2014

412-01 Seminar: The American Dream

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The American Dream is one of the most popular phrases in recent history. What precisely do we mean by the American Dream? What are its defining features? It's a term that's often used broadly and has meant different things to different people. We live in a country made up of dreams. Scores of individuals, ranging from politicians, business leaders, academicians, and news commentators to folks in various walks of life refer to it. To some people the term connotes freedom, equality, opportunity, free enterprise, upward mobility, owning a home, good job, fame, or financial success, among others. It has been used in different settings. For example, when the Cincinnati Reds won the National League Central Division in 2010, I recall an article in the Cincinnati Enquirer entitled in bold letters: GREAT AMERICAN DREAM COMES TRUE.

There are a number of academically reputable books and articles that make reference to the American Dream. The first known scholar to use the term was Walter Lippmann in his book, Drift and Mastery, published in 1914. He used the term only once. An intellectual and political commentator, Lippmann pointed out that the American Dream “may be summed up . . . in the statement that the undisciplined man is the salt of the earth.” In that statement he affirmed his “belief in the virtues of the spontaneous [and] enterprising" individual. Like many critics at the turn of the twentieth century, who identified a number of economic and social injustices in the community, Lippmann hoped America could be restored so that “each man could again be left to his own will,” that each individual would be able to affirm his individuality as much as possible. Concerned over the many problems that ordinary people faced, Lippmann argued that creating “a minimum standard of life below which no human being can fall is the most elementary duty of [our] democratic state.” He thought as did Herbert Croly in his 1909 book The Promise of American Life, a book the Republican President Teddy Roosevelt very much admired, that Americans “can no longer treat life as something that has trickled down to us. We have to deal with it deliberately, devise its social organization.” Both Lippmann and Croly underscored the need to enact reforms in society in order to realize the promise of American life, to remain true to America's ideals.

Though Lippmann first used the term, it has long been acknowledged that the Pulitzer Prize writer and historian, James Truslow Adams, popularized it in his 1931 book, The
Epic of America. He used it over thirty times. Though the phrase American Dream did not become part of the American vernacular until then, the concept -- Adams argued -- began "to take form in the hearts of men" in the early 1600s in the colonial settlements of Jamestown, Plymouth, and Boston. He maintained that the American Dream was a vital force from the start. "The economic motive," he wrote, "was unquestionably powerful, often dominant, in the minds of those who [left Europe and] took part in the great migration" to America. It has been well documented that most European immigrants in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries fled from persecution or hard social and economic conditions in their homeland. But "mixed" with the economic motive, Adams argued, was "the hope of a better and a freer life, a life in which a man might think as he would and develop as he willed." Consistently throughout The Epic of America he argued that the Dream arose “from the depths of the common mass" of people.

We are living at a time in our history where we are experiencing a revolution in time and space relationships as well as seeing the digitization, virtualization, and automation of more and more things. The new technologies have thrust a new scale of life upon us. Some say the American Dream has staying power. If so, how will it fare in our new setting? In looking at the past and the present we should not want to romanticize the Dream at the expense of not discussing real and divisive issues. Individuals committed to the concept of the American Dream should want to face real issues in order to make it possible for as many individuals as possible to go after their dreams.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

The purpose of the course is to think historically about the major trends and patterns in American History as they relate to the American Dream.

Participants in the course should seek to:

1. understand the development of institutions, ideas, and values, that have shaped and continue to shape the American Dream;
2. understand the process of assembling information from the past and give meaning to it; and
3. understand processes of change and arguments about cause and effect.

Participants in the course should also demonstrate a depth of understanding through the development of analytic and critical skills. You should be able to

1. think historically so that you can make connections;
2. make written and verbal arguments in a critical and persuasive manner; and
3. seek valid conclusions based on appropriate sources of information.
ACADEMIC HONESTY

The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of results and material submitted in reports or admission and registration documents and the falsification of any academic record including letters of recommendations.

All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student's own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of another's efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one's own.

Penalties for violations of the policy may include one or more of the following: a zero for that assignment or test, an "F" in the course, and expulsion from the University. The dean of the college in which the student is enrolled is to be informed in writing of all such incidents, though the teacher has full authority to assign the grade for the assignment, test, or course.

