

## **The Attainability of the American Dream**

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### **Introduction**

The purpose of this unit is to integrate the complicated yet versatile theme of the American Dream throughout the study of American history and the development of democracy. Since its inception, the United States of America represented opportunity to those who felt religious, political, or social oppression or discrimination in Europe. Although America has long been a beacon of equality and freedom and has earned the nickname “the land of opportunity,” it has been slow to embrace the true meaning equality across race, gender, religion, and class. Similarly, despite being a model for democracy and popular sovereignty, America’s political systems have been dominated by either the wealthy elite or political machines<sup>1</sup>. Ultimately, the American Dream is based on the informal definition of democracy, power of the people, in other words, the ability of the individual to achieve their goals of being a “better” person or of providing more for their families as was provided to them. This unit will study the extent to which America established and upheld its particular form of democracy, where power resides with the people. In its earliest years, America established true democracy and then evolved into a republic in order to accommodate an expanding constituency. In today’s political environment, “the people” have as much power as they make for themselves through voting and civic involvement, and yet ordinary citizens still feel powerless (high school students in particular, can relate to this sense of powerlessness). One challenge students will be given is to determine how the American Dream fits into each period of American history and also to judge its degree of attainability for everyone.

The theme of an American Dream is unique in that it is often overlooked in the traditional high school survey of American History and yet it is so engrained in American culture and its politics. America has developed a culture shaped by diverse groups of people who often chose to migrate here in search of a better life. Those groups of immigrants, typically taught in “waves,” represent the extent to which the American Dream is a reality. This is the context in which most people consider the existence and attainability of the American Dream, and yet it is so much more comprehensive. Within this unit, students will be encouraged to expand their notion of the American Dream and will be able to apply it to the many instances of hope in American History, including initial colonization, politics of the American Revolution, various reform movements, and modern America. In today’s context, students can analyze the use of the term by politicians seeking elected office and by citizens who feel entitled to this elusive American Dream. At the end of the unit, having thoroughly defined and analyzed the

American Dream in various contexts and considered their own ability to reach it, students can discuss its overall possibilities.

## **Rationale**

This unit is intended for the Advanced Placement United States History course, which is almost exclusively taught to 11<sup>th</sup> grade students with a wide range of skills and intellect. Because of College Board's equity policy, schools are encouraged to increase AP enrollment despite students' grades or ability (at the moment, the North Carolina has not included AP scores as criteria for the evaluation tool, but apparently it is imminent). This creates an added task of reaching all students in the room including the kids contending for the title of valedictorian next year and those who earned D's in regular or honors Civics and Economics the year before.

Needless to say, teaching "APUSH" (AP U.S. History) is challenging for both teachers and students. Advanced Placement history courses are more challenging due to the depth and breadth of content as well as the high level of reading and writing, and critical thinking skills necessary to be successful. As the teacher, every year I feel pressured to cover an enormous amount of content uncertain which historical facts, figures, and events will appear on the AP Exam in May. I rely heavily on lecture to deliver the content then attempt to weave in primary sources readings, analytical writing, and other classroom activities when I can. They are usually quite brief so that I am able to finish a particular unit and administer the unit test. College Board is in the process of redesigning the Advanced Placement United States History course, in addition to many other course they offer, to alleviate the crucial problem of pacing and to put the focus back on acquiring important skills<sup>ii</sup>. This unit will serve as my segue into the future of APUSH and Common Core. Both will be incorporating critical thinking skills, text dependent multiple-choice questions, and best of all, flexible approach to content. The unit I have created will incorporate foundational historical skills associated with the use of primary source documents and will help me transition to the new course (it is rumored that standard and honors U.S. History will be taught thematically, which will be an even more challenging transition). Various lessons from this unit can be easily tailored to the curriculum of Honors American History currently taught in one semester, beginning with George Washington's presidency. Because Advanced Placement United States History is a yearlong, in-depth survey of American History from the age of exploration to the present, the first few lessons will need to be avoided to meet the Honors curriculum. Beginning with the 2013-2014 school year, however, the standard and honors level courses will change to a two-semester course, American History I and II, still taught on a 4x4 block schedule. At that point, all of these lessons, though originally intended for Advanced Placement, can be adapted and can be presented to standard and honors level classes.

