

Films and Society

The American Dream through Films

The American Dream



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqUP3kCA5jo>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZM5sOXVdFFg>



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWu4KrxUWeM>

The American Dream



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWApW2eliRM>

Main Themes

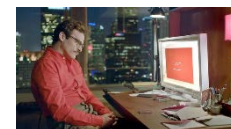
- Race and Gender
- Immigration
- Social Class
- Social Mobility
- Consumerism
- Happiness
- Virtual and Real Lives

Movies: Feature Films

[e-reserves](#)



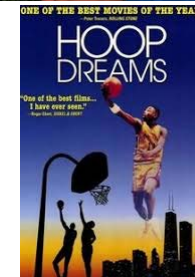
- Charles Chaplin, Modern Times (1936)
- Orson Welles, Citizen Kane (1941)
- Imitation of Life (1959)
- Godfather II (1974)
- A Better Life (2011)
- Her (2013)



Documentaries



- Becoming American:
- The Chinese Experience Part 3
- People Like Us Parts 1-4
- Hoop Dreams
- Happy



Readings

e-reserves



- Paul Krugman, The Conscience of a Liberal, Chapter 3
- Cynthia Deitch, Gender, Race, and Class Politics and the Inclusion of Women in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Gender and Society
- Malcolm Gladwell, The Crooked Ladder, New Yorker August 11, 2014
- Min Zhou, Are Asian Americans Becoming White? Contexts Feb 2004, Vol. 3, No. 1: 29-37.
- Ruben G. Rumbaut , Origins and Destinies: Immigration to the United States Since World War II, Sociological Forum, (Dec., 1994), pp. 583-621
- Lee, Jennifer and Frank D. Bean, Americas changing Color Lines, Immigration, Race/Ethnicity, and Multiracial Identification, Annual Review of Sociology, Vol. 30 (2004), pp.221-242
- Leslie McCall and Christine Percheski, Income Inequality: New Trends and Research Directions, Annual Review of Sociology 2010
- Bart Landry and Kris Marsh, The Evolution of the New Black Middle Class, The Annual Review of Sociology, Vol. 37, (2011), pp. 373–94
- Emily Beller; Michael Hout, Intergenerational Social Mobility: The United States in Comparative Perspective, The Future of Children, Vol. 16, No. 2, Opportunity in America. (Autumn, 2006), pp. 19-36
- The New Politics of Consumption Debate in the Boston Review, Summer 1999, pp.1-26
- Barry Schwartz, Tyranny of Choice, Scientific American, December 2004, pp.44-49
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, If We Are So Rich, Why Aren t We Happy? American Psychologist, 1999
- Kahnemann, Daniel et al, Would You Be Halppier If You Were Richer, A Focusing Illusion. Science, 2006
- Manago and Vaughn, Social Media, Friendship, and Happiness in the Millennial Generation, pp.187-206 in D. Meliksah ed. Friendship and Happiness Across the Life-Span and Cultures, 2015
- Gonzales, Amy L. "Disadvantaged minorities' use of the Internet to expand their social networks." *Communication Research* 44, no. 4 (2017): 467-486.

American Dream

- Coined by Walter Lippmann (1914)
- James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* **1931**
- "If, as I have said, the things already listed were all we had to contribute, America would have made no distinctive and unique gift to mankind. But there has been also the *American dream*, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his 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.**"



- James Truslow Adams (1878-1949) scion of a wealthy Yankee family, banker then historian.

The American Dream



Picture taken on October 2, 1932, 69 floors (840 feet) up at the Rockefeller Center as a publicity stunt by a group of photographers for the newly built building.



Charles Ebbetz, one of the three photographers.



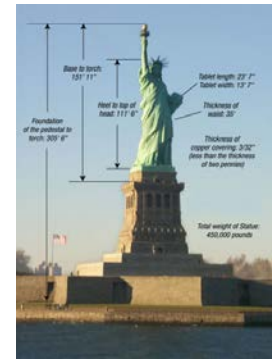
Statue of Liberty erected in Paris before being shipped to New York in 350 pieces in 1885, 9 years late (originally intended to celebrate the centennial of the Declaration of Independence of 1776).

The statue was designed by sculptor Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi and built by Gustave Eiffel.



Statue of Liberty

111.5 feet from base to torch
305.5 feet from foundation to torch

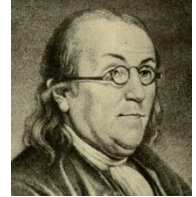


The *Peter the Great Statue* is a 98-metre-high (322 ft) monument to *Peter the Great*, located at the western confluence of the Moskva River and the Vodootvodny Canal in central *Moscow*, Russia. It was designed by the Georgian designer Zurab Tsereteli to commemorate 300 years of the Russian Navy, which *Peter the Great* built.



The ***Birth of the New World*** (colloquially known as *La Estatua de Colón*, literally meaning "The Statue of Columbus") is a colossal sculpture located on the Atlantic coastline of Arecibo, Puerto Rico. In 2016, it became the tallest statue in the hemisphere, surpassing Mexico's Guerrero Chimalli (which measures 200 feet (60 meters) including its base).

Cultural Roots



- The Protestant tradition

“Remember, that time is money.”

"He that loses five shillings, not only loses that sum, but all the advantage that might be made by turning it in dealing, which by the time that a young man become: old, will amount to a considerable sum of money."

