

# YOUR AMERICAN DREAM

To The Teachers:

Two years ago, my wife, Lilly, and I established the Merage Foundation for the American Dream. We believe its mission is important to the nation and its citizens. The Foundation is dedicated to promoting expanded opportunities for immigrants. It hopes to inspire young immigrants to achieve their American Dream. It hopes to help promising immigrant leaders contribute to their communities and to the nation. It hopes to encourage Americans to understand and celebrate the contributions of immigrants to America.

The Foundation's initiatives include:

- The development of award-winning DVDs and educational materials (The American Experience) concerning the history of immigration and the lives of successful American immigrants for use in high schools throughout the nation.
- The provision of stipends and the creation of a Merage Fellows program for outstanding graduating immigrant students nominated by 21 universities throughout the country.
- The development of occasional papers and the convening of Forums concerning the impact of immigration on America and issues concerning immigration.

We are delighted that you want to use the DVDs and educational materials in your classrooms. Paraphrasing Ralph Waldo Emerson, the famous American author, the Merage Foundation hopes that the American Dream Experience will help students walk with their feet, work with their hands, speak their own minds and reach their own aspirations.

Paul Merage  
President

To The Teachers:

The Merage Foundation for the American Dream is pleased to send you DVDs and related educational materials for The American Dream Experience. Both describe in vivid terms the history of immigration to America and the lives and contributions of living American immigrants. Both reflect an effort by the Merage Foundation to create a library of DVDs and educational materials for high school teachers and principals throughout the U.S. Based on use of both in over 1200 classrooms last year, the Foundation believes that the American Dream Experience will inspire students—including immigrant students and students from immigrant families—to define and achieve their American Dreams.

We hope that teachers will incorporate the DVDs and educational materials in their lesson plans over a period of several weeks. We encourage teachers to invite local immigrant leaders to watch the DVDs and discuss their content with students. We urge teachers to involve all students, whether immigrants or not, in the planned activities related to the DVDs. Students, if they are not immigrants or children of immigrant families, are likely to be able to trace their roots back to immigrant grandparents, great-grandparents or great-great-grandparents. The Foundation welcomes teacher feedback concerning the impact of the American Dream Experience in the classroom.

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## THE AMERICAN DREAM EXPERIENCE

ORLANDO PATTERSON:

Traveling Between Two Worlds;  
Breaking Down Barriers



*Dr. Patterson speaks with President Gerald R. Ford, Dr. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and Dr. Nathan Glazer.*

### BACKGROUND: BLACKS AND AMERICA

The first black immigrants to America arrived as slaves on ships from Africa or as escaped slaves fleeing countries in the Caribbean. From the mid-15th century to approximately 1870, nearly 10 million people were kidnapped from Africa, usually from the coastal stretch of West Africa between the Senegal and Congo Rivers. Almost all were destined for a life of slavery in the Americas, though fewer than half a million were brought to the United States.

The great majority of slaves abducted from Africa landed in South America, Central America, and the Caribbean islands. Conditions for slaves on West Indian plantations were even more brutal than in the United States. One need only compare the current population of Barbados (278,000) with the total number of slaves brought to that country (387,000 between 1600 and 1810) to imagine that West Indian planters literally worked their slaves to death. By contrast, the 427,300 slaves brought to the U.S. became

the ancestors of more than 20 million Americans.

The greatest influx of forced immigration occurred between 1721 and 1820—ironically, this was the period known as the Enlightenment—during which 60 percent of all slaves were transported to the Western hemisphere. The U.S. Congress outlawed slave trading in 1808, but the decree had little impact: another 50,000 slaves were sold in America after that date. Thus, they became the first illegal immigrants in American history.

A bloody Civil War (1861-65) erupted between Southern-slaveholding states with primarily agricultural economies and Northern industrial states where slavery was not practiced. The South, or Confederacy, attempted to secede from the United States rather than free its slaves and pay wages to farm workers. The North, or Union, fought to keep the breakaway Southern states in the union. At war's end, the South surrendered and returned to the union. The 13th Amendment

to the Constitution (1865) outlawed slavery. But systematic discrimination against blacks persisted for another century in the South. Schools, libraries, restaurants, hotels, hospitals, lunch counters, public bathrooms, and even drinking fountains were segregated by law. The 15th Amendment outlawed racial discrimination at the ballot box in 1870, but in practice, many blacks were prevented from voting in Southern states well into the 1960s.

## THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

In 1955, black Americans in Montgomery, Alabama refused to ride city buses, which were still segregated by race. The Montgomery bus boycott ended a year later, when the U.S. Supreme Court declared segregation on buses unconstitutional. The boycott launched the Civil Rights Movement. Civil rights advocates, led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., among others, fought segregation in all forms: at lunch counters, in schools, on interstate buses, and in public facilities.

In August 1963, 200,000 people marched in Washington, where Dr. King delivered his historic “I Have a Dream” speech in which he envisioned a nation without racial barriers. Subsequently, the U.S. Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1964. While not all encompassing, it gave the federal government the power to ban discrimination based on race, color, national origin, or religion. A year later, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It abolished poll taxes, literacy tests, and other schemes used by Southern states to make it hard for poor blacks to vote.

## CARIBBEAN IMMIGRANTS

More than 150,000 Cubans fled to America between Fidel Castro’s takeover of Cuba in 1959 and the 1962 Bay of Pigs invasion. Most Cubans settled in Miami (where they represent approximately half of the immigrant population), or big cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, all of which had substantial Spanish-speaking populations.

Since 2000, however, approximately three times as many immigrants have come from the Dominican Republic as from Cuba. Two-thirds of all Dominican immigrants live in the New York metropolitan area, largely in Spanish-speaking enclaves. Total U.S. immigration from the Dominican Republic will soon surpass the total number of Cuban immigrants.

The West Indian countries of Haiti, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago have had similar immigration explosions. These three countries sent just over 30,000 immigrants to the United States in the 1950s, but 130,000 in the 1960s. During the 1970s, the number had doubled to 271,000. In all, more than 600,000 Jamaicans and half a million Haitians have immigrated to the United States, most of them since 1965.

The greatest period of Jamaican immigration occurred between 1989 and 1991, when more than 70,000 Jamaican immigrants were recorded officially. (Under the amnesty established by the 1986 immi-



*Dr. Patterson  
at Harvard*

gration legislation, many immigrants, including large numbers of Jamaicans, were counted as immigrants for the first time even though they had been living in the U.S. for years.) Since then, the number of Jamaicans immigrating to the U.S. has declined to approximately 14,000 per year. Nevertheless, this number is still higher than the total number of Jamaican immigrants during the entire decade between 1951 and 1960.

## RACE AND CLASS

Discrimination against blacks because of their skin color has limited education and job opportunities. These obstacles, in turn, have on average contributed to lower incomes for blacks.

Many analysts have indicated that greater economic and social opportunities for black Americans could be achieved by addressing and reducing

still-existing racism and racial prejudice. These views provided the intellectual and legal impetus for the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The landmark legislation passed during that era narrowed the income, job, and education gap for many black citizens.

More recently, some scholars have suggested that class and cultural factors contribute to the plight of many in black America even more than racism or discrimination. One of their most respected members is Orlando Patterson, an immigrant from Jamaica. He based many of his conclusions, in part, on his own experience in coming to America.

## CLASS DISCUSSION PROMPTS

The Merage Foundation assumes that teachers will view this DVD and read the related materials as part of their development of lesson plans. Before teachers show the DVD and begin the planned activities, they should:

- Review with students the important events in Orlando Patterson’s personal and professional life. He was born in rural Jamaica in 1940. He lived there until he was 12 when he moved to Kingston, the capital, to go to high school. He was the only student in his class to go to high school.

Jamaica was under British rule. At home, Patterson spoke Creole and lived informally. But at school, Patterson dressed formally. He learned the culture and institutions of Great Britain and celebrated British holidays like Empire Day.

Jamaica gained its independence from Britain in 1962, about the same time Patterson graduated from high school and went to college in London. He received a degree in Economics from the University of London, then got his PhD. in Sociology from the London School of Economics in 1965. He immigrated to the United States in 1970, where he became a professor at Harvard.

In the U.S., Patterson quickly gained a reputation for his outspoken beliefs on race, culture, and class. His first book, published in 1977, contended that differences in class and culture, more so than those of race or color, were the primary causes of problems facing black Americans. His own experi-

ences as an immigrant were key to this argument.

Patterson's expertise and insightful, if controversial, opinions on race, culture and class have won him international acclaim. He became an advisor on race, culture and class issues to many world leaders including Presidents Ford and Clinton.