## **Objectives**

Specific content objectives addressed in this unit are based on the topics and themes presented by College Board for this course, but in general students should gain a sense of multiple causation, be able to identify significant change over time, and be able to compare and contrast various ideas trends. Additionally, this unit will include influences from the current North Carolina Standard Course of Study as well as the upcoming North Carolina Essential Standards American History I and II, based on the reading and writing skills set forth by the new Common Core Standards. Both College Board and North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction are moving towards a heavy emphasis on primary sources and critical thinking skills. This unit will use a substantial number of primary source documents as a basis for delivering a large amount of content, but still provide students with the opportunity to analyze information, think critically about its content, meaning, and possible bias, then finally present their ideas and arguments in an effective and convincing manner. There will be a heavy focus on Standard H.5: Understand how tensions between freedom, equality and power have shaped the political, economic and social development of the United States. Advanced Placement students are particularly adept in historical analysis and interpretation of various viewpoints. Throughout the unit, students will be expected to identify issues and problems encountered by our political leadership as well as ordinary citizens. They will need to consider multiple perspectives of these various individuals and groups and weigh their opinions. Next, students will be able to support their own interpretations of events and issues using analytical essays with historical evidence to support arguments. Finally, students will take what they have learned in each lesson and evaluate the relevance to and/or influence of these past events on contemporary issues.

Although this unit meant is to be taught chronologically, there will be a thematic approach used to integrate the evaluation of both the American Dream and the development or decline of democracy into each unit of study. For example, the expansion of suffrage can be taught in Unit One during the creation of America and the presentation of the idea of "universal suffrage;" Unit Two with the ascendancy of the common man and the first political party conventions, Unit Three with the end of slavery after the Civil War and during Reconstruction with the ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution; Unit Five with the second push for equal rights for women during the Progressive Movement; and finally, in Unit Seven during the creation of the Anti-War Movement and a counterculture. Additional themes/topics are listed alphabetically under the Strategies section of this unit, which for quick reference, include: autocracy, civil liberties, democracy (true and representative), immigration, labor, republicanism (form of government and virtue), and xenophobia.

More specifically, the common threads and background information that I would like to weave through these lessons include: (1) the exclusion of minorities, immigrants, and women from politics; (2) the progressive development of suffrage; (3) landownership and housing trends; (4) migration patterns and changes in birthrates; (5) levels of voter-

participation; (6) turning point elections (1828, 1896, 1932, 1964, to name a few); (7) government reactions to the needs/demands of the people; (8) instances of minor parties and their impact on public opinion and election outcomes.

## **Strategies**

Within each chronological unit of study there will be comprehensive analysis of several events, people, culture, ideas, change, and themes through which the existence of the American Dream will be identified and measured. Students should have basic prior knowledge obtained in World History in 9<sup>th</sup> grade as well as Civic and Economics in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. This includes major worldwide events that affected America, various political systems, ideas on suffrage, and amendments, legislation, and landmark court cases involving civil liberties. Most of the content, however, will come from the textbook that our district provides, *The American Pageant*, 13<sup>th</sup> edition, and classroom activities and lectures. Students will present their knowledge of this content using a number of methods, including class discussion and debate, research, critical thinking and document analysis, and essay writing.

Assessment emphasis will be on high-level application and text dependent selected response questions and written analysis of textual readings, primary source documents, and other supplemental readings. Student-centered debates and historical simulations are utilized to increase engagement, maximize comprehension, develop research skills, improve public speaking skills. Additionally, they are used for my own purpose of assessing student mastery of the material.

Recently, in order to create more student-centered activities without losing time to teach content, I merged my units and used the extra days that were previously used for testing, to conduct debates and simulations. I have included my list of units as a quick reference: Unit 1: Discovery, the Colonial Period, and Revolution; Unit 2: the New Nation; Unit 3: the Civil War and Reconstruction; Unit 4: the Gilded Age and Progressive Reform; Unit 5: Imperialism, World War I, and Depression; Unit 6: World War II and the Cold War; Unit 7: Modern America.

Each lesson in this unit will include general definitions and examples of foundational terms to introduce the content. Throughout the study of American History, the comprehension of basic foundations is crucial as they are repeated again and again within almost every time period. Those basic foundational terms are listed here in alphabetical order:

### American Dream

Initially, Students will piece together a general and versatile definition of the American Dream. Typically, Americans (and presumptively, most students) will define the term

using words like freedom, work ethic, education, values, etc. The first time the term itself appeared was in 1931 in James Truslow Adams' *The Epic of America*, where he defined the American Dream as "His American Dream is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."<sup>iii</sup> Students will be able to brainstorm a variety of words and ideas, but need to create a more concise definition that fits within each time period in American History. (An alternate approach could be to create a separate definition relative to each time period. This could be recorded in the theme journal mentioned later in the Strategies section.)

