SES/Social Class in Films, Documentaries, TV Shows, & Songs
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This list includes films, documentaries, TV shows, and songs that have social class as a primary theme. This could mean that they directly address social class or social class is a strong subtext. Although not an exhaustive list (which is probably not possible), it represents some of the diversity in class representation over time.

**Films**

**American Job**  Man goes from one unskilled labor job to another. Drama.

**Baby Mama**  Infertile professional woman hires poor woman to be a surrogate mother. Comedy.

**BAPS**  Waitresses try to raise money to open their own shop and scam a dying millionaire. Comedy.

**Billy Elliot**  Working class boy wants to be a ballet dancer. Comedy, Drama.

**Blue Collar**  Three car plant workers rob union safe and blackmail union. Drama.

**Born Yesterday**  A million dollar Tycoon hires a tutor to teach his lover proper etiquette. Comedy, Romance.

**Catch Me if You Can**  Young man poses as pilot, pediatrician and attorney to scam people. Drama.

**Cinderella Man**  Impoverished ex-prize fighter rises up to become a champion. Drama.

**Citizen Cane**  Reporters try to decipher last word of newspaper tycoon, whose life story is shown in flashbacks. Drama.

**City of God**  Two boys who grow up in slums of Rio de Janeiro take different life paths. Drama.

**Coal Miner's Daughter**  Biography of Loretta Lynn, a country and western singer who grew up in poverty. Drama, Musical.

**Class**  Naive country boy gets a scholarship to a class prep school. Comedy, Drama.

**Clockwatchers**  Work lives and loves of temps. Comedy, Drama.

**Clueless**  High school student in Beverly Hills must survive the ups and downs of adolescent life. Comedy.

**Cradle Will Rock**  Story of Federal Theater Program of 1930s and its attempt to stage a musical on a steel strike. Drama.

**Crybaby**  Delinquent falls in love with rich girl. Comedy.

**Curly Sue**  Homeless man and child attempt to scam rich woman. Comedy.

**Dangerous Liaisons**  Rich and bored aristocrats in France play high-stakes games of passion and betrayal. Drama.

**Deliverance**  Four urban businessmen go into the wilderness, where they run into country people. Drama.

**Dirty Dancing**  Wealthy woman falls for dance instructor from different background. Drama, Musical.

**8 Mile**  Young working-class white rapper from Detroit struggles with his anger through music. Drama.

**Envy**  A man becomes increasingly jealous of his friend's newfound success. Comedy.
Erin Brockovich Unemployed single mother becomes a legal assistant and almost single-handedly brings down a California power company accused of polluting a city's water supply. Drama.

Evita Eva Peron rose from poverty to become the most famous Argentine woman in history. Drama, Musical.

54 Story of Studio 54, a hot disco hangout for the social elite of New York. Drama.

Flashdance Pittsburgh woman with two jobs as a welder and an exotic dancer wants to get into ballet school Drama, musical.

The Full Monty A group of working class men form a stip group to get money. Comedy, Musical.

Good Fences Story of an upwardly mobile black family for whom the American dream becomes a nightmare. Drama.

Good Will Hunting A janitor at MIT has a gift for mathematics which is discovered, and a psychologist tries to help him with his gift and the rest of his life. Drama.

The Grapes of Wrath Poor Midwest family is forced off of their land and travel to California, suffering the misfortunes of the homeless in the Great Depression. Drama.

Great Expectations Man of modest background falls in love with a rich girl. Mysterious benefactor gives the man an opportunity to make his dreams come true. Drama.

The Great Gatsby Young Midwesterner now living on Long Island finds himself fascinated by the mysterious past and lavish lifestyle of his neighbor. Drama.

Hairspray A fat working-class girl triumphs over her thin upper-class rivals to win a spot on a dance show and the heart of a boy. Comedy, Musical.

Heathers Girl wants to be part of popular wealthy clique of girls. Drama.

Imitation of Life Struggling young actress with a daughter sets up housekeeping with a homeless black widow and her light-skinned daughter who rejects her mother by trying to pass for white. Drama.

