

Essay summary of the american dream

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The American Dream is the idea that hard work and commitment will result in prosperity and completion of personal goals.

It is perceived by many to be an easy way of pursuing and following through on their goals in life. Beginning in the late 1800s immigrants came into the United States looking for employment and the opportunity to succeed. These new opportunities would help lead them towards fulfilling their American Dream. The social class system in America determines the lifestyle and outcome of one's life. The majority of people who are born into a low social class will continue to be poor throughout the rest of their lives. These people may have a goal to become wealthier, but these goals will never be fulfilled because of their negative ascribed and achieved characteristics. Positive ascribed and achieved characteristics help push people ahead in society and the social class structure.

Negative ascribed and achieved characteristics hold people back and force them to overcome these obstacles in order to succeed. Ascribed and achieved characteristics greatly affect the pursuit of the Dream for people. The *Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck perfectly portray the effect of the social class system and these personal characteristics on the American Dream. Determining one's success or failure is based upon these characteristics and ultimately determines the social class in America. The *Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, contains many different circumstances in which these characteristics affect their pursuit of the American Dream.

Jay Gatsby, the main character of the book, pursues his dream by becoming wealthy. Born into a poor family, Gatsby tries to earn his dream girls' love by making money. For five years he makes a great amount of money only to try and impress this woman's expectations. He faces the problem of not realizing that the past is gone and he cannot get things that are impossible to reach. The book, *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck, shows the effect of social class and personal drive to reach the American Dream. Lennie, who is mentally retarded, faces an obstacle he will never be able to overcome. Although his dream is simple, it will never be reached because of this ascribed characteristic.

Another character in the book is Curley's wife. An ascribed characteristic that she strives for is her beauty. A negative characteristic that holds her back from achieving her dream is her low social class and the fact that she's a woman. All of these characters have different limitations, but they will all affect their pursuit of the American Dream and result in the same outcome. *The Great Gatsby* shows the effect of ascribed and achieved characteristics upon the upper class. Jay Gatsby was born into a low social class. He falls in love with Daisy Buchanan who is very wealthy.

His desire for love is an impossible feat that he cannot obtain because of his low social class. "Rich girls do not marry poor boys, Jay Gatsby" (Movie: *The Great Gatsby*). He pursues his dream by becoming wealthy and hoping that she will accept him as the same social class. A positive ascribed characteristic that will help him is the fact that he is a white male. This helps him because white men have a better chance of getting what they desire

over any other gender or race. A negative ascribed characteristic is the fact that he was born into a lower class family. This will hold him back and greatly affect his pursuit of the American Dream.

A positive achieved characteristic that Jay Gatsby, is the fact that he is rich after overcoming an extraordinary obstacle of beginning in a lower class position in society. His rise in the social structure from lower to upper-lower only took him five years to obtain. This is an astonishing feat in which he has succeeded and pushed himself ahead in pursuing his dream. " Almost five years! [...] It had gone by her, beyond everything" (Fitzgerald 101). Although he had become extremely wealthy, there is a negative side to his climb in the social structure. His negative achieved characteristic is the way in which he got all his money. The way that he made his fortune was through drugs and illegal actions.

He lied to many people he was close to about his past because he knew that the truth would intrude upon his goal. "I am the son of some wealthy people in the mid-west [...] San Francisco" (Fitzgerald 69). Gatsby figures that the only way to pursue his dream is to lie about his past. Jay Gatsby could never overcome his obstacles so he was unsuccessful in pursuing his American Dream. He focused on obtaining Daisy's love and undoing the past. " Gatsby believed in the green light [...] tomorrow we will run faster, stretch our arms out further" (Fitzgerald 189). The biggest problem that Gatsby faces is the fact that he cannot overcome his unrealistic pursuit of Daisy.

Jay Gatsby's failure is a full result of pursuing something that he will never get; therefore, his dream cannot be fulfilled. The book, *Of Mice and Men*, by

John Steinbeck portrays the effect of ascribed and achieved characteristics on people in the lower class. Lennie and George travel together in order to find employment and make a living. This story takes the reader through the pursuit of a dream by two men and what they go through along the way. Their mutual dream is to “ get the jack together and we’re gonna have a little house and a couple of acres and a cow and some pigs and---” (Steinbeck 14). Lennie is a very strong, hardworking man who has a simple dream. The biggest problem he faces is that he is retarded.

This negative ascribed characteristic is an impossible obstacle to overcome. A positive ascribed characteristic that somewhat helps him is the fact that he is a white male. A positive achieved characteristic is that he is extremely hardworking. “ He’s awright. Just aint bright [...] But he can do anything you tell him” (Steinbeck 22). His problem is keeping a job in order to make money and earn a living plays a big role in his pursuit of the American Dream. His friend, George, says “ If I was alone I could live so easy [...] I could get a job an’ not have no mess” (Steinbeck 103).

His retardation leads to his problem with keeping a job and not being able to function in normal society. Not only did his negative ascribed characteristic of being retarded affect the pursuit of his dream, it ultimately led to his death. These obstacles are impossible to overcome. In result, he cannot follow through with his American Dream. Curley’s wife has extremely high expectations for her American Dream. One positive ascribed characteristic that helped her was her beauty. Her looks helped her throughout life.

She was born into a low social class and later on in life she married into the lower class. These are both negative ascribed and achieved characteristics of Curley's wife. Another negative achieved characteristic of Curley's wife is that she is a whore. She has the " eye" for other men. " She gonna make a mess [...] She's a jail bait all set on the trigger" (Steinbeck 51). Before she got married to Curley she had a chance of obtaining her dream as an actress. She missed out on the opportunity and married Curly, a ranch hand.

" I tell ya I could'a went with shows [...] she was breathless with indignation" (Steinbeck 78). When she looks back on it she finds herself to be very disappointed in her decision. She does not approve of Curley because he does not make enough money and is not up to her standards. " Spends all his time sayin' what he's gonna do [...] Think I'm gonna stay in that two-by-four house? " (Steinbeck 78) Even though she is in the lower social class, she visualizes herself in a higher position above others with whom she associates herself with. If it was not for her low social status I believethat she would have been successful in her dream as an actress. Her beauty took her a long way in life and it helped her become close to her desired goal. Even though her dream was not very realistic, she had many qualities that helped her.

The biggest setback that she had was the fact that she was a woman in the lower section of the social structure in America. Her ascribed characteristic of being poor determined the difference between her death and fulfilling her American Dream. Throughout the novels *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck, and *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, many characters portray the effect of personal characteristics upon their pursuit of the

American Dream. Jay Gatsby's personal achievement could not overcome all of the obstacles he had to work around in order to obtain his dream. Even though he became rich, the past was over and he could not retrieve Daisy's love. Lennie had some extremely helpful qualities, but he could not overcome his ascribed characteristic of being retarded.

For Lennie, it wasn't his personal achievement, but instead it was his ascribed characteristics which held him back from his American Dream.

Curley's wife had the desire to become an actress, but instead she married a ranch hand who was in the lower class like herself. Her negative ascribed characteristic of being born into the lower social class held her back from reaching her goal. These characters all contained their own distinguishable problems, but they all had the same outcome. Ascribed and personal characteristics determine the future and outcome of one's desired goal and for these three characters, this was true. Personal achievement and effort cannot always overcome all obstacles and for many the American Dream is just an impossible destination to reach. " So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (Fitzgerald 189).