### Autocracy

Students should have some prior knowledge regarding various forms of autocratic governments, including a monarch (with a discussion of Absolute Power), dictator, totalitarian, and emperor. One focus will be the Magna Carta because it laid the foundation for the evolution of parliamentary or representative government and subsequent statements of rights in Great Britain and later the United States.

### Civil Liberties and Individual Rights

How were the political and intellectual philosophies expressed by European Enlightenment thinkers ingrained into the foundations of our government in America? There will be extensive discussion of John Locke's influence on the American Declaration of Independence and our revered notions of natural and unalienable rights: "life, liberty and property" led the colonists to rebel with justification. Those same rights were later explicitly protected by the Bill of Rights. Less time will be allotted to discuss Voltaire's influence on the America's most prized freedom – the freedom of speech. Students will also analyze the first test of freedom of the press through the John Peter Zenger Trial. Regarding the Constitution itself, students will study Baron de Montesquieu's ideas of the separation of powers (which the Founding Fathers accomplished by dividing the federal government into three branches) and the safeguards involved in our system of checks and balances. Last will be Thomas Hobbes' endorsement of a strong government (which translates easily into the Founding Father's fear of an unruly and uneducated mob). Hobbes also influenced the foundation of federalism in our Constitution.

### Democracy (True and Representative)

There will be two extremely quick studies of Ancient Greece and Rome and a discussion evaluating the similarities and differences between them. Once we take a closer look at the foundations of American democracy, students will be able to compare and contrast Ancient Greece and Rome with examples of absolute rule, and then finally our system of representative democracy. Students will examine the features and principles of American democracy as established in the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution examine how they have been highlighted by certain events throughout history. Key concepts can include but are not limited majority rule, worth of the individual, minority rights, compromise, freedom, and equality.

### Immigration

We are a nation of immigrants who have come from every continent and every nation around the world to create a true melting pot. Throughout our history, people migrated here based on the promise of the American Dream. “The Land of Plenty” has offered people around the world greater economic opportunity, a higher degree of religious freedom and countless forms of social justice. That is, if those people are willing to “learn, work, save, invest, and play by the rules.”<sup>iv</sup> This particular topic offers students several excellent chances to balance the claims that the American Dream is attainable for all or if it is merely a myth. These chances are available through three major time periods in American History and can therefore also provide students with a chance to analyze change over time. The topic of immigration will be taught separately from colonization, which is not typically viewed as a “wave of immigration.” Students will first judge the experiences of the early wave of immigrants who came primarily from Ireland and Germany during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Students will later judge the experiences of the second wave of immigrants who came from Southern and Western Europe as well as Asia during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Labor

#### *The labor problem in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century British colonies*

Students will first study the search for suitable labor in the early British colonies, beginning with the failed attempts to enslave Native Americans and concurrent wars within each region of the colonies. The next attempt to solve the labor problem, particularly in the Chesapeake regions, was the importation of indentured servants. The topic of indentured servitude provides for an excellent discussion on the attainability of the American Dream based on both the high hopes of English men and women leaving England for economic opportunity versus the reality that only about a quarter of those servants survived and acquired wealth or respectability. Finally, students will analyze the events that led to a decline in the use of indentured servants and a rise in the purchase and importation of African slaves. The impetus for this change was Bacon’s Rebellion,

which was led by small farmers and poor indentured servants. This rebellion was hardly successful and yet it spurred significant change by creating a sense of fear that indentured servants were unreliable and hostile when compared to the more subservient, albeit expensive, African slaves.

*“From The Folks Who Brought You the Weekend”*

The second focus will come later, during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era when labor unions began to form as a response to poor working conditions, low wages, and extremely long workdays and workweeks. During our study of the Second Industrial Revolution, students will debate the legitimacy of terms, robber Barron and Captain of Industry. Students will later discuss the legitimacy of labor unions. The discussion within this lesson will be centered around the analysis of Herbert Spencer’s theory “survival of the fittest.” Students will simulate Theodore Roosevelt’s arbitration between the Anthracite Coal Mine owners and workers.

