### **Policy on Deadlines and Extensions**

Expos is a course that builds sequentially: the class exercises and response papers prepare you for the draft; your work in the draft lays the foundation for a strong revision; the skills and strategies you learn in Unit 1 remain essential in the new challenges of Unit 2. Because of this sequential work, keeping up with the course deadlines is necessary to your continued learning. For this reason, I grant extensions only in exceptional circumstances.

As a first-year student, part of what you are learning is how to manage your time, to balance your academic and extracurricular responsibilities, and to build habits of working that allow you to complete long and complex assignments independently. These are challenges that every student in the class faces this semester. However, situations can arise that go beyond these typical first-year challenges. If you find yourself dealing with medical issues, family emergencies, or extraordinary situations that genuinely interfere with your work, please let me know. I won't need to know personal details, but we can meet to make a plan to help you move forward in a reasonable way in light of the circumstances you are facing. In these situations I also urge you to reach out to your Resident Dean, your proctor, or your adviser so that you have the necessary support in all of your courses.

### **Policy on Collaboration**

As in many academic situations, our Expos class will be a setting that involves frequent collaboration--we will develop ideas together through class discussion, peer review, and draft workshops. The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). It is a form of academic integrity to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay; you can do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, "Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading." However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

### **Policy on Academic Integrity**

One of the essential elements of the Expos curriculum is the work we do on effective source use, appropriate acknowledgement of sources, and expectations for citing sources in academic writing. In each unit, we will work on strategies for working with the ideas of other authors and sources, and how to develop your own ideas in response to them. Most forms of academic writing involve building on the ideas of others, contributing ideas of your own, and signaling clearly for readers where each idea comes from. This complex relationship with sources is part of our work through the whole semester, and you should always feel free to ask me questions about this material.

As we become familiar with the expectations of an academic audience, we will also work on strategies to avoid errors in citation and unintentional plagiarism. As with all your courses, the expectation in Expos is that all the work that you submit for this course must be your own. That work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

## Schedule of Class Meetings and Topics

# UNIT 1: Elite Education and Upper Class Formation

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**TUESDAY** | JAN 24: Course introduction; Capitalist class structure; defining the upper class

*Writing focus:*

- Questions and answers; arguable theses

*Read:*

- Chibber, V. (2022). "The Basic Structure" in *Confronting Capitalism: How the World Works and How to Change It*. New York: Verso.
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**THURSDAY** | JAN 26: "Liberal Meritocratic Capitalism"

*Writing focus:*

- Questions and answers; arguable theses continued

*Read:*

- Milanovic, Branko. (2019). "Liberal Meritocratic Capitalism" in *Capitalism, Alone: The Future of the System that Rules the World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. [PDF]
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**TUESDAY** | JAN 1: Elite Education and Ruling Class Reproduction

*Writing focus:*

- Writing as conversation

*Read:*

- Khan. (2011). "Introduction" and "The New Elite" in *Privilege: the making of an adolescent elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton University Press. [PDF]
- Graff, & Birkenstein, C. (2018). "*They say / I say*": *the moves that matter in academic writing* (Fourth edition.). W. W. Norton & Company. [PDF]



*The Ruling Class*

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**THURSDAY** | FEB 2: Elite Education and Ruling Class Reproduction (continued)

*Writing focus:*

- Introductions

*Read:*

- Khan. (2011). “Finding One’s Place” in *Privilege : the making of an adolescent elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton University Press. [PDF]
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**TUESDAY** | FEB 7: “Meritocracy” and Ease

*Writing focus:*

- Summarizing

*Read:*

- Khan. (2011). “The Ease of Privilege” and “Conclusion” in *Privilege : the making of an adolescent elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton University Press. [PDF]
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**THURSDAY** | FEB 9: The “Liberal Meritocratic” Ruling Class

*Writing focus:*

- Introductions (again)
- Using sources

*Read:*

- Sample introductions
- Selections from the *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* website.