The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love Rich black girl and working class white girl fall in love. Comedy.

Inventing the Abbots Life of two boys from the wrong side of the tracks and their interaction with the three daughters of a local aristocrat. Drama.

It Can Happen to You Man wins lottery and everyone wants a piece. Comedy, Drama.

Jawbreaker Popular girls accidentally kill a girl. They are found out by poor gawky girl who wants to be part of their clique. Drama.

Joe Dirt Working class man searches for family, becomes famous as butt of jokes of a radio DJ. Comedy.

Julie Johnson Working class woman realizes dream of going to college. Drama.

Little Darlings Rich girl and poor girl at summer camp. Comedy.

Look Back in Anger A disillusioned, angry university graduate comes to terms with his grudge against middle-class life and values. Drama.

Love Story Educated couple marry, and he is disinherited from father's will, leaving them to start marriage at rock bottom. Drama.

Maid in Manhattan Senatorial candidate falls for a hotel maid, thinking she is a socialite. Comedy.

Matewan Story of unionization of West Virginia coal mines in 1920s. Drama.

Memoirs of a Geisha Woman transcended her fishing-village roots to became one of Japan's most celebrated geishas. Drama.

Mommie Dearest Wealthy, disturbed actress adopts daughter to give her "what I never had." Drama.

Money for Nothing Unemployed dockworker finds $1.2 million that fell off of an armored car, and decides to take the money and run. Comedy.
Mr. Deeds Small-town pizzeria owner and poet inherits $40 billion from his deceased uncle and is besieged by opportunists. Comedy.

Mrs. Winterbourne Poor girl is mistaken for widow of wealthy man. Comedy, Drama.

My Fair Lady Wealthy man takes poor girl and makes her into a “lady.” Comedy, Musical.

9 to 5 Lives and working conditions of secretaries. Comedy.

Norma Rae Working class woman unionizes her workplace. Drama.

North Country Women working in coal mines who are harassed because of gender try to improve their status. Drama.

The Notebook Young lovers separated because parents disapproval of class background. Drama.

Pecker Working class guy from Baltimore becomes “discovered” as a photographer. Comedy.

Poor White Trash Poor family resorts to trash to send son to college. Comedy.

Pretty in Pink Working-class girl, social outcast, dates preppy upper class boy from the in-crowd. Comedy.

Pretty Woman Wealthy man falls in love with prostitute. Comedy, Romance.


The Prince and Me Pre-med student who falls in love with a Danish Prince. Romance.

The Pursuit of Happyness Struggling salesman takes custody of his son as he’s poised to begin a life-changing professional endeavor. Drama.

Pygmalion Wealthy man takes poor girl and makes her into a “lady.” Comedy, Musical.

A Raisin in the Sun Struggling young man lives with family that gets an unexpected windfall. Drama.

Rebel Without a Cause Middle-class teen angst in the 1950s. Drama.

Rocky Small time boxer gets a once in a lifetime chance to fight the heavyweight champ. Drama.

Rushmore Prep school boy falls in love with teacher who is dating wealthy older friend. Comedy.

Slums of Beverly Hills Lower middle-class teenager and her oddball family. Comedy.

Society

Soul Plane Airplane offers different accommodations by social class. Comedy.

Sordid Lives Three generations of a Texas working-class family gather for a funeral. Comedy.

Spanglish Woman and her daughter emigrate from Mexico for a better life in America and work for a wealthy family. Comedy, Drama.

Straight Talk Woman ditches her small town life for big city Chicago, where she becomes a sensation as a radio show host. Comedy.

A Streetcar Named Desire Refined woman visits sister and working-class husband. Drama.

Sweet Home Alabama Woman from poor background runs away from her husband in Alabama and reinvents herself as a New York socialite. Comedy, Romance.

The In Crowd A mentally disturbed young woman takes a job at a posh country club and falls in with a clique of wealthy college kids. Drama, Thriller.


Trading Places Snobby investor and a street con artist find their positions reversed as part of a bet by two callous millionaires. Comedy.