## Religion

Freedom of religion is what brought attracted the first colonists to America. It is what our country was founded on and is protected in our federal Constitution. ...or is it? Students will encounter examples of religious freedom and tolerance as well as instances of discrimination and hostility. This theme is present in almost every unit of this survey course and is a major element of the theme of the American Dream.

## Republicanism

The idea of republicanism is important in two ways: students need to know the definition of republic as a form of government and as a characteristic of the American populous and leadership. After reviewing the basic definition of the term republic, students will analyze the meaning of republican virtue and how it might change over time. George Washington exemplified the virtuous citizen in the early years of the United States. He was patriotic, heroic, selfless, reluctant to hold power, and nonpartisan. Typically, the study of republican virtue is almost exclusively taught in the early years of the United States Constitution, but in this unit, students will begin their focus with a workable definition of the term. Students will then expand their focus of republican virtue in the early years by discussing possible applications in other time periods to include a current characterization of our citizens and political leaders. Students will search for a citizen or political leaders that matches the republican virtue of George Washington and compare their republican characteristics based on specific criteria and a rubric.

## Suffrage

One component of American democracy is the right to vote. How else can the people hold the power? At the time of George Washington's presidency, only adult white males who owned property had the franchise. Students will study the gradual expansion of suffrage and determine if there is a correlation to the American Dream. Unit One during the creation of America and the presentation of the idea of "universal suffrage," Unit Two with the ascendancy of the common man and the first political party conventions, Unit Three with the end of slavery after the Civil War and during Reconstruction with the ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, Unit Five with the second push for equal rights for women during the Progressive Movement, and finally, in Unit Seven during the creation of the Anti-War Movement and a counterculture.

### Xenophobia

Students will determine a solid definition of the term xenophobia as a fear of anything foreign or different and provide some historical examples. The two major periods of xenophobia that will be studied include the First Red Scare following the First World War and the Second Red Scare following the Second World War. Students will assess how much this fear permeated American culture and politics and whether it interfered with the American Dream.

### **Additional Notes on Strategies**

Those concepts will be revisited and redefined numerous times throughout the survey course. A theme journal will be utilized by students to create an effective way of cataloging the meanings of the concepts, analyzing the common threads among them, and would serve as an opportunity to compare and contrast the definitions as they evolve or change.

Once the conceptual foundations of each lesson have been laid, students can begin to generate ideas about the meaning of the American Dream in the context of each time period. Students should have an established definition of the American Dream and then be able to determine if it is the same for everyone in every time period. Is the dream a promise and absolute? Or is it simply the search for something better? Additionally, in order to emphasize the importance of themes and change over time in history, by the end of the unit, students will have identified numerous examples of the American Dream in various contexts. Students will then trace the values and ideology of America within each different context. In other words, what does America stand for? They will also identify any trends regarding ideas of justice, fairness, liberty, democracy, and equality.

By the end of this unit, students will be able to create sophisticated opinions based on substantial evidence. After the extensive study and intentional use of the theme of the



American Dream, it should become quite relevant to students despite its tendency, as I mentioned earlier, to be overlooked during the study of American History.

## **Activities**

After studying the basic concepts and reading assigned chapters in the textbook, students will be assigned enrichment activities that are based on their own “outside information” and ancillary primary sources<sup>vi</sup>. Outside information is a term used by College Board to refer to the information that students have already acquired and is not necessarily contained in the primary source they read. You will, without fail, have students who perceive primary sources as confusing, intangible, or simply impossible to comprehend. Thus, it is absolutely crucial to scaffold this activity, even in an advanced class. Before you reach each lesson I have provided the strategies I typically use for document analysis, scoring essays, and grading debates. The following lessons are presented by time period, each of which is accompanied by its own list of primary source documents and is supplemented by either a set of debate/convention directions or writing prompts.

Students will use APPARTS to analyze primary sources: The acronym APPARTS provides students with prompts that gives them a format for analyzing and understanding primary sources<sup>vii</sup>. Author: Who created the source? What do you know about the author? What is the author's point of view? Place and time: Where and when was the source produced? How might this affect the meaning of the source? Prior knowledge: Beyond information about the author and the context of its creation, what do you know that would help you further understand the primary source? Audience: For whom was the source created and how might this affect the reliability of the source? Reason: Why was this source produced, and how might this affect the reliability of the source? The main idea: What point is the source trying to convey? Significance: Why is this source important? Ask yourself "So what?" in relation to the question asked.