"The most trifling actions that affect a man's credit are to be regarded. The sound of your hammer at five in the morning, or eight at night, heard *by a creditor*, makes him easy six months longer; but if he sees you at a billiard-table, or hears your voice at a tavern, when you should be at work, he sends for his money the next day; demands it, before he can receive it, in a lump." *Benjamin Franklin*

Money and Success and Happiness in this world are moral and the reward of hard work

- Max Weber (1864-1920) -- German sociologist, one of the founders of sociology

- The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905)

For many centuries Christianity looked at this world as sinful and simply the prelude to the spiritual world of the afterlife – Heaven or Hell

Worldly hedonism vs. spiritual asceticism



Worldly Pleasures

Avarice by Pieter Breughel, the Elder



Spiritual Asceticism

St. Francis of Assisi by El Greco



Worldly Asceticism

Quentin Massys Money Changer and his Wife



Reformation and Calvinism



The decisive break with this traditionalist world view comes with the Reformation and Calvinism

– John Calvin's (1509-1564) doctrine of Predestination

"We know only that a part of humanity is saved, the rest damned. To assume that human merit or guilt play a part in determining this destiny would be to think of God's absolutely free decrees, which have been settled from eternity, as subject to change by human influence, an impossible contradiction.

The Father in heaven of the New Testament, so human and understanding, who rejoices over the repentance of a sinner as a woman over the lost piece of silver she has found, is gone. His place has been taken by a transcendental being, beyond the reach of human understanding, who With His quite incomprehensible decrees has decided the fate of every individual and regulated the tiniest details of the cosmos from eternity. God's grace is, since His decrees cannot change, as impossible for those to whom He has granted it to lose as it is unattainable for those to whom He has denied it.

In its extreme inhumanity this doctrine must above all have had one consequence for the life of a generation which surrendered to its magnificent consistency. That was a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual. In what was for the man of the age of the Reformation the most important thing in life, his eternal salvation, he was forced to follow his path alone to meet a destiny which had been decreed for him from eternity. No one could help him." (Weber)

- But this was a terrible prospect to face. Everyone wanted to know if s/he was among the select few who was predestined for salvation. The only signal was proper conduct and success in this world.
- Used to be: Good behavior -> Salvation
- Now: (Predestined to) Salvation -> Good behavior*
- But there is a big difference between Good behavior and Good behavior*.
 - Good behavior: an effort by humans (may fail, can lapse and resurge)
 - Good behavior*: sign from God (consistent, permanent, methodical)

Protestantism

Worldly (economic) success as a sign of being predestined / chosen to go to heaven – not being greedy or avaricious

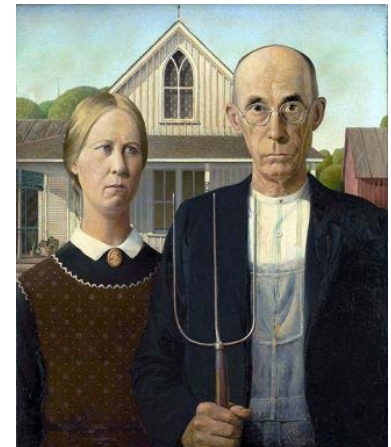
This shifted the focus from the afterlife to this world

Before Calvinism: **Worldly hedonism** vs. **spiritual asceticism**

Calvinism: **Worldly asceticism** – one can focus on material things with the force of religious righteousness

Puritan tradition

- Calvinism is the doctrinal background to Puritanism
- Puritans fled England to practice their faith more “purely,” more rigorously, to prove they were destined for salvation.
- If they can build a New Jerusalem, the “City upon a Hill” (John Winthrop), a society that expresses God’s true meaning, they can prove to be the selected.
- Benjamin Franklin: The value of
 - hard work,
 - saving, frugality
 - self-improvement, education,
 - self-reliance (but also charity)



Summary

- Calvinism removes the active God from human life (**predestination**)
- People must find out if they are meant for salvation through their acts on earth
- Worldly success through industry and wealth creation becomes signs of being selected
- A new way of life emerges based on self-reliance and worldly asceticism

American Creed

- “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are **Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness**.
- — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, *deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed*,
- — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their *Safety and Happiness*. ”

The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776



The American Creed

- Samuel Huntington:

- Liberty
- Equality
- Individualism
- Democracy
- Rule of law

Seymour Martin Lipset

- Liberty
- Egalitarianism
- Individualism
- Populism
- Laissez-faire

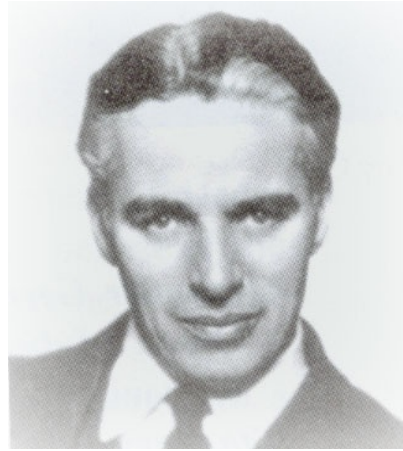
The American Dream

- American dream is built on and balances the elements of the American Creed. It is a
- “promise that everyone, **regardless of ascription or background** may reasonably seek success through action and traits under their **own control**.” (Jennifer L. Hochschild)
- “everyone who steadfastly practices certain practical virtues will find a place at the table... These virtues – **self control, discipline, effort, perseverance, and responsibility** – stand at the core of our idea of good character.” (John Schwarz)

Main Themes

- Race and Gender
- Immigration
- Social Class
- Social Mobility
- Consumerism
- Happiness
- Virtual and Real Lives

Charles Chaplin



- Charles Chaplin (1889-1977)

Questions

- What is typically American about Charles Chaplin's character?
- How is the American Dream depicted in his movies different from ours today and how is it similar?