*Due:*

- Response paper 1
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**SUNDAY at 11 PM** | FEB 12: Draft of paper 1 due

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*The Ruling Class*

**TUESDAY** | FEB 14: Unit 1 Draft Workshop

*Writing focus:*

- Critique and revising

*Read:*

- Student drafts
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**THURSDAY** | FEB 16: NO CLASS – DRAFT CONFERENCES

## UNIT 2: Wall Street and Ruling Class Formation

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**TUESDAY** | FEB 21: From Harvard to Wall Street

*Writing focus:*

- Revising

*Read:*

- Ho. (2009). “Introduction: Anthropology Goes to Wall Street” and “Biographies of Hegemony: The Culture of Smartness and the Recruitment and Construction of Investment Bankers” in *Liquidated: an ethnography of Wall Street*. Duke University Press. [PDF]
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**THURSDAY** | FEB 23: Working Conditions and Ideologies in Finance

*Writing focus:*

- Counterarguments

*Read:*

- Ho. (2009). “Wall Street's Orientation: Exploitation, Empowerment, and the Politics of Hard Work” in *Liquidated: an ethnography of Wall Street*. Duke University Press. [PDF]

*The Ruling Class*

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**SUNDAY at 11 PM** | FEB 26: Revision of paper 1 due

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**TUESDAY** | FEB 28: Corporate Culture

*Writing focus:*

- Drafting
- *Read:* Ho. (2009). “Downsizers Downsized : Job Insecurity and Investment Banking Corporate Culture” in *Liquidated: an ethnography of Wall Street*. Duke University Press. [PDF]

*Due:*

- Response paper 2
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**THURSDAY** | MARCH 2: Financial Capitalism

*Writing focus:*

- Counterargument (again)

*Read:*

- *Read:* Ho. (2009). “Liquid Lives, Compensation Schemes, and the Making of (Unsustainable) Financial Markets” in *Liquidated: an ethnography of Wall Street*. Duke University Press. [PDF]
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**SUNDAY at 11 PM** | MARCH 5: Draft of Paper 2 due

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**TUESDAY** | MARCH 7: Unit 2 Draft Workshop

*Writing focus:*

- Revising

*Read:*

- Selected student drafts

**THURSDAY** | MARCH 9: NO CLASS – DRAFT CONFERENCES

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**WEEK OF MARCH 13:** SPRING BREAK

## UNIT 3: Research Paper

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**TUESDAY** | MARCH 21: The “Anxieties of Affluence”

*Writing focus:*

- Introduction to research

*Read:*

- Sherman, & Project Muse. (2017). “Introduction” in *Uneasy street : the anxieties of affluence*. Princeton University Press. [PDF]
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**THURSDAY** | MARCH 23: Dilemmas of Wealth

*Writing focus:*

- Formulating research questions

*Read:*

- Sherman, & Project Muse. (2017). “Orientations to Others” in *Uneasy street : the anxieties of affluence*. Princeton University Press. [PDF]
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**SUNDAY at 11 PM** | MARCH 26: Revision of paper 2 due

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*The Ruling Class*

**TUESDAY** | MARCH 28: The Legitimizing Power of Work

*Writing focus:*

- Types of evidence

*Read:*

- Sherman, & Project Muse. (2017). “Working Hard or Hardly Working?” in *Uneasy street : the anxieties of affluence*. Princeton University Press. [PDF]
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**THURSDAY** | MARCH 30: Being “Ordinary”

*Writing focus:*

- Research process

*Read:*

- Sherman, & Project Muse. (2017). “A Very Expensive, Ordinary Life” in *Uneasy street : the anxieties of affluence*. Princeton University Press. [PDF]
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**TUESDAY** | APRIL 4: Upper Class Parenting

*Writing focus:*

- Data analysis

*Read:*

- Sherman, & Project Muse. (2017). “Parenting Privilege” in *Uneasy street : the anxieties of affluence*. Princeton University Press. [PDF]

*Due:*

- Research proposal
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**THURSDAY** | APRIL 7: Library Workshop

*Writing focus:*

- Finding and evaluation secondary sources

*Read:*

- No reading

*The Ruling Class*

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**TUESDAY** | APRIL 11: Research Proposal Workshop

*Writing focus:*

- Developing research questions

*Read:*

- Student research proposals
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**THURSDAY** | APRIL 13: Catch up day – topic TBD

*Writing focus:*

- TBD

*Read:*

- TBD
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**TUESDAY** | APRIL 18: Clarity and Concision

*Writing focus:*

- Style

*Read:*

- No reading
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**THURSDAY** | APRIL 20: Course Evaluations

*Writing focus:*

- Q and A regarding research

*Read:*

- No reading
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*The Ruling Class*

**SUNDAY at 11 PM** | APRIL 23: Draft of paper 3 due

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**TUESDAY** | APRIL 25: Concluding Thoughts; Draft workshop

*Writing focus:*

- Recap of major themes

*Read:*

- No reading
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**Due date for research paper revision TBD**