For all debate and simulation assignments, student grades are distributed in two ways and are weighted as test grades. The grade distribution is divided into their pre-activity preparation and their participation in the class debate, discussion, or simulation. Student preparation is usually outlined to include worksheets or other items to be completed, but depending on the topic, student research is either highly structured or students are given discretion to choose their resources.

Scoring essays can be challenging, but I find that using a rubric can alleviate much of the stress associated with the daunting task. My rubric is based on the rubric College Board uses for their AP Exam (assign grades to this rubric using your own discretion)<sup>viii</sup>. Students will be graded on the following criteria: (a.) Clear, well-developed thesis (b.) Understands & addresses the complexity of the question (c.) Supports thesis with relevant SFI as historical evidence (d.) Analyzes historical information to provide significance & meaning (e.) Each paragraph supports the thesis & argument (f.) Is cogent (contains a

convincing argument & consistently demonstrates a logical & clear plan of organization)  
(g.) May contain an insignificant error or two that do not seriously detract from the overall quality of the essay.

The following time periods were chosen for their relevance to the American Dream theme and are listed in chronological order (the same order in which they will be taught). The neat thing about this unit is that while I will be teaching the American Dream in each of these periods, any given lesson could be used separately from the others as long as some time is first spent on the idea of the American Dream. Note: the primary sources are not to be used in their entirety, but rather in excerpts.

## Colonization

Religion is just one aspect of the American Dream, but it is certainly an important one. The Pilgrims fled England's persecution for a land in which they could practice their form of religion. In what becomes known as the Puritan Dilemma," the colonists attempt to create a utopia while still remaining relevant in the world<sup>ix</sup>. They wrote out their laws and created their government before they ever set foot in America so that the society would have a basis in law and a covenant with God. Students will read the quite brief primary source and determine its basic terms and overall significance. Some believe it was America's first Constitution. Either way, the compact illustrates the idea of consent of the governed and true democracy. It also established a working government based on God's law. Students will be challenged to discover the connections between a Puritan Congregationalist church and town government meetings in New England. Students will respond to a writing prompt for this unit: To what extent did colonists experience freedom in the British North American colonies?

Primary sources for this lesson will include:

- "The Mayflower Compact"
- John Winthrop's speech, "A Model of Christian Charity"
- *Democracy in America* (Part One: Chapter 4) by Alexis de Tocqueville's
- Examples of indentured contracts
- The Fundamental Orders
- The Maryland Act of Toleration
- The Great Charter (creation of the House of Burgesses)
- The House of Burgesses law that codified chattel slavery

## Revolution and Independence

Revolutionary ideas from the likes of John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine created a nation out of rebellion. Students are often surprised to discover that dissent is at the very basis of our nation. Students will analyze some of the ideas presented in

*Common Sense*, such as national unity, natural rights, and the illegitimacy of the monarchy and of hereditary aristocracy. They will also determine the validity of Paine's arguments as well as the necessity for independence and war. Comparisons will be made between European Enlightenment thinkers and early American Republican thinkers. Students will conduct a debate centered on the intentions consequences of the American Revolution. The central question: Were freedom and equality achieved by the Founding Fathers? Students will need to write a half page response and create four comments for each side (yes and no). On debate day, students will be randomly given a side. Primary sources for this lesson will include:

- *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine
- A comparison between John Lock's *Two Treatises on Government* and Thomas Jefferson's "Declaration of Independence"
- Abigail Adams Letter to John Adams, "Remember the Ladies" and John Adams' "Response to Remember the Ladies"
- Phyllis Wheatley's poetry
- Examples of new state constitutions in the North (included the immediate or gradual abolition of slavery)

### The development of a New Nation

This unit witnesses the development of the nations first political parties and increases in suffrage. By the time Andrew Jackson became president, modest beginnings were no longer an embarrassing obstacle to try to overcome, but rather an impressive character trait. Students will debate the extent to which political parties are responsive to the people. Primary sources for this lesson will include:

- George Washington's "Farewell Address"
- Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (Part One; Chapter 5)
- John O'Sullivan's manifest destiny quote