EVALUATION

1. Write four short essays (approximately 1,000 words, three to four pages each) on each of the following sections in the course: The Founding Fathers' Ideals; Romanticism and Slavery; Industrialization, Individualism, and Equality: 1870s-1940s; and Politics, Wealth, and Income Inequality. In each essay comment on (a) the author's intent, (b) the key question that the author is addressing, (c) the most important information to support the author's arguments, and (d) the main conclusion. Though you are expected to read all the assigned readings in the respective modules, you are not expected to comment on each piece. Rather, in each essay you should comment on certain specific arguments made by the authors as well as share your personal thoughts and opinions on arguments presented in some of the readings. The first essay is due September 16; the second, September 30; the third, October 21; and the fourth, November 6. (Each essay is worth 10%)

2. You are to write a seminar paper, which should be approximately 3,500 words, roughly 12 to 15 pages. The main focus of the paper should be on How Fares the American Dream? In light of your understanding of the concept of the American Dream in the shaping of our nation, what have been, and what are, issues and challenges related to the Dream? You should make use of the assigned readings, class discussions, and outside
You should consult at least three outside readings (books or articles). The seminar paper is due December 2. (25%)

3. Quiz is worth 10%.

4. Class discussion of readings 10%. You are to read assigned readings in the order presented in each module.

4. Final examination is worth 15%.

### SYLLABUS

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings and Sources</th>
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<tr>
<td>August 26</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>August 28 -</td>
<td>Puritan and Enlightenment Experiences</td>
<td>Cullen, <em>The American Dream</em>, Introduction and Chapter 1; and Introduction in Hanson, ed., <em>Dream in the 21st Century</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>September 9, 11,</td>
<td>Founding Fathers' Ideals</td>
<td>Cullen, Chapter 2; <em>CANVAS - MODULE TWO</em> Thomas Paine's &quot;Of the Origin and Design of Government . . .&quot;; The Declaration of Independence; Alexander Hamilton, Federalist Paper No. 1; Jon Meacham, &quot;Free to be Happy&quot;; Darrin McMahon's &quot;Liberalism and Its Discontents&quot;; Benjamin Franklin's Documents; John Adams's Documents; Thomas Jefferson's Documents; James Madison's Document; J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer; Arthur Schlesinger's &quot;What Then is the American, This New Man?&quot;; George Pierson's &quot;The M-Factor in American History.&quot;</td>
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<td>16, 18, 23, 25</td>
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<td>September 30,</td>
<td>Romanticism and Slavery</td>
<td>Cullen, Chapter 3;</td>
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**CANVAS - MODULE THREE** Richard Hofstadter, "On the Unpopularity of Intellect"; Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The American Scholar" and "Self-Reliance"; Excerpts from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*; Early nineteenth century observations of the American; Feminists Hold a Convention, 1848"; Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"; Frederick Douglass's "Contradictions in American Civilization."

October 16 Quiz (10%) Identify seminar paper topic and potential sources. Paper is due November 25.

October 21, 23 Industrialization, Individualism, and Equality: 1870s - 1940s
November 4, 6, 11, 13 Politics, Wealth, and Income Inequality

October 28, 30

**CANVAS - MODULE FOUR** William Graham Sumner's "The Absurd Effort To Make the World Over"; Lester Frank Ward, "Mind as a Social Factor"; Excerpts from Henry George's writings; Herbert Hoover's Rugged Individualism Speech; Franklin D. Roosevelt's Commonwealth Club Speech; James Truslow Adams's "Epilogue" from The Epic of America; Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream Speech; Roger Fortin's "Future-Oriented Consciousness of Americans Over Two Centuries."

November 4, 6, 11, 13 Politics, Wealth, and Income Inequality


November 18, 20, 25

**CANVAS - MODULE SIX** Sandra Hanson and John Kenneth White, "The American Dream: Where are We?"; Robert and
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<tr>
<td>December 2</td>
<td>Seminar paper and 1-page abstract are due (25%).</td>
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<td>December 2, 4, 9, 11</td>
<td>Presentations and Discussion of Seminar Papers</td>
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<td>December 18</td>
<td>Final Examination (15%)</td>
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Edward Skidelsky, "Introduction" from *How Much is Enough?*; Skidelsky's "Exits from the Rat Race."