PL 28501  The American Dream: A Philosophical Investigation, 3 credits  
Summer, 2013

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Schedule: June 24-July 31, 2013, M & W, 6:15–9:15 p.m.
Room: TBA

Boston College Mission Statement

Strengthened by more than a century and a half of dedication to academic excellence, 
Boston College commits itself to the highest standards of teaching and research in 
undergraduate, graduate and professional programs and to the pursuit of a just society 
through its own accomplishments, the work of its faculty and staff, and the achievements 
of its graduates. It seeks both to advance its place among the nation's finest universities 
and to bring to the company of its distinguished peers and to contemporary society the 
richness of the Catholic intellectual ideal of a mutually illuminating relationship between 
religious faith and free intellectual inquiry.

Boston College draws inspiration for its academic societal mission from its distinctive 
religious tradition. As a Catholic and Jesuit university, it is rooted in a world view that 
encounters God in all creation and through all human activity, especially in the search for 
truth in every discipline, in the desire to learn, and in the call to live justly together. In 
this spirit, the University regards the contribution of different religious traditions and 
value systems as essential to the fullness of its intellectual life and to the continuous 
development of its distinctive intellectual heritage.

Course Description

What does it mean to be an American in the 21st century, in the post September 11th 
climate? How do we structure our society, how do we live together as neighbors, how do 
we adapt to the new realities? Students will emerge with greater knowledge about and 
curiosity concerning the social, economic, political, cultural and psychological processes 
that shape contemporary definitions of the self and identity and that contribute to the 
formation of behaviors in the 21st century. Through film, literature, and contemporary 
scholarship, course surveys and engages some key concepts in Americans’ ways of life: 
their roots, their developments, the tension between them and the impact of a changing 
world. Course examines terms like freedom and equality, rights and obligations, liberal 
and conservative, security and fear, individual and community are examined and uses 
them for assessment and understanding.

Course Objectives
1) The student will learn academic skills and habits to assess his/her own disposition relative to present socioeconomic and political contexts and engage in cultural, philosophical, and psychological analyses.

2) The student will develop skills in critically identifying and understanding core theses in readings and lectures and articulate these main points during in-class discussion and through concise analytical papers.

3) The student will gain more sophisticated understandings of the relationship between human identity, power, freedom, and history via mastery of particular psychodynamic, hermeneutical, and critical theory methods.

4) The student will demonstrate knowledge regarding cultural and ethnic diversity in the United States following 9/11 and will gain a deeper sensibility with regard to how his or her interpretation of this event is historically constituted from within a Western, particularly American, culture.

5) The student will demonstrate ethical skill in confronting crisis, with particular emphasis on encounter with the Other in the form of ethnic minorities.

Grading

WCAS Grading System
The undergraduate grading system consists of twelve categories: A (4.00), A- (3.67), excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), B- (2.67), good; C+ (2.33), C (2.00), C- (1.67), satisfactory; D+ (1.33), D (1.00), D- (.67), passing but unsatisfactory; F (.00), failure; I (.00), incomplete; F (.00), course dropped without notifying office; W (.00), official withdrawal from course. The graduate grading system is A (4.00), A- (3.67), Excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), good; B- (2.67), C (2.00), passing but not for degree credit; F (.00), failure.

Grade Reports. All students are required to log into the web through Agora to access their semester grades. Students must utilize their BC username and password to log on. If your username or password is not known, the Student Learning and Support Center in the O’Neill Library Computer Center will issue a new one. The SLSC requires a valid picture ID (a BC ID, driver’s license or passport) to obtain your password.

Evaluation/Grading

125 points Attendance/Participation
50 points Short Paper #1
50 points Short Paper #2
75 points Final Oral Exam
300 points total
Text(s)/Readings (Required)

Book to purchase:


Excerpts from the following books:

George Orwell’s *1984* (chapter 5- available online at [http://www.george-orwell.org/1984/4.html](http://www.george-orwell.org/1984/4.html))

Dostoyevsky’s *The Grand Inquisitor* (available online)


Articles/Book Chapters:


Students will watch part or all of the following videos/movies/lectures*:

Cle Sloan’s *Bastards of the Party*
Wintonick and Achbar’s *Manufacturing Consent (google video)*
Text(s)/Readings (Recommended)


**Important Policies**
http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/schools/advstudies/guide/academicinteg.html

**Written Work**
Graduate and undergraduate students are expected to prepare professional, polished written work. Written materials must be typed in the format required by your instructor. Strive for a thorough, yet concise style. Cite literature appropriately, using APA, MLA, CLA format per instructors decision. Develop your thoughts fully, clearly, logically and specifically. Proofread all materials to ensure the use of proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. You are encouraged to make use of campus resources for refining writing skills as needed [http://www.bc.edu/libraries/help/tutoring.html].

**Scholarship and Academic Integrity**
It is expected that students will produce original work and cite references appropriately. Failure to reference properly is plagiarism. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not necessarily limited to, plagiarism, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, cheating on examinations or assignments, and submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without seeking permission of all instructors concerned. Scholastic misconduct may also involve, but is not necessarily limited to, acts that violate the rights of other students, such as depriving another student of course materials or interfering with another student’s work.

**Disability Statement**
Classroom accommodations will be provided for qualified students with documented disabilities. Students are invited to contact the Connors Family Learning Center office about accommodations for this course. Telephone appointments are available to students as needed. Appointments can be made by calling, 617-552-8903. You may also make an appointment in person. For further information, you can locate the disability resources on the web at http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/libraries/help/tutoring/specialservices.html.