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn Story of girl in poverty who maintains idealism. Drama.

Valley Girl Lives of middle-class kids from San Fernando valley, and relationship of middle-class girl with boy from working class. Comedy.

Wall Street Stockbrokers who will do anything to succeed. Drama.

West Side Story Two teens from rival NYC gangs fall in love. Romance, Musical.

Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory Poor boy wins opportunity to tour candy factory. Musical, Fantasy.
With Honors  Harvard student finds thesis paper being held hostage by a homeless man, who schools the young man on life. Drama, Comedy.
Working Girl  Secretary's idea is stolen by her boss, who seizes opportunity to steal it back by pretending she has her boss's job. Comedy, Drama.

Documentaries

American Dream  Account of the protracted strike of the employees of the Hormel meat-packing plant in Austin, Minnesota, in 1984
Born into Brothels  Lives of children born to prostitutes in India.
Born Rich  Children of the mega-rich.
Celebration  Story of Celebration, FL a planned community.
Country Boys  Story of two boys in Appalachia.
Fast Food Women  Story of women who work in fast-food industry.
Flag Wars  Wealthy white gay men begin to gentrify poor black neighborhood.
Girls Like Us  Story of four urban teenage girls.
Harlan County USA  Chronicles labor strike in mining town in Kentucky.
Legacy  Story of family of black women who vow to change their lives after a family member is murdered.
Life and Debt  Effects of globalization on Jamaican industry and agriculture.
Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter  Story of five women who worked in trades during WWII.
People Like Us: Social Class in America  Title says it all. A must see.
Roger & Me  Michael Moore pursues GM CEO Roger Smith to confront him about the harm he did to Flint, Michigan with his massive downsizing.
Seeing Red  Story of members of the American Communist Party.
Up series  (7 Up, 14 Up, etc) Longitudinal study of British children from different social classes.

TV Shows

All in the Family  – Working class family deals with (and often argues) over issues contemporary to the seventies.
Arrested Development  – Chronicles the transition a wealthy family undergoes after the patriarch is jailed for embezzlement. Deals with family trying to readjust their lifestyle to a different class status.
Beverly Hillbillies  – A “hillbilly” family strikes oil and moves out to Beverly Hills, where they have problems fitting in with their upper class neighbors.
Beverly Hills 90210  – Explores the problems of a group of rich kids in Beverly Hills.
Blue Collar TV  – A sketch comedy show focusing on “redneck” and working class humor.
COPS  – Shows real life police officers on their jobs. Often focuses on criminals from the working class and underclass.
Cosby Show  – Follows a middle to upper middle class African American family.
Dallas  – Shows the exploits of an oil-rich family.
Dirty Jobs  – Shows jobs that are, as the title suggests, dirty. Most jobs are manual labor and often involve jobs that occupied by the working classes.
Dukes of Hazzard  – Focuses on the Duke family, a southern family of moonshiners and “ne’er do wells”. Portrayed the hillbilly and redneck stereotype of the South, including such characteristics as poor, uneducated, and unrefined.
Everybody Hates Chris  – Based on Chris Rock’s childhood, a sitcom that follows Chris’ family. Mother and father work multiple jobs in order to send Chris to a better school.
Freaks & Geeks - Followed a group of teenagers in the eighties. Occasionally portrayed class differences between several of the characters.

Fresh Prince of Bel Air - Sitcom about an inner-city poor kid (Will Smith) who moves in with his upper class relatives in Bel Air.

Gilligan's Island - Seven people are stranded on an island and must deal with their differences in order to help each other survive. The Howells, an elderly married couple, are extremely wealthy. The Professor is a professional and somewhat middle or upper middle class. Ginger, an actress, is also somewhat well off. The others - Mary Ann, the Skipper, and Gilligan represent the working class.

Green Acres - An upperclass family moves to the country to live as farmers.

Good Times - Show about a poor African American family in the projects.

Gossip Girl - Wealthy teens in upper East Side NYC.

