

AMS 101, Section C: Introduction to American Studies
“Defining the American Dream”
CNR: 20193, 200 Hiestand
T/TR 11 AM – 12:15 PM
Spring 2008

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Part 1: Course Description

AMS 101 will introduce students to the interdisciplinary study of American life and culture. This course utilizes a variety of source materials, from visual to archival to popular culture, and draws on a variety of fields including history, women’s and gender studies, literature, art, science and technology, and religion. To help us narrow our inquiry, this course will focus on the theme of the “American Dream.” The American Dream is a ubiquitous phrase whose definition may seem obvious, as if it were something upon which all Americans agree and have always agreed. Indeed, one of the defining elements of American culture is the shared belief in the American Dream. Far from being a monolithic, static idea, however, the American Dream has shifted and changed over time and it means different things to different people. Furthermore, it has not always been accessible to everyone – many groups have engaged in and continue to engage in social protest and civil rights movements in order to gain access to the dream.

In this class, we will study the history and evolution of the American Dream. How have notions of the American Dream changed from colonial times to today? Why? What cultural, political, social, economic, and other forces prompted these changes? To what extent is the American Dream a reality for all people living in the United States? How do notions of the American Dream impact public culture, politics, and peoples’ engagement in their communities and in government? How do they affect our priorities, as well as our sense of possibility and responsibility? And, finally, how can understanding the concept of the American Dream help us better understand American culture as a whole, as well as current social and political debates?

These are some of the questions that this class will pose. Students will be encouraged to develop their own critical thinking, reading, and writing skills in order to respond to them and in order to construct their own arguments. This class is also concerned with student writing. A majority of the assignments will be written. Portions of several classes will be devoted to discussion of college-level academic research, argument development, paper organization, and revision. Students will also become comfortable finding and analyzing primary sources using on-line collections, such as the Library of Congress’s American Memory Project, and Miami University’s own collections.

Class format:

This class will be a combination of lecture and discussion. Students are expected to come to class each day having read the assigned material and prepared to discuss it both in large and small groups. In addition, we will often have in-class writing assignments. To enrich our discussions, I will frequently bring in music, TV or movie clips, cartoons, or photos.

Course Goals/Learning Outcomes:

- * make meaningful connections between the past and the present
- * hone critical thinking, reading, and writing skills
- * understand the cultural, political, and historical contexts in which texts are produced
- * identify, evaluate, and use primary and secondary sources, including visual materials
- * develop the skills necessary to construct strong thesis statements and well-developed written arguments of one’s own

Required Texts (available for purchase at the MU bookstore in the Shriver Center or through a number of on-line vendors, and on reserve at the King Library):

1) Franklin, Benjamin. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, second edition. With an introduction by Edmond S. Morgan. New Haven: Yale University Press, Nota Bene Book, 2003. ISBN: 0300098588.

2) Yeziarska, Anzia. *Bread Givers*. New foreword and revised introduction by Alice Kessler-Harris. New York: Persea Books, 1999. ISBN:089255-014-7.

3) Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Scribner's, 1999. ISBN: 0743273567.

4) *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1965. ISBN: 0345350685

Additional readings are posted in electronic reserves (accessible through Blackboard and the MU library).

Assignments and Grading:*

Paper #1 (2-3 page McGuffey reader paper/project) = 15%

Paper #2 (3-4 page primary source analysis) = 20 %

Paper #3 (3-4 proposal argument) = 20%

Homework** (to be assigned in class, not necessarily listed on the syllabus) = 10%

Class participation and attendance = 15%

Final take-home essay exam = 20 %

*Detailed assignments for papers #1-3 will be handed out and posted on Blackboard.

** Throughout the semester, I will offer a few extra-credit opportunities that can be used to makeup for a missed homework assignment or add one point to a paper grade.

Grading Scale:

97-100= A+

93-96 = A

90-92 = A-

87-89 = B+

83-86 = B

80-82 = B-

77-79 = C+

73-76 = C

70-72 = C-

67-69 = D+

65-67 = D

Below 65 = F

Please note: students are welcome to appeal their grades but grade appeals must be made within three days of the returned assignment.