### Antebellum Reform Movements

Early reform movements were spurred by the massive wave of religious revival and humanitarian efforts of the Second Great Awakening lead by Charles Grandison Finney. These reforms included transcendentalism, temperance, women's rights, abolition, mentally ill and prisoner advocacy, education, nutritional health, and various utopian societies (e.g. Mormons, Brook Farm, Oneida, Shakers, New Harmony). The major activity for this time period will be a Perfection Gallery Crawl and Convention. Students will be assigned a leading reformer of the antebellum era and will be in charge of researching their issues and influence. Students will research their assigned reformer and create a poster, which will be used to inform the class. Posters for each reformer will be

placed on the walls in the classroom and students will walk around and take notes on each reformer before we conduct the convention. Students will use their own research to answer the following questions, which will be discussed in the convention: (1) What various criticisms of American society are there at this time? (2) What specific methods will you use to improve American life? (3) Do you believe that social progress, equality, or justice can be achieved under the present system of government? Explain. (4) Can legislation change human behavior or must individuals improve themselves & society? (5) What successes have you had (or expect to have) while promoting your particular reform(s)? (6) Which movement should take precedence over all others? Why?<sup>x</sup>

Primary sources for this lesson will include:

- Emma Lazarus' poem, "The New Colossus"
- *What to a Slave Is the 4<sup>th</sup> of July?* By Frederick Douglass
- *Appeal to the Colored People of the World* by David Walker
- Seneca Falls Convention's "Declaration of Rights"
- Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass"

### The Populists and Progressives

Both of these political coalitions were based on dissatisfaction with government and its inability to effectively deal with the problems of the Gilded Age. This is one of the best time periods in which the American Dream could be taught. The people demanded change and many of them saw it happen. What is equally important about this time period is that despite the monumental progress made, there still remained a sense of inequity and the existence of social, economic, and political obstacles in the path of the American Dream. Howard Zinn refers to the plight of African Americans in the New South as "Emancipation without Freedom."<sup>xi</sup> Students can have a class discussion on the quote from President Calvin Coolidge, "We have a great desire to be supremely American," in 1924 during the period known as the Second Red Scare<sup>1</sup>. Students will then be provided with the opportunity to contrast the desire to be 100% American with the moniker of America as a melting pot. The major activity for this time period will be a

- *Principles of Biology* by Herbert Spencer
- William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech
- Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History"
- Helen Hunt Jackson's "A Century of Dishonor"
- Du Bois "The Souls of Black Folk"
- Horatio Alger's "Ragged Dick"
- F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby"
- The National Origins Act

## The Stormy Sixties<sup>xii</sup>

Students will be put into groups and assigned one of the major reform groups of the counterculture movement: (1) Civil Rights (2) Women's Liberation (3) Anti-War (4) Gay Rights (5) The Hispanic/Chicano. Each group will present to the class their push for equality and the extent to which they increased their ability to achieve the American Dream. Primary source documents for this lesson include:

- Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "The American Dream" speech
- Betty Freidan's "A Feminine Mystique"
- The Equal Rights Amendment
- John F. Kennedy's inaugural address
- Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" program and speeches
- *Mendez v. Westminster* and *Hernandez v. Texas*

## Attainability of the American Dream Today

This culminating lesson will be taught following the AP Examination in May when we have a month left of school, but do not have anything left that we "have" to learn. There will be more flexibility with this lesson and more current event issues to integrate. Content will focus primarily on the Great Recession of 2008 and the elections of 2008 and 2012, but on the other hand, students will be able to create and voice their opinions based on personal experience. There will be three major activities in this lesson including a blog post, a debate, and a final essay.

At this point in the year, students should be well versed in the idea of an American Dream, but should also be able to project their own opinion of the dream using evidence. In order to facilitate this skill, students will use their own real-life experiences and those of their close family members to contribute to PBS's blog, "Deepening the American Dream."<sup>xiii</sup> Students will be asked to describe their current socioeconomic status and comment on their (or rather their parent's) ability to achieve the American Dream. These blog posts will be confidential and students will be asked not to divulge any information that might be used to identify them by other students. It is important for students to feel comfortable expressing themselves freely. Students may discuss issues surrounding education, social issues, and youth employment, but are not limited to just these topics.

In order to further expand its versatility, students will apply the idea of an American Dream to our current state of politics. According to new research conducted by Public Agenda, the American electorate is split nearly in half over whether the government should play a role in helping people achieve the American Dream<sup>xiv</sup>. Students will use this data to support their own opinions of the government's role in our lives. Next, students will produce an argumentative essay, which they will then use to engage in a

lengthy debate centered upon the nature of the American Dream and answer the following questions: Is the American Dream attainable for all Americans? Has our government made it easier or more difficult to fulfill the American Dream? What and when has there been a change in the attainability of the American Dream over time?

