

ECONOMIC REALITIES OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

S20-5018 (Social Work)

348 (Economics)

3910 (Sociology)

Spring 2019

Monday 4:00 - 7:00

305 Seigle Hall

Instructors:

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I. Overview:

This course explores from an interdisciplinary perspective the American Dream and its viability within the current economic realities of the United States. The course is divided into four sections. We begin by examining the components of the American Dream in today's society, tracing the economic history of the concept, and exploring the extent to which social and economic justice play a role in the American Dream.

The second section of the course examines several traditional pathways to achieving the American Dream, including overall economic growth and rising standards of living, economic mobility, equality of opportunity, and the availability and creation of jobs that will adequately provide for individuals and families.

In the third part of the course we discuss some of the current obstacles that prevent the realization of the American Dream. These include the prevalence and consequences of poverty and economic insecurity, unemployment, and challenges posed by income and wealth inequality across all of American society.

The final section of the class explores the future directions and possibilities for strengthening and/or modifying the American Dream with the objective to improve the lives of the American population.

Throughout the course, a variety of perspectives and viewpoints will be presented. Research will be drawn from economics, sociology, social work, and other areas of social inquiry. Emphasis will be placed upon the consistency between empirical data and different aspects of the American Dream.

II. Texts and Reading Materials:

The following texts are required:

The American Dream vs. the Gospel of Wealth: The Fight for a Productive Middle-Class Economy, Norton Garfinkle, Yale University Press, 2006.

Class War? What Americans Really Think About Economic Inequality, Benjamin I. Page and Lawrence R. Jacobs, University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Course Readings – Readings will be available on the course web site.

III. Organization of Course:

Each week the instructors will lecture and present material for approximately the first hour and a half of class. Following a break, we will devote the second part of each meeting to class participation and discussion. Hopefully, this format will maximize the learning experience for us all.

The role of the instructors is to make this class a dynamic, challenging, and enriching learning experience for each student in the course.

The role of the student is vital in helping all of us learn and refine our thinking and arguments regarding the course subjects and material. Active class participation is expected by all, with that participation providing insights, questions, and observations. In addition, we encourage students to embrace the interdisciplinary approach of the course. Students should actively probe new ideas and ways of thinking during the course discussions.

IV. Assignments and Grading Criteria:

1) Notes on Readings (25% of total grade)

In order to make the class more interesting, stimulating, and relevant, a great deal is expected from each of you in class participation. Reading the assigned material prior to class is a prerequisite for intelligent class participation. To help in this process, students will turn in a set of notes each week on the assigned readings. These notes should, first, describe and synthesize what in your opinion are the major points and themes of the week's readings. Second, the notes should include your personal reactions and ideas to these themes and any other issues raised in the readings that you would like to comment on. Your work in developing these notes will not only help prepare you for each week's class, but they will provide you with an excellent starting point for the course essay assignments. Our overall goal is to encourage participation from every member of the class, and to have that participation add to both your learning as well as ours.

2) Take-Home Essays (75% of total grade)

The majority of your course grade will be based on an essay that defines the American Dream, assesses its reality in today's society, and explores ways to make the Dream more attainable and

effective in helping future Americans to lead fulfilling and satisfying lives. You will develop this essay cumulatively over the semester in three major parts:

- Part 1 (due February 18): The concept of the American Dream. 20% of total grade.
- Part 2 (due April 1): Revise part 1 that describes the concept and add analysis of pathways to achieve the American Dream. 20% of total grade.
- Part 3 (due May 6): Revise parts 1 and 2, further develop analysis of pathways and barriers to reaching the Dream, and conclude with your assessment of the reality of the American Dream and what policy and institutional changes can make it more effective in the future. 35% of total grade.

Parts 1 and 2 will be graded and returned to you prior to the due dates of the subsequent parts, with feedback from the instructors to incorporate in your revisions. We also hope your understanding of the earlier material will deepen as the semester proceeds encouraging you to revise your earlier writing effectively. Your grade for part 2 will depend both on your revision of part 1 and the new material you develop for part 2. Part 3 will be graded as a final term paper covering material from the entire course. More details for each assignment will be distributed to the class two weeks prior to the due dates.

Of course, class lectures and discussions will provide useful ideas for your essay. It is especially important, however, for you to incorporate ideas from the class readings. We will not have time to cover all the useful ideas from the readings in class. We strongly encourage you to use your notes related to the readings for the development of your essay over the course of the semester. We will look for a creative use of material from the readings that goes somewhat beyond ideas discussed in class as we grade the assignments.

We expect all papers to be submitted in class on the due date. There is no policy for late papers. Unless students have a serious health problem or family emergency, late papers will receive a significant grade penalty. Please plan your semester accordingly to have time to complete the assignments by the due dates give above.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

PART I: WHAT IS THE AMERICAN DREAM?

Introduction - January 14

Values and Components - January 28

“Introduction.” Rank et al., from *Chasing the American Dream: Understanding What Shapes Our Fortunes*, pp. 1-11, 2014. Course website.

“Introduction” and “The American Dream 1900-1916: The Spirit of American Dreams.” Churchwell, from *Behold, America: The Entangled History of “America First” and “The American Dream,”* pp. 1-5, 21-29, 2018. Course website.