Part 2: Miami Plan for Liberal Education

AMS 101, Introduction to American Studies, is a Foundation Course in the Miami Plan for Liberal Education. It fulfills the United States Cultures Requirement, as well as the Historical Perspectives Requirement. For majors in the College of Arts and Science, it also fulfills the CAS Humanities Requirement. AMS 101 also serves as the gateway course for majors in American Studies. As such the course is more than just a survey of American culture. This course is designed with three interrelated goals in mind: (1) To explore the complexities and contradictions underlying American society and culture, looking at how (or if) disparate Americans have shaped a shared American identity and culture, (2) To introduce students to important issues, significant works, and interpretive methods of American Studies as an interdisciplinary discipline, and (3) To

experiment with cultural interpretation and learn to think critically and analytically about issues of identity, community, culture, and nation. The course is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of the American experience. Rather, it is intended to examine a selection of central ideas and experiences that illuminate a larger dialogue about American society and culture. Students will explore America as concept, process, and ideal, and as culture, place, and nation. Organized broadly by chronology from the colonial period to the present, the course will be divided into thematic sections that will highlight contested core ideas associated with American culture and identity. These core ideas include democracy, capitalism, immigration, success, freedom, identity, and individualism. Race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class will be central to our discussions of these core ideas.

With these goals, questions, and themes in mind, students will be encouraged to think broadly and synthetically about the ideas and experiences that have shaped American culture as it has evolved from the colonial period to the present. And they will be encouraged to share their ideas and experiences with others in the class and the larger university community. Primary emphasis will be placed on discussion, analytical thinking, close textual readings, and cultural analysis. How do scholars of American Studies conceptualize and explain culture? How do they synthesize and interpret a range of texts and perspectives? How do they develop interpretive arguments? The main concern of this class is to provide students with the perspective and skills to reflect on American culture as it has emerged up to the present day. We will conclude with a discussion of public culture and the possibilities for responding to and acting on the ideas and issues we have covered during the course of the semester.

Thinking Critically and Understanding Contexts: This course seeks to enable students to think critically and understand the context of the messages, meanings, experiences, and ideas that are woven together to define American culture. Students will be introduced to a variety of cultural texts—novels, films, advertisements, essays. They will then learn how to decipher those texts, to engage in close readings, to sort out the various cultural codes embedded in those texts. Students will not simply explore texts as isolated entities. Rather, they will be asked to consider the larger context in which these texts, broadly speaking, are constructed and with what other texts, both past and present, they are in conversation. What is the framework that defines these cultural texts? How are they engaged in dialogue with each other? What is the social, economic, and political position of the speakers, writers, participants, and readers of these texts? How do these positions shape the meaning of cultural texts? These are the kinds of questions scholars of American Studies ask.

Engaging with Other Learners: Throughout the course, in formal and informal ways, students will be asked and encouraged to share ideas and experiences with each other, with their professors, with friends and family, with visiting scholars, and with the other members of the larger community in which they live. In order to think critically and understand the context of American culture and how they fit into that culture, students need to engage in an ongoing conversation with those around them, both in class and outside of class. Only through dialogue with each other can we begin to learn about the complexity of American culture. Class discussion is an integral component of this class, and students will frequently be encouraged to attend lectures and other events outside of class.

Reflecting and Acting: This course seeks to enable students to better understand American culture and their place within that culture. Through class discussion, reading, and writing assignments students will be encouraged to reflect about their identity as “Americans” and as citizens. The ultimate goal in teaching students how to interpret their culture is to give them the ability to actively shape and change that culture.

Part 3: Course Policies

Format of Papers: All papers must be typewritten. Double space between lines, use 12-point font, and use 1-inch margins all the way around the text. Papers should conform to MLA or Chicago Manual of Style standards for format and citation of sources. Please consult me, a librarian, and/or the Center for Writing Excellence for additional information. More information is available at: <http://www.units.muohio.edu/cwe/about/index.html>

Class Attendance and Participation:

Attendance and class participation count for 15% of your grade. You are expected to attend class daily, to arrive on time, to have prepared assigned reading, and to participate in class discussion. Approximately once a week we will have an in-class writing that will be used to assess both attendance and grasp of course material. Students who miss three or more in-class writings will be docked at least one letter grade for their final averages. According to the University's attendance policy, the only "excused absences" are for religious holidays. If our class conflicts with a religious holiday, please notify me in advance of your absence. If you participate in a varsity sport or other University-sponsored activity that will preclude you from attending occasional classes, please see me during office hours to make other arrangements.