**Attendance**
Class attendance is an important component of learning. Students are expected to attend all classes and to arrive by the beginning of and remain for the entire class period. When an occasion occurs that prevents a student from attending class, it is the student’s obligation to inform the instructor of the conflict before the class meets. The student is
still expected to meet all assignment deadlines. If a student knows that he or she will be absent on a particular day, the student is responsible for seeing the instructor beforehand to obtain the assignments for that day. If a student misses a class, he or she is responsible for making up the work by obtaining a classmate’s notes and handouts and turning in any assignments due. Furthermore, many instructors give points for participation in class. If you miss class, you cannot make up participation points associated with that class. Types of absences that are not typically excused include weddings, showers, vacations, birthday parties, graduations, etc. Additional assignments, penalties and correctives are at the discretion of the instructor. If circumstances necessitate excessive absence from class, the student should consider withdrawing from the class. In all cases, students are expected to accept the decision of the instructor regarding attendance policies specific to the class.

Consistent with our commitment of creating an academic community that is respectful of and welcoming to persons of differing backgrounds, we believe that every reasonable effort should be made to allow members of the university community to observe their religious holidays without jeopardizing the fulfillment of their academic obligations. It is the responsibility of students to review course syllabi as soon as they are distributed and to consult the faculty member promptly regarding any possible conflicts with observed religious holidays. If asked, the student should provide accurate information about the obligations entailed in the observance of that particular holiday. However, it is the responsibility of the student to complete any and all class requirements for days that are missed due to conflicts due to religious holidays.

There may be circumstances that necessitate a departure from this policy. Feel free to contact the WCAS at 617-552-3900 for consultation.

**Deadlines**

Assignments are due at the beginning of the class period (at 6:15pm) on the specified dates. Late assignments will not be accepted. It is highly suggested that you submit your work with enough advanced time to account for possible technical issues or other unforeseen circumstances. Also, if you are having difficulty with a paper or your life precludes its completion, talk with the professors significantly in advance so that we can figure something out. Silent lateness often gets equated with irresponsibility. Let’s stay in dialogue…

**Course Assignments** (readings, exercises and/or experiences)

Remember that because this an “intensive” format completed in just over one month, you are expected to work at a steady and rigorous pace, and you must keep up with weekly assignments when they are due. Because of the compressed timeline of the course you are expected to work at almost twice the pace as you would work within a regular semester. There is no lag time in this course to procrastinate and put off work, and doing so will leave you in an impossible place of having to catch up while also having to complete the work for that new week. Before taking this course, be
absolutely sure that this is a time in your life when you are ready to commit to working hard and devoting the time it will take to complete it. It is expected that 10 hours per week of your study time will be spent on out of class readings, assignments, discussions, and exercises. These are listed below. Please note that some weeks will require more time and some weeks less time but the average is approximately 10 hours per week over the semester.

Students are expected to complete the following out of class course assignments:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twice weekly</td>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>Mon &amp; Weds</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 8th (week 3)</td>
<td>*Short Paper #1</td>
<td>July 8th</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 22nd (week 5)</td>
<td>Short Paper #2</td>
<td>July 22nd</td>
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<td>July 29 &amp; 31</td>
<td>Final Oral Examination</td>
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More specific information for short paper assignments will be provided on the first day of class.

**Course Schedule/Topical Outline**

**Week 1**

*Monday, June 24*

**Introduction to the Course**

*The American Dream...*

*Reading*: Syllabus

*Wednesday, June 26*

**Caste Systems in the Age of Political Correctness: Invisible Hierarchies**

*Reading*: Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*, pgs 1-58 (excerpt available on Blackboard)
Week 2

Monday, July 1st

Our Lenses: Hermeneutics and Critical Theory
Bringing Gadamer & Foucault to 21st Century America

Reading: Cushman, chapters 1-2

Wednesday, July 3rd

The Empty Self: Consumerism and the Psychology of Fulfillment
and
Defining American Identity Post 9/11 and In the Wake of the Boston Bombings: The Need for the “Not Me”

Readings: 1) Cushman, chapters 3-4; 2) Kearney’s short article https://www2.bc.edu/~kearney/pdf_articles/Professor%20Kearney.pdf

Week 3

Monday, July 8th

Neo-Liberal Subjectivity and the Enterprising Self
Defining Happiness, Freedom, Desire, and the Self

Readings: 1) Layton article Who’s Responsible? (available on Blackboard); 2) Binkley article Happiness, Positive Psychology, and the Program of Neoliberal Governmentality (available on Blackboard)

*Paper #1 Due (see assignment details above)

Wednesday, July 10th

Manufactured Selfhood: Subjectivity and Governmentalization
Readings: 1) Cushman, chapters 8; 2) Orwell’s 1984 (chapter 5 excerpt available online at http://www.george-orwell.org/1984/4.html)

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Week 4

Monday, July 15th
McDonaldization and Expedient Being

Reading: Ritzer’s McDonaldization of Society pp. 1-53 (excerpt available on Blackboard)

Wednesday, July 17th

Technology and the American Subjectivity: Pornographic Selfhood

Readings: 1) Turkle’s Alone Together, chapters 8-9 (excerpt available on Blackboard); 2) Goodman’s Pornographic Self book chapter (available on Blackboard)

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Week 5

Monday, July 22nd

Expressive Individualism and Conformity: An Allergy to Freedom

Reading: Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor (available online)

*Paper #2 Due (see assignment details above)

Wednesday, July 24th

Religion, Secularity, Spirituality, and Expressivism

Reading: Richard Kearney article After Terror (available on Blackboard)
Week 6

Monday, July 29th

Chomsky and Foucault on Human Nature and Government

Final Oral Exams

Wednesday, July 31st

Final Oral Exams