### **Annotated Bibliography for Teachers**

“AP Central – AP United States History Course Home Page.” The College Board. [http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/courses/teachers\\_corner/3501.html](http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/courses/teachers_corner/3501.html). Accessed August 2007. Countless resources for AP teachers.

Jillson, Calvin C. *Pursuing the American Dream: Opportunity and Exclusion Over Four Centuries*. University Press of Kansas, 2004. This is an excellent resource for teachers seeking to integrate the idea of an American Dream. The author takes you through each period of American History and discusses the obstacles, if any, that blocked the path to the dream. The overall theme that America has not always provided a means to achieve “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Kennedy, David M., Lizabeth Cohen, and Thomas Bailey. *The American Pageant*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 13e, 2006. Classroom textbook, AP version.

“A New American Dream?” Bill Moyers. [http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/blog/2007/08/a\\_new\\_american\\_dream\\_1.html](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/blog/2007/08/a_new_american_dream_1.html). Accessed September 2012. This site has a good amount of background information on the American Dream throughout history, but it also has a great resource for students to read about modern examples and to contribute their own account of the dream.

Murolo, Pricilla and A. B. Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*. New York: The New Press, 2001. This book is a quick survey of labor, both voluntary and involuntary, in American history. It describes the roles and reactions of the government as well as the development and effectiveness of labor unions. It is too dense to use in class in its entirety, but excerpts could be used to supplement the textbook’s coverage of unions, which is quite minimal.

“The Invisible Dream.” Public Agenda. <http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/the-invisible-dream>. Accessed October 2012. This website provides the new research on the ways Americans view the American Dream today. There is fairly strong consensus on how it is defined and some interesting undercurrents regarding politics.

Schweikart, Larry and Michael Allen. *A Patriot’s History of the United States*. New York: Penquin Books, 2004. This text can be used to counter the liberal bias of Howard Zinn. It also has many positive stories of the American Dream being alive and attainable.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000. This is a classic account of the development of American culture and politics from an outsider's perspective. It would be helpful for any U.S. History or government teacher to read for content knowledge, but is extremely lengthy and would be impossible to assign to your classes. It could be used, however, in segments or excerpts, or even with short quotations.

Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005.

### **Annotated Primary Source Reading List for Students, by Time Period**

#### Colonization

- “The Mayflower Compact,” America’s first constitution, shows the relationship between religion and government
- John Winthrop’s speech aboard the *Arabella* “A Model of Christian Charity,” is the Pilgrim leader’s vision for the Puritan migrants in the New World
- *Democracy in America* (Part One: Chapter 4) where French political writer and visitor, Alexis de Tocqueville, defines popular sovereignty as it exists in America
- “The Fundamental Orders” issued in Connecticut to establish self government in the settlement of Hartford
- “The Maryland Act of Toleration,” created by proprietor, Lord Baltimore, a supporter of the shrinking Catholic minority in Maryland
- Examples of indentured contracts (easily found through an online search engine) show the intention to tie oneself to an employer and plot of land for a period of 3-10 years in exchange for passage to America
- “The Great Charter,” is the document that created the first representative government in the New World, the House of Burgesses in Virginia in 1619 (not to be confused with the Great Charter or Magna Carta of England)
- The House of Burgesses law that codified chattel slavery as a response to the indentured servant rebellion in 1765, known as Bacon’s Rebellion

#### Revolution and Independence

- *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine, written to highlight the absurdity of British absolute rule over the large republic across the Atlantic
- *Two Treatises on Government* and the “Declaration of Independence,” it is important to be able to identify the similarities between these two documents and two authors
- Abigail Adams Letter to John Adams, “Remember the Ladies” and John Adams’ “Response to Remember the Ladies” for the discussion of an increased role or presence of women in the new republic

- "On Messrs. Hussey and Coffin," the first published poem by Phyllis Wheatley, the first published African American poet in the world and highlights the importance of circumstance when achieving the American Dream
- States Constitutions that abolished slavery during or soon after the American Revolution (good examples would be Vermont, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New York)

#### The development of a New Nation

- George Washington's "Farewell Address," which presents three important themes for the new nation: the dangers of permanent entangling alliances with other nations, the divisive nature of partisanship, and the importance of maintaining religious and moral values in our new representative government
- Excerpts from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (Part One: Chapter 5), this is a classic account of the development of American culture and politics from an outsider's perspective
- John O'Sullivan's "manifest destiny," excerpted from *The Great Nation of Futurity*, was the first time anyone published the notion that America had been ordained by God to spread across the continent for the expansion of liberty