Make-up Exams and Late Assignments: Failure to take an exam or turn in a paper on the exam/due date without making prior arrangements with me will result in a zero for the exam/assignment. I will only allow you to take a make-up exam or paper extension in the event of family or medical emergency, religious holiday, or official Miami University business (with documentation). To receive an extension, special arrangements must be made with me in ADVANCE of the exam/assignment. Late papers will be penalized one letter grade for each day that they are late. If you cannot attend class on the date an assignment is due, arrange to have a classmate or friend drop it off during scheduled class time. There is no makeup of in-class work.

Academic Misconduct: Turning in work that is not your own, or any other form of scholastic dishonesty, will result in a major course penalty, possibly failure of the course. A report of the incident will also be made to Miami University officials. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or about how to use outside sources in your assignments, please see me *before* you turn in the project. For more information, please see the "Undergraduate Academic Regulations" section of the Student Handbook. Students are also strongly encouraged to complete "Miami scholar," the library's on-line tutorial about academic integrity, research, and citing sources, The URL is <http://me.lib.muohio.edu/miamiescholar/>, and a login (with Unique ID and MUNet password) is required.

Classroom Etiquette: We will often discuss controversial topics about which students will have a variety of opinions. Courteous and respectful consideration of others' views is imperative. All cell phones must be turned off before class. Drinks are fine, but please do not eat in class. Using your laptops for anything other than taking notes (e.g. email, IM, web surfing) detracts from the quality of class discussion, distracts other students, and will result in a reduction of the student's class participation grade. In addition, the professor reserves the right to consider students who repeatedly arrive late to class, sleep in class, and/or spend class time on-line as absent that day.

Students With Disabilities: If you are a student with a physical and/or psychiatric disability and feel that you may need a reasonable accommodation to fulfill the essential functions of the course, please contact the Office of Disability Resources at 529-1541 (V/TTY). Students with AD(H)D and/or specific learning disabilities may contact the Rinella Learning Center at 529-8741. Guidelines for who is eligible for services and accommodations can be found at www.muohio.edu/ODR and <http://www.units.muohio.edu/saf/lrn/ldServices.shtml>.

Part 4: Class Schedule

DATE	TOPIC	Homework/Readings
	I: Origins of the Dream	
T 1/15	Introduction to AMS 101	
TR 1/17	Colonial Origins of the American Dream	*write a one-paragraph definition of “the American Dream” *read John Winthrop, excerpts from “A Modell of Christian Charity” (ER/BB)
T 1/22	Cultural conflicts and Captivity Narratives	*read Mary Rowlandson, excerpts from “A Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson” (ER/BB) *start reading <i>The Autobiography of Ben Franklin</i> , pages 43-160 (pay special attention to 148-160)
TR 1/24	Benjamin Franklin and the Formation of National Identity Paper #1 assigned	Complete <i>The Autobiography of Ben Franklin</i> , 43-160 (pay special attention to 148-160)
T 1/29	Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness	Read 1) The Declaration of Independence, online at: http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/declaration_zoom_2.html 2) The Declaration of Sentiments from the 1848 Women’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, http://www.usconstitution.net/sentiments.html 3) Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July” (1852) http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/ind-ex.asp?document=162
TR 1/31	Industrialization and the Formation of Middle Class Identity Introduction to William Holmes McGuffey, his Eclectic Readers, and His World	Read: “The Perils of Progress,” chapter 6 in <i>The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862</i> , Carol Sheriff (ER/BB) In-class activity: Browse the table of contents for <i>Godey’s Lady’s Book</i> from February 1850 and then read the article “New Furniture.” http://www.history.rochester.edu/godeys/02-50.htm
		*** visit McGuffey Museum by 2/4
T 2/5	The Cult of the Individual	Read Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self Reliance” (1841/1847) (ER/BB)
TR 2/7	Peer review of paper #1	complete draft of paper #1
T 2/12	Civil War and Reconstruction	Read “Of the Dawn of Freedom,” WEB Dubois (ER/BB)
	II: The Self-Made Man?	
TR 2/14	The Gilded Age: America on Display Paper #1 due in class	Read Andrew Carnegie, <i>The Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie</i> , chapter 3 “Pittsburgh and Work,” and Carnegie, “The Gospel of Wealth” (ER/BB) Complete paper #1
T 2/19	The West in Popular Culture/Origins of U.S. Empire	*Read “The Strenuous Life” by Teddy Roosevelt (ER/BB)

