

The American Dream: Fact or Fantasy?

FYSE 1354A- Fall 2011

Meets T/Th 9:30-10:45am, in AXN 104

Professor: S. Shapiro - sshapiro@middlebury.edu - Campus Phone: x5977 - Cell: (206) 919-6060
Office Hours: T/Th 11am-12:30pm in LIB 224 (near CTRLR)

Course Description

This seminar is designed for non-native speakers of English, and aims to answer the question, “What is the American Dream?” We will consider the ways that the American Dream has been conceptualized by historians, politicians, journalists, activists, and artists. We will read works by authors such as Alexis de Tocqueville, James Baldwin, Betty Friedan, Howard Zinn, Maya Angelou, Julia Alvarez, and Jennifer Hochschild. Film screenings include *How the West Was Won* (1962) and *Crash* (2004). Students will develop a range of skills for academic speaking, reading, and research, and will write multiple drafts of short and long papers.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Develop a greater understanding of the complexities of American culture and identity
- Engage deeply and critically with a variety of course readings
- Contribute extensively to in-class discussion and practice oral presentations
- Practice finding, evaluating, synthesizing, and citing sources
- Write and revise a variety of academic essays, and offer feedback to peers
- Use technology to contribute to course learning
- Gain familiarity with academic culture in the U.S. and at Middlebury
- Build confidence and self-awareness in regards to speaking, reading, writing, research, etc

Reading List

Cullen, J. (2003). *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*. Oxford University Press. (available at Middlebury Bookstore)

Electronic readings- Uploaded to course website- <http://shawnashapiro.com>

(Username and Password can be found in Course Hub)

. Other handouts may be provided in class.

**Please keep all readings and handouts in an organized notebook or binder!!

(See Course Calendar for specific dates and readings)

Expectations

In this seminar, we are a writing team, and each member of the team is essential. Therefore, you are expected to attend all classes on time, complete all readings when assigned, and turn in all work on time. Late papers, absences, and lack of preparation will be penalized. You are expected to contribute to class discussion through both speaking and listening. In the event of illness, please notify me (email or phone) before class that you will be absent. Extended absences must be approved by your commons dean and could have an adverse affect on

your final course grade. I often send reminders and notes via email, so please check your email at least once every 24 hours.

Course participation includes discussion, interviewing, oral presentations, and a good deal of reading and writing. In addition, you will meet with me and with our peer mentor on a regular basis. You will be graded on your class participation, the effort you put into the writing/editing/conferencing process, and the quality of your individual written work.

Formatting for Written Work

Unless specified otherwise, written assignments should be double-spaced, 12-point font (Times New Roman), with 1-inch margins. APA citation style will be used. Major papers should include a statement of the Honor Code: "*I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment,*" with your signature. In class, we will talk more about academic integrity, and discuss ways to use sources appropriately. For now, please remember that **plagiarism** involves 'stealing' someone else's words or ideas, and using them as if they were your own. It is a very serious offense, and can result in academic suspension or even expulsion. For more information on plagiarism and how to avoid it, please visit <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

Assignments

You will complete a total of four papers, as well as some shorter reflection and response assignments. For longer papers, you will write at least two drafts—sometimes completing a third or fourth draft as well. Much of the work will be due to me electronically, although you may be asked to bring copies to class for peer review.

Grading

40% of your grade will be based on the final drafts of Papers 1, 2, and 4

20% of your grade will be based on the final draft of Paper 3

40% of your grade will be based on class participation, early drafts, short assignments, oral presentations, peer review, etc.

Communication and Support

Communication and respect are very important to our course. I attempt to return all phone calls and emails within 24 hours and appreciate the same from my students. Your feedback is essential to the success of this course. I will give you multiple opportunities to reflect on the course, both in-class and anonymously, but I appreciate hearing from you at any point about your needs and experiences. If you are feeling overwhelmed or frustrated, I hope you will let me know as soon as possible, so I can help you get the support you need.

If you have a disability of any kind that might impact your studies, please communicate with me and/ or the ADA office, so that we can make a plan to accommodate you. See <http://www.middlebury.edu/campuslife/diversity/ada/> for more information.

Although I will be meeting with you frequently, both during scheduled appointments and in office hours, I hope you will make use of support from the following:

Peer Mentor: Victoria Marambio- vmarambio@middlebury.edu

Library Liaison: Richard Jenkins- sbertoli@middlebury.edu -x2330 - Library 135C

CTLR: <http://www.middlebury.edu/administration/ctlr> (peer tutors for all subjects, including drop-in Sun-Th eve.)

Course Overview: Major Papers

**Note: More details on all of these papers will be forthcoming in class*

Paper 1- “What is the American Dream?” (3-4 pp.):

For this paper, you will survey a diverse group of 20 Middlebury students (from outside our class), asking them to define the American Dream in one phrase, image, or sentence. In your paper, summarize your findings, comment on what you found most interesting, and compare your results with the information on one of the public websites we’ve looked at for class (PBS, etc.). Practice using summary, paraphrase and quotation in your writing. You will give a 3-minute mini-presentation of your findings in class.

