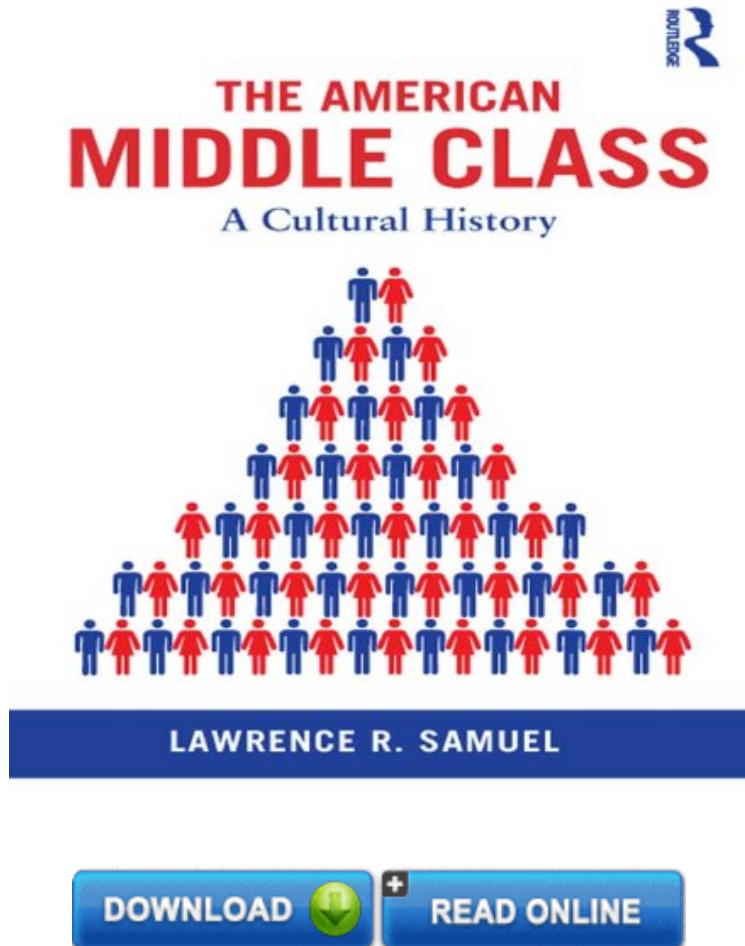


# The American Middle Class: A Cultural History

Lawrence R Samuel

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**Lawrence R Samuel : The American Middle Class: A Cultural History** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The American Middle Class: A Cultural History:

The middle class is often viewed as the heart of American society, the key to the country's democracy and prosperity. Most Americans believe they belong to this group, and few politicians can hope to be elected without promising to serve the middle class. Yet today the American middle class is increasingly seen as under threat. In *The American Middle Class: A Cultural History*, Lawrence R. Samuel charts the rise and fall of this most definitive American population, from its triumphant emergence in the post-World War II years to the struggles of the present day. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, powerful economic, social, and political factors worked together in the U.S. to forge what many historians consider to be the first genuine mass middle class in history. But from the cultural convulsions of the 1960s, to the 'stagflation' of the 1970s, to Reaganomics in the 1980s, this segment of the population has been under severe stress. Drawing on a rich array of voices from the past half-century, *The American Middle Class* explores how the middle class, and ideas about it, have changed over time, including the distinct story of the black middle class. Placing the current crisis of the middle class in historical perspective, Samuel shows how the roots

of middle-class troubles reach back to the cultural upheaval of the 1960s. *The American Middle Class* takes a long look at how the middle class has been winnowed away and reveals how, even in the face of this erosion, the image of the enduring middle class remains the heart and soul of the United States.

"Finally, a book about the history of the American middle class that is attentive to the way Americans actually used—and fought over—the term "middle class"! Samuel elegantly synthesizes the history of the United States from World War II to the present through arguably its most important lens. His book is especially valuable in its careful treatment of the black middle class."—Robert D. Johnston, author of *The Radical Middle Class* "In this provocative history, Lawrence Samuel traces the decline of the middle class from its pinnacle as the shining star of post-World War II America to its beleaguered condition today. Placing cultural and political developments at the center of his analysis, Samuel shows how we got into this dire situation, and how we might get out of it."—Elaine Tyler May, author of *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* "The middle class is as American as apple pie. What is so surprising, then, is how little we actually know these people, their hearts and minds, their culture and myths. That is until now. Lawrence R. Samuel's at once brisk and broad cultural reinterpretation of postwar America charts the rise and fall of the great American middle and why their story is important to our own times."—Bryant Simon, author of *Everything but the Coffee: Learning about America from Starbucks* About the Author Lawrence R. Samuel is the founder of Culture Planning, LLC, a consulting company offering cultural insight to Fortune 500 companies. He holds a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Minnesota, and was a Smithsonian Institution Fellow.