	Paper #2 assigned	*Homework for 2/19: visit the Miami University Special Collections and ask to look at “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West: Historical Sketches and Daily Review,” a program from one of his wild west shows presented at Madison Square Garden in 1907. call number: GV1821.B8 A 4. Then write one page answering some of the following questions: how would you describe the context of this program? How are Native Americans depicted? Anglo-Americans? What function does the “wild west” serve in American culture?
TR 2/21	Immigration and the American Dream (part 1) Work on topic proposal #2 in class	Start reading <i>Breadgivers</i>
T 2/26	King Library Research Day **class will meet in King Library, room 110** Topic proposal due in class	Complete topic proposal #2 Keep reading <i>Breadgivers</i>
TR 2/28	Discuss <i>Breadgivers</i>	Finish reading <i>Breadgivers</i>
	III. Can you buy the American Dream?	
T 3/4	Mass culture and mass consumption	Start reading <i>The Great Gatsby</i>
TR 3/6	Peer Review of Paper #2	Complete draft of paper #2 Keep reading <i>The Great Gatsby</i>
T 3/11	Discuss <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	Finish reading <i>The Great Gatsby</i> Work on paper #2 revisions
TR 3/13	The Great Depression Paper #2 due in class	Read excerpts from Dale Carnegie’s <i>How to Win Friends and Influence People</i> (ER/BB) Complete paper #2
	SPRING BREAK 3/16-3/23	Start reading <i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> (focus on chapters 1-2, 9-19)
	IV. The Dream of Equality	
T 3/25	Fighting for the American Dream Abroad and at Home	Read Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream” available online at http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/treatise/king/mlk01.htm . Please also watch the famous speech on Youtube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbUtL_0vAJk Keep reading <i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> (focus on chapters 1-2, 9-19)
TR 3/27	Freedom Summer Walking Tour Class will meet on the Western	Keep reading <i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i>

	campus (location TBA)	
T 4/1	The Suburbanization of the Dream Origins of second wave feminism	Read "The Problem that Has No Name," by Betty Friedan (ER/BB) Watch "In the Suburbs," a promotional video from 1957 available online at http://www.archive.org/details/IntheSub1957 . Write a paragraph relating the two. Keep Reading <i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> .
W 4/2 6 PM	EXTRA CREDIT SCREENING OF "MALCOLM X" ROOM TBA	
TR 4/3	Discuss <i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> Paper #3 assigned	Finish reading <i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i>
T 4/8	Is there a "possessive investment in whiteness"? Watch "Green"	Read excerpts from <i>The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics</i> , by George Lipsitz (ER/BB)
TR 4/10	Immigration and the American Dream (part 2)	Do a Lexus Nexus search on the phrases "immigration" and the "American Dream." Select one of the articles you find and bring it to class.
T 4/15	Are the poor "invisible"?	Read introduction and chapter 1 from <i>The Working Poor</i> by David K. Shipler (ER/BB) Optional reading, "The Invisible Poor" by James Fallows (ER/BB)
TR 4/17	Peer Review of paper #3	Complete draft of paper #3
T 4/22	The Dream of Celebrity	Work on revisions of paper #3 Reading TBA
TR 4/24	Exporting the American Dream **Paper #3 due in class**	Finish paper #3 Reading TBA
T 4/29	What does the American Dream mean to you?	Look over your notes from the semester and write 1-2 potential final exam essay questions that you think address the themes of the course.
TR 5/1	Last day of class Review for the final exam	
T 5/6	Final exams due in my office (125 MacMillan) by 5 pm	Have a great summer!