Paper 2- “American Archetypes” (5-6 pgs)

By this point, we will have encountered a variety of iconic representations of Americans, including the pilgrim (or other religious refugee), the Puritan, the patriot/revolutionary, the pioneer, the farmer, the cowboy, and the entrepreneur. Choose one of these icons (or another that comes to mind) as an embodiment of American values. Use evidence from course readings and the film *How the West Was Won* to address the following questions: What are the key characteristics of this archetype? How does he (or she) represent the American Dream? How has history shaped the way this type of person is viewed? Also discuss the ways that this archetype can be seen as part of national identity today. (Look for examples in politics, sports, media, pop culture, etc.).

Paper 3 -“The American Dream and National Debate” (research paper, 6-8 pgs)

In this paper, you will discuss how various (and often conflicting) notions of the American Dream are reflected in discussions of a current issue or event. (See below for sample topics). Use library databases to locate sources of background information, public opinion/commentary, and scholarly analysis on your topic. Then, develop an analytical, research-based essay in which you use the lens of “American Dream” to examine that issue more in-depth. Plan to give a 15 minute presentation, including a short class discussion, related to your topic.

Possible Topics for Paper 4 (just to get you started):

- a. The 2012 U.S. presidential debates
- b. The tenth anniversary (and/or memorial) for the 9/11 terrorist attacks
- c. The Tea Party movement
- d. Immigration laws and regulations
- e. Same-sex marriage
- f. English-only movements
- g. Educational policies or curricula
- h. Unemployment, the real estate crisis, or another economic issue
- i. An issue in sports, technology, or popular culture
- j. Others? (including international issues)

Paper 4- “Defending (or Dismissing) the American Dream” (4-5 pgs):

Given the many definitions and complications of the American Dream that have arisen throughout the semester, one might ask whether the notion actually has any “real” value. In this essay, you will articulate an argument for why the concept of the American Dream is still relevant, or why it is outdated. You may draw evidence from course material, your own experiences, and (if desired) outside sources.

COURSE CALENDAR (tentative)

Sept 7 (W)- Course introduction and overview. Jigsaw survey and HW. Tips for advising and registration.
Sept 7-9 (W, Th, F)- Advising meetings w/ SS.

Sept 13 (T)- Review “American Dream” websites: prior to class: PBS, USA Today, Forbes, etc.
Due in class: Summary and commentary on findings at one or more websites (2 pgs, typed, paper).
Also continue surveys for Paper 1.

Sept 15 (Th)- Kohl. Brooks- “A Values Gap.” Hochschild (Ch 1 part 1).

Sept 20 (T)- Cullen Intro and Ch1. Due: Paper 1, full draft (email to SS and bring copies for peer review).
Evening (tentative): Time management workshop

Sept 22 (Th)- Huntington Ch 4. Meacham (from Newsweek). Mini-presentations on Paper 1.
Meetings w/ Victoria

Sept 27 (T)- Cullen Ch 2. Also read Declaration of Independence. Due: Paper 1 revised draft. Meetings with SS.
Evening film: *How the West Was Won*

Sept 29 (Th)- Brooks Ch 2 (on de Tocqueville). Excerpts from Crevecoeur, Emerson, and possibly Turner.

Oct 4 (T)- Cullen Ch 3. Due: Paper 2 outline or first draft.
Oct 6 (Th)- Dodwell. Schlissel-“Frontier Family.”

Oct 11 (T)- Vecoli. Due: Paper 2, full draft. Possible evening class. All week: Meetings with Victoria.
Oct 13 (Th)- Cullen Ch 5.

*Sun Oct 16: Due (electronically): Paper 2 revised draft.

Oct 18 (T)- Research workshop.

Oct 20 (Th)- Writing Workshop. Also due: proposal for Paper 3

NOTE: Afternoon Speaking for Professional Purposes workshop- more details TBA.
Also possible class outing this weekend?

*Sun Oct 23: Due (electronically): Midterm portfolio with cover letter and final drafts of Papers 1 and 2.

NOTE: The rest of the schedule below is subject to change, depending on where we are at by this point.
Due dates for major assignments, however, will remain the same.

Oct 25 (T)- No class (midterm recess)

Oct 27 (Th)- Writing Workshop. Due: Paper 3, first draft. Meetings with SS (portfolio/paper 3).

Nov 1 (T)- Cullen Ch 4. Evening film: *Crash* (2004). Meetings with Victoria.

Nov 3 (Th)- Rose, Baldwin.

Nov 8 (T)- Angelou (poems); Friedan, Others? Due: Paper 3, revised draft.

Evening: Banner/registration workshop.

Nov 10 (Th)- Song (essay). Zinn? Others? Meetings w/ SS (writing/advising).

Nov 15 (T)- Cullen Conclusion. Statistics from Pew Charitable Trust, and other resource sites.

Due: Paper 4 notes/outline

Nov 17 (Th)- TBD- More literary excerpts: Alvarez, Hughes, others

*Sun Nov 20 –Due: Paper 4 full draft (electronically).

Nov 22 (T)- Writing Workshop. Meetings with Victoria.

Nov 24 (Th)- No class (Thanksgiving)

Nov 29 (T)- Class presentations I. Due: Revised draft of Paper 4

Dec 1 (Th)- Class presentations II.

Dec 6 (T)- Peer review and/or Writing Workshop. Meetings w/ SS (optional).

Dec 8 (Th)- Course wrap-up.

Dec 12 (Mon)- Final portfolio and cover letter due, electronically.