

The American Dream

(presentation & workshop by Robert Hill)

Bellinzona, febbraio 2019

Luogo / Data: Liceo di Mendrisio, giovedì 21 marzo 2019

Docenti destinatari: Docenti di inglese delle SMS

Organizzatrice: prof.ssa Sabrina Norman, docente di inglese del LIME

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OVERVIEW OF THE DAY

We will explore the origins of the myth of 'the American Dream' – the Declaration of Independence and immigration in the 19th and 20th centuries – before showing how the 20th century interrogated the myth in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and recent fiction by Don DeLillo (*Underworld*) and Jonathon Franzen (*The Corrections*).

We will also examine artworks, films and popular songs which both endorse and question 'the American Dream'. Inevitably, the political landscape – from the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s to the current Trump presidency – will be mentioned.

PROGRAMME FOR THE DAY

1 Morning (before break):

'The American Dream' in history.

Definition(s) and uses of the term 'the American Dream'.

Derivation and backstory of the term 'the American Dream'.

The Declaration of Independence.

Civic monuments: The Statue of Liberty

From 19th century immigration to immigration now.

Civil Rights; Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech

Materialism (including the financial collapse of 2008) and Consumerism

2 Morning (after break):

'The American Dream' in the Arts.

In the 'Roaring' 1920s: architecture (New York skyscrapers) and the novel (*The Great Gatsby*, 1925, by Scott Fitzgerald)

In the Depression of the 1930s: 'The American Dream' questioned in *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) by John Steinbeck; film versions of these novels and documentary and photographic evidence; the folk music of Woody Guthrie (e.g. "This land is your land").

Visual arts: 'American Gothic'.

3 Afternoon (before break):

'The American Dream' in the Arts (continued).

In the 1940s and 1950s: 'The American Dream' celebrated (in the paintings of Norman Rockwell) and questioned in the painting 'Flag' by Jasper Johns,

in drama (especially in the *Death of a Salesman*, 1949, by Arthur Miller).

4 Afternoon (after break):

'The American Dream' in the Arts (continued) from the 60s onwards.

in film (among others, these films):

Easy Rider (1969)

Midnight Cowboy (1969)

Rocky (1976)

Scarface (1983)

Glengarry Glen Ross (1992)

The Great Gatsby (2013) Baz Luhrmann

The Wolf of Wall Street (2013) Martin Scorsese

The Immigrant (2013) James Grey

in song (among others, these songs):

“America”, from West Side Story

Songs of Bob Dylan

“Born in the USA” and others (Bruce Springsteen)

in prose (among others, extracts from these works):

Extracts from works by Hunter S Thomson, Don DeLillo, Jonathan Franzen

Question and Answer session.