Dr. Patterson has been a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences since 1991. He is a respected award-winning author.

- Help students understand the significance and meaning of terms and phrases referred to in the DVD, including race, class, racism, discrimination, colony, culture, Creole, Empire Day, legacy of slavery, British political rule, West Indians, segregation, assimilation, civil rights movement, binationalism and biculturalism, integration.

- Ask students if they can define their American Dreams. If it is difficult for students to do so, teachers should ask students about their hopes concerning their education, jobs, career, marriage, children, family, and contributions to community. Teachers should encourage students to think about and develop their American Dreams as they continue their education. Teachers should ask students to define Orlando Patterson's American Dream.

## THEME ONE: LEAVING BEHIND MEMORIES AND PLACES

Orlando Patterson left many different memories and places behind him on his voyage to America. A descendant of slaves, he grew up in rural Jamaica. When he was 12, he moved to the capital city of Kingston and lived with his aunt in order to attend high school. He was the only student in his entire elementary school to go to high school.

In those days (the 1950s and 1960s), Jamaica was under British rule, and the schools were very formal. Orlando felt like he shuttled between two worlds: the formality of school and the informality of the street.

Jamaica achieved independence from Britain in 1962. Orlando gained his own independence at about the same time. In the 1960s, he went to London to complete his college studies, leaving family and friends behind in Jamaica. He emigrated to the United States in 1970 to take a job as a professor at Harvard University.

## PLANNED ACTIVITY

Orlando Patterson's journey to America did not reflect the typical problems that often face many low-income minority immigrants. Because of his educational achievements, he was recruited by Harvard, one of the premier universities in the country. He suffered little racial and class discrimination.

Divide students into small groups. Ask students in each group to compare the path they or their parents took to get to America with Orlando Pattersons. Did they always believe that America would be their final destination?

Have the groups discuss and respond to the following questions.

- How did you (or your parents) decide to come to America?

- What were some of the obstacles you or your parents encountered even before arriving in the United States?

- Did you (or your parents) have to stop in another country before coming to America? Why?

- What was the hardest part of your (or your parents') decision to leave the country you emigrated from?

- What things were hardest for you (or your parents) to leave behind when you (or they) immigrated to the United States.

## THEME TWO: ESTABLISHING A LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

Before emigrating to Britain, Orlando spent a summer in the United

States, where he lived with an aunt in Brooklyn, New York. For three months, he lived in a neighborhood called Crown Heights, where many other West Indians had immigrated. "I hardly met anyone except other West Indians," he said. "I kept asking people 'where are the black Americans and where are the white Americans?'" Patterson's observations increased his understanding of the complicated factors—culture, class, race—that help generate America's different neighborhoods.

After he completed his graduate studies in Britain, Orlando moved to the United States permanently. But he did not have to confront many of the obstacles typically faced by new immigrants. He already spoke English. He was well educated. He took a good job as a professor at Harvard University.

He soon established a reputation for his opinions on race, culture and class. His critics said that because he was an immigrant, he could not completely understand the racial issues that divided America. But Orlando believed that his status as an immigrant allowed him to see racial issues in

America even more clearly than American-born citizens.

## PLANNED ACTIVITY

Orlando Patterson was surprised at the separation between groups that existed among American neighborhoods. During his three months in Crown Heights, he met mostly other West Indian immigrants. In many U.S. cities, recent immigrants live together in a single neighborhood (like Chinatown, Little India, or Boyle Heights in Los Angeles, home to a significant Latino population). Many of these neighborhoods seem to have sprung up because of cultural and class differences as well as poverty and race.

Divide students into two teams for a class debate. Write the following statement on the board: Ethnic and racial neighborhoods, where concentrations of immigrants from the same country live, help immigrants adapt to America.

One team defends this statement. The other team argues the opposite position: that ethnic and racial neighborhoods hinder immigrants from assimilating and participating in the wider community's broader economic and social life. Each team discusses its position for 15-20 minutes, then chooses a speaker to present its best arguments for the debate. At a minimum, some of the arguments might touch on subjects such as:



*Dr. Patterson with his mother.*

• Language. Is it helpful to new immigrants to live in a community where many other people speak their native language, or does it prevent them from learning English?

