

WRITING PROJECT 1: The American Dream

ASSIGNMENT: Write an essay of 1,000 words in which you address the following prompt.

PROMPT: The American dream has two faces: the one communally egalitarian* and the other competitively elitist.** This contradiction is fundamental to the structure of American society. Even as America's great myth of equality celebrates the virtues of mom and apple pie, it also lures us to achieve social distinction, to rise above the crowd and bask alone in the glory. "This land is your land and this land is my land," Woody Guthrie's populist anthem tells us, but we keep trying to increase the "my" at the expense of the "your." Rather than fostering contentment, the American dream breeds desire, a longing for a greater share of the pie.
-- Jack Solomon, Masters of Desire

*dedicated to equality ** undemocratic

INSTRUCTIONS: Explain Solomon's argument and discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with his analysis. Support your position, providing logical reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

AUDIENCE: A university group whose members are undecided on the topic about which you are presenting your argument.

REQUIRED STRUCTURE FOR ESSAY: Six paragraphs -- Introductory paragraph, three body paragraphs (presenting supporting reasons), **one paragraph which acknowledges and refutes the opposing view**, then concluding paragraph. Thesis statement must include mention of opposing view.

SOURCES: If you use outside sources for this essay, you must document them correctly, according to MLA format, via both in-text citation and a Works Cited list. See note at end of assignment sheet.***

DUE DATES: Rough Draft (1 copy, typed, double-spaced) - Begin Peer Editing by Tuesday, February 16

Final Project:

- **Rough Draft**
- **1 set of completed peer edit sheets** (or documentation from the Writing Center showing you worked with someone there)
- **Revised Final Draft**

All three of these items must be **submitted on BB by Friday, February 19 at 11:59 p.m.**

- Your project will not be accepted for grading unless you submit all three items.

[Please note: the Writing Center does NOT fill out peer edit sheets; they give general feedback and you will likely have the best result with your essay if you have peer edit sheets filled out by your email partner]

FORMAT STYLE: MLA

- Spacing: double-spaced throughout
- Margins: 1 inch on all sides
- Font: 12 point, Times New Roman
- Header: at top right 1/2 inch down, aligned to right margin; on every page; your last name, one space, page number, no punctuation. Example: Brown 1
- Heading: top left, double-spaced, four lines (your name, instructor's name, course, date)
- Title: Centered, primary words capitalized, double space only before and after, no bold or italics or other changes of font
- Actual Title: You must include an appropriate title which fits the topic of your essay
- **Every essay should include a citation in a Works Cited list at the end of the essay for the prompt as an outside source, since every essay should refer to the prompt. No other outside sources are required, although you MAY use other outside sources as long as you document them correctly according to MLA format.** (If you have questions about how to document sources, please ask me.)
- MLA citation for prompt: Solomon, Jack. "Masters of Desire: The Culture of American Advertising." *The Signs of Our Times*. New York: Putnam, 1988.
- **REQUIRED ITEMS WHEN SUBMITTING FINAL PROJECT:** Rough draft, one set of completed peer edit sheets, and final revised draft. (Project will not be accepted for grading unless all three components are submitted.)

GRADING CRITERIA (ACCORDING TO RUBRIC)

A SUPERIOR ESSAY:

- addresses the topic clearly and responds effectively to all aspects of the task demonstrates a thorough critical understanding of the passage in developing an insightful response
- explores the issues thoughtfully and in depth
- is coherently organized and developed, with ideas supported by apt reasons and well-chosen examples
- has an effective, fluent style marked by syntactic variety and a clear command of language
- is generally free from errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

***You may use any of the following as outside sources or you may find your own reliable sources if you choose to use some. In either case, I strongly encourage you to READ and /or VIEW these sources.

15 minute VIDEO: Slomo: The Man Who Skated Right Off the Grid

SHORT STORY BY GEORGE SAUNDERS: "The Semplica-Girl Diaries"

ARTICLE: "Can You Buy You Happiness?"

ESSAY BY KELI GOFF: "The American Dream is Dead and Good Riddance"

ESSAY BY JERRY USEEM: "Power Causes Brain Damage"

Also, consider the following quote from Robert N. Bellah:

“When times are prosperous, we do not mind a modest increase in ‘welfare.’ When times are not so prosperous, we think at least our successful career will save us and our families from failure and despair. We are attracted, against our skepticism, to the idea that poverty will be alleviated by the crumbs that fall from the rich man’s table . . . Some of us often feel, and most of us sometimes feel, that we are only someone if we have made it: can look down on those who have not. The American dream is often a very private dream of being a star, the uniquely successful and admirable one, the one who stands out from the crowd of ordinary folk, who don’t know how. And since we have believed in that dream for a long time and worked very hard to make it come true, it is hard for us to give it up, even though it contradicts another dream that we have—that of living in a society that would really be worth living in.”

Bellah, Robert. *Habits of the Heart*. Berkeley: U of California, 1985. 285.