#### Antebellum Reform

- Emma Lazarus' poem inscribed on the Statue of Liberty "The New Colossus" that declares America has the land of freedom
- *What to a Slave Is the 4<sup>th</sup> of July?* was written by former slave, Frederick Douglass to show the lack of freedom that existed post emancipation
- David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored People of the World* is one of the most radical abolitionist writings of the antebellum era
- "Declaration of Rights," issued by Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucretia Mott at the women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, uses the same opening phrase of the Declaration of Independence
- Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" defines the American experience

#### The Populists and Progressives

- Herbert Spencer's social Darwinist theory, found in his book, *Principles of Biology*, explains that Darwin's theory of evolution can be applied to the social and economic ladder of the Gilded Age
- William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech condemns a government who would force an unfair economic principle upon its people
- The Homestead Act granted adult heads of families 160 acres of public land in the west for a minimal filing fee
- Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis, found in his essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," defines the nature of American individualism



- “A Century of Dishonor” by Helen Hunt Jackson describes the nature of the government’s relationship with Native Americans throughout history
- *The Souls of Black Folk* was written by W.E.B. Du Bois to highlight the reality of African American society
- Horatio Alger’s *Ragged Dick* is one examples of his theory of upward mobility
- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald describes the idea of materialism, which could be a great connection to the American Dream
- The National Origins Act was issued by the U.S. Congress in 1924 that sought to limit the immigration of certain groups from Eastern and Southern Europeans as they were viewed as inferior and undesirable

### The Stormy Sixties

- Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “The American Dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, which is often credited with mobilizing supporters of desegregation and prompted the 1964 Civil Rights Act
- *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Freidan informs women that it was normal to feel unfulfilled in their lives as housewives, which she labeled as “the problem that has no name”
- The Equal Rights Amendment, proposed by Congress during the Women’s Liberation movement, was never ratified by the states
- John F. Kennedy’s famous inaugural address in which he invokes the spirit of the American Dream
- Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society” speech where he appeals to Americans to play a part in improving the quality of life for everyone
- *Mendez v. Westminster* and *Hernandez v. Texas*, both court cases challenge racial equality of Hispanics

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<sup>i</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>ii</sup> “Historical Thinking Skills,” College Board, accessed June 2012, <http://advancesinap.collegeboard.org/historical-thinking>

<sup>iii</sup> “A New American Dream?” Bill Moyers, [http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/blog/2007/08/a\\_new\\_american\\_dream\\_1.html](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/blog/2007/08/a_new_american_dream_1.html) (Accessed September 2012)

<sup>iv</sup> Calvin C. Jillson, *Pursuing the American Dream: Opportunity and Exclusion Over Four Centuries*, (University Press of Kansas, 2004)

<sup>v</sup> Priscilla Murolo and A. B. Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend* (New York: The New Press, 2001)

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- <sup>vi</sup> “AP U.S. History Course Description,” College Board,  
<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/repository/ap-us-history-course-description.pdf> (Accessed August 2007)
- <sup>vii</sup> “Primary Source Strategies,” College Board,  
[http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/repository/ap05\\_ushist\\_greer\\_2\\_p\\_50286.pdf](http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/repository/ap05_ushist_greer_2_p_50286.pdf) (Accessed August 2010)
- <sup>viii</sup> “AP U.S. History Course Description,” College Board,  
<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/repository/ap-us-history-course-description.pdf> (Accessed August 2007)
- <sup>ix</sup> David M. Kenndy, Lizabeth Cohen, Thomas Bailey, *The American Pageant* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 13e, 2006)
- <sup>x</sup> The Center for Learning, *Advanced Placement American History, Volume I*, (Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1987)
- <sup>xi</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005).
- <sup>xii</sup> David M. Kenndy, Lizabeth Cohen, Thomas Bailey, *The American Pageant* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 13e, 2006)
- <sup>xiii</sup> “Deepening the American Dream blog,” PBS,  
[http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/blog/2008/07/whats\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_the\\_america.html](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/blog/2008/07/whats_the_future_of_the_america.html)  
(Accessed June 2012)
- <sup>xiv</sup> “The Invisible Dream,” Public Agenda, <http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/the-invisible-dream> (Accessed October 2012)