“Introduction: A Dream Country.” Cullen, from *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*, pp. 3-10, 2003. Course website.

“The Slow Death of the American Dream.” Rifkin, from *The European Dream: How Europe’s Vision of the Future is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream*, pp. 11-36, 2004. Course website.

“Remarks by the President on the Economy in Osawatomie, Kansas.” Obama, pp. 1-14, 2011. Course website.

Economic History - February 4

The American Dream vs. The Gospel of Wealth: The Fight for a Productive Middle-Class Economy. Garfinkel, 230 pages, 2006.

Details for part 1 of the essay assignment distributed February 4th, due February 18th

Justice and the American Dream - February 11

“Fair Chances.” Methaug, from *Equal Opportunity Theory*, pp. 15-33, 1996. Course website.

“A Theory of Justice.” Rawls, from *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 385-401, 1971. Course website.

“Power of the Market.” Friedman, from *Free to Choose*, pp. 9-24, 1980. Course website.

PART II: PATHWAYS TO THE AMERICAN DREAM

Rising Economic Standard of Living - February 18

“Economic Growth, Human Welfare, and Inequality.” Turner, from *Economics After the Crisis*, pp. 1-33, 2012. Course website.

“Economics in a Full World.” Daly, *Scientific American*, 100-107, 2005. Course website.

“High Income Improves Evaluation of Life but Not Emotional Well-Being.” Kahneman and Deaton, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 16489-16493, 2010. Course website.

Economic Mobility and Equality of Opportunity - February 25

“The Fading American Dream: Trends in Absolute Income Mobility Since 1970.” Chetty et al., *Science*, pp. 398-406, 2017. Course website.

“Chasing the Same Dream, Climbing Different Ladders: Economic Mobility in the United States and Canada.” Corak, Economic Mobility Project, The Pew Charitable Trusts, pp. 1-25, 2010. Course website.

“King of America: The Dream of Equality.” Cullen, from *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*, pp. 103-131, 2003. Course website.

“Inheriting Class.” Reeves, from *Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Middle Class is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That Is a Problem, and What to Do About It*, pp. 59-76, 2018. Course website.

Quality Jobs - March 4

“Introduction.” Rosenfeld, from *What Unions No Longer Do*, pp. 1-9, 2014. Course website.

“Job Quality in the United States” and “Confronting Polarization and Precarity.” Kalleberg, from *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs: The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems in the United States, 1970s to 2000's*, pp. 1-18, 179-194, 2011. Course website.

“The Shareholder Value Society: A Review of the Changes in Working Conditions and Inequality in the United States, 1976 to 2000.” Fligstein and Shin, from *Social Inequality*, Neckerman (ed.), pp. 401-432, 2004. Course website.

PART III: BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO THE AMERICAN DREAM

Poverty and Economic Insecurity - March 18

“The Dynamics of Poverty in the United States: A Review of Data, Methods and Findings.” Cellini, McKernan, and Ratcliffe, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, pp. 577-605, 2008. Course website.

“Looking Backward: 1964-1991” and “Life on the Mississippi: East St. Louis, Illinois.” Kozol, from *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, pp. 1-39, 1991. Course website.

“Preface” “Introduction” and “The New Economic Insecurity.” Hacker, from *The Great Risk Shift*, pp. ix-xii, 1-34, 2006. Course website.

“Economic Security.” Rank et al., from *Chasing the American Dream: Understanding What Shapes Our Fortunes*, pp. 29-50, 2014. Course website.

Details for part 2 of the essay assignment distributed March 18th, due April 1st

Unemployment and Underemployment - March 25

Keynesian Basics pages from “Muddy Water Macro” website. Links on course website.

“The End of the Consumer Age.” Cynamon and Fazzari, from *After the Great Recession*, Cynamon, Fazzari, and Setterfield (eds.), 27 pages, 2013. Course website.

Income and Wealth Inequality: Part 1 - April 1

Class War? What Americans Really Think About Economic Inequality. Page and Jacobs, 112 pages, 2009.

Income and Wealth Inequality: Part 2 - April 8

“The Rise and Consequences of Inequality in the United States.” Krueger, remarks presented to the *Center for American Progress*, January 12, 2012. Course website

“Defending the One Percent.” Mankiw, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, pp. 21-34, 2013. Course website.

Rigged: How Globalization and the Rules of the Modern Economy Were Structured to Make the Rich Richer, Dean Baker, published by Center for Economic and Policy Research, Washington D.C., 2016, chapter 1.

PART IV: THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Policy Ideas - April 15

“Reclaiming the Dream: A Domestic Marshall Plan: A Ten-Step Strategy” and “Politics: A Grassroots Response: Reviving the Moderate Center and Middle-Class Power.” Smith, from *Who Stole the American Dream?*, pp. 379-426, 2012. Course website.

“Keeping America’s Edge.” Manzi, *National Affairs*, pp. 3-21, 2010. Course website.

Reshaping the Future - April 22

Rigged: How Globalization and the Rules of the Modern Economy Were Structured to Make the Rich Richer, Dean Baker, published by Center for Economic and Policy Research, Washington D.C., 2016, chapters 8 and 9.

“The New Inequality Debate,” Robert Kuttner, *The American Prospect*, Winter, 2016.

Details for part 3 of the essay assignment distributed April 22nd , due May 6th