Hee Haw - Variety show based on “hillbilly/hicks”.

The Jeffersons - Follows a newly rich African American family that moves into a luxury apartment and begin to develop relationships with their neighbors.

Knights of Prosperity - A bunch of blue collar men decide to rob a celebrity in New York City.

Married with Children - A sitcom about a lower class family, led by patriarch Al Bundy, a miserable shoe salesman.

MTV Cribs - A series that videotapes celebrities giving a personal tour of their homes. Focused on conspicuous consumption and displays of wealth.

My Name is Earl - After winning the lottery, a “never do well” tries to right the wrongs of his past.

My Sweet 16 - Documents the planning and throwing of several rich girls’ sixteenth birthday parties, with much emphasis on the amount of money being spent on each party.

The Oblongs - A cartoon about a misfit family that, due to where they live at the bottom of the Hill where chemicals are dumped, are all suffering from physical mutations. The Oblong family and their neighbors, ostensibly working class, are often pitted against the people who live on the Hill, who are the elite and wealthy (as well as physically beautiful) of the town.

One Day at a Time - Sitcom that follows a recently divorced mother and her two children.

Roc - Follows the trials and tribulations of a city garbage collector.

Roseanne - This is a sitcom about a working class family that struggles with situations from everyday life. Based on the life of Roseanne Bar.

Sanford & Son - Follows the adventures of a junk dealer and his son.

Sex and the City - Four women in New York City discuss their sex lives. Slight class differences between the characters, but mostly within the middle to upper strata.

The Simple Life - Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie, two wealthy women, leave behind their lives of luxury in order to try their hands at a “simpler life”. Documents their exploits as they struggle to work, cook, and hold various internships.

The Sopranos - Series that focuses on a mob boss and his family.

Trailer Fabulous - A home improvement show for the lower class, specifically those who live in mobile homes.

The Waltons - Show about a hard working poor mountain family, set in the thirties.

Ugly Betty - Betty is hard working girl who is hired into the fashion industry, where she encounters problems as someone who is of not the same class status, doesn't fit the beauty standards, and has a stronger moral base from which to work.

Welcome Back Kotter - Teacher returns to his inner city high school to teach a group of underachievers. Deals with class and education issues.

The White Shadow - A white former NBA professional retires and gets a job coaching at a mostly black inner city school. Class differences play out in the episodes.
**Wife Swap** — A reality television show that takes two seemingly opposite families and switches the wives in order to watch how the families react to having a new rule maker. Many episodes take families from different class statuses to swap.

**Wonderfalls** — A college grad falls into a rut wherein she lives in a trailer park and works as a retail clerk. She is told by tiny figurines to do things or face dire consequences.

**Specific TV Episodes or Characters**

- Family Guy—committing welfare fraud; Peter loses job; Peter’s father visits after retirement;
- Lois’ father loses all of their money
- King of the Hill—Khan; LuAnn characters
- DeGrassi: The next generation—Sean; Craig and his father
- Veronica Mars—the first season
- Queer as Folk—first season relationship between Michael and Dr. David

**Songs**

- Billy Bragg collection
- Brooks & Dunn—Hard Working Man
- Garth Brooks—I have friends in Low Places
- Tracy Chapman—Fast Car; Talking About a Revolution
- Everlast—What It’s Like
- Good Charlotte—Lifestyles of the Rich & Famous
- Hall & Oates—Rich Girl
- Billy Joel—Allentown
- Sammy Kershaw—Queen of my Double Wide Trailer; Working Woman’s Holiday
- John Lennon—Working Class Hero
- Loretta Lynn collection
- Reba McIntyre—Fancy
- Joan Cougar Mellencamp—collection
- Dolly Parton—9 to 5; Coat of Many Colors; Bargain Store
- Rise Against—Swing Life Away
- Bruce Springsteen—collection
- Doug Stone—Addicted to a Dollar
- The Supremes—Love Child
- Gretchen Wilson—Red Neck Woman

**Additions? Suggestions? Comments? Contact Christine Smith, smithc@uwgb.edu**