• Customs. Is it more or less difficult for new immigrants to learn the customs of their adopted country if they live and work in neighborhoods where most everybody comes from the same country?

• Community. Does living in a neighborhood with other immigrants from the same country create a helpful sense of community, or does it separate immigrant inhabitants from the larger community?

• Discrimination. Are immigrants more likely to experience discrimination if they live in communities with other immigrants, or if they live among American-born citizens?

Remind students that there are no “correct” answers to these questions. The team that “wins” the debate is the one that makes the most convincing arguments for its case.

## THEME THREE: ACHIEVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Orlando Patterson has achieved his American dream: fulfilling his goal of becoming a respected scholar and international expert on race, culture and class. He has advised U.S. presidents from both political parties on innovative solutions to America’s ethnic and racial problems. He has served as special advisor to Jamaica’s prime minister on issues of social development.

He is a frequent contributor to the op-ed pages of The New York Times and other national newspapers. In 1991, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, one of the highest honors in the nation. *Freedom*, his 1991 book on the historical sociology of freedom, won the National Book Award for nonfiction. (The second volume of this two-volume set was published in 2006).

Patterson believes that opportunity is a central pillar of the American Dream. His own life experience has taught him that education is the key to opportunity. The importance of education is a value his mother instilled in him when he was in high school. It’s a value he has tried to share with others.

## PLANNED ACTIVITY

Although he considers himself an American, Patterson returns several times a year to Jamaica. “I don’t see a conflict,” he says. But not everybody agrees. Some people feel that to achieve the American Dream, you have to leave behind most of your cultural traditions and fully assimilate into American society.

To what degree are the American Dream and biculturalism (loyalty to your new country and to the culture in which you grew up) compatible? Is it possible to achieve the American Dream and still retain roots in your former culture?

Ask students, individually or in small groups, to interview three or four immigrants from their communities. They should interview immigrants who have succeeded as well as those who are still working hard to achieve success. The students should ask their subjects some of the following questions:

• What does it mean to “become an American?” Do you have to give up most or all of your cultural traditions to truly “become an American?” Why? Why not? Are there cultural traditions that are too important to give up? Are their cultural traditions that might prevent you from achieving the American Dream?

• Are there traditions from your culture or other cultures you’ve experienced that you think Americans should adopt?

Each group should summarize their interviews and present them to the class for discussion. After all students have presented the results of

their interviews to the class, ask each student to give their answers to the questions they asked of people they interviewed. Ask students if seeing the DVDs or talking to immigrants changed their view of the impact of race, culture and class on the ability of immigrants to achieve their American Dream? How?

## AMERICAN DREAM REVISITED

The Orlando Patterson DVD and planned activities are designed to help students talk about their own American Dreams. Teachers should conclude the planned activities by encouraging students to discuss their own American Dreams. If some students still find it difficult to participate in the classroom discussion, teachers should ask them to talk about their hopes concerning their future education, jobs, marriage, children, family, and contributions to the community. Teachers should foster a classroom dialogue concerning student role models.

The discussion should focus on what makes a good role model, including such qualities as hard work, ambition, willingness to overcome problems, courage, and a desire to contribute to their communities.

## RESOURCES

### Print:

*America Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences, Volume I.* Neil J. Smelser, William Julius Wilson, Faith Mitchell, Editors. (National Academy Press, 2001).

*America in Black and White*, by Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, (Simon & Schuster, 1997)

*The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* by Philip D. Curtin. Univ. of Wisconsin Press, Madison Wisc. 1969.

*Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* by Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (MIT Press, 1963)

*Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* by Roger Daniels (Visual Education Corporation, 2002)

*The New Americans*, by Michael Barone (Regnery, 2001)

*Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63*, by Taylor Branch (Simon & Schuster, 1988).

*The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* by Nicholas Lemann, (Vintage Books, 1992).

### Books by Dr. Orlando Patterson

*The Children of Sisyphus*, (Houghton Mifflin, 1965)

*Ethnic Chauvinism: The Reactionary Impulse*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 1977)

*Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, (Harvard University Press, 1982)

*Freedom: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture, Vol. 1*, (Perseus Publishing, 1992)

*The Ordeal of Integration: Progress and Resentment in America’s “Racial” Crisis*, (Perseus Publishing, 1998)

*Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries*, (Basic Books, 1999)

*Freedom: Freedom in the Modern World, Vol. II*, (Basic Books, 2006).

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