

# Example of reading response essay

Psychology, Success



Laurence Shames' work, "The More Factor," is a discussion of the American ethos of accumulation of wealth. He discussed the importance that American place of money and on scale over emphasizing quality of life and accomplishment of lasting achievements of inherent value. Shames stipulates that this evolved from the early settlement of the present day United States and expanded as the frontier of the nation pushed westward. He argues that the frontier became the focus of American pursuits with individuals consistently relying upon the wealth of the frontier to offer continued opportunities.

Shames paints a picture of Americans as being reliant on future opportunities which are the product of windfall, serendipity, and the joyful circumstance of "more." His arguments stand on the premise that the foundation of first settlement in this land was the pursuit of a frontier offering the opportunity for more than what could be found in Europe. While certainly the veracity of this statement is not easy to challenge, the obfuscation of this stipulation is easily accomplished and can thus be manipulated to create a false impression of the premise. America was founded to be an environment of opportunity, not of exploitation. Alexander de Tocqueville is quoted with great frequency for his calling of America the "great experiment." Let it be said that the experiment was to see what could grow should the man-made impositions which obstruct growth be removed. The United States Declaration of Independence adopted its own take on the fundamental Enlightenment principals of life, liberty, and property, using instead the phrase life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. While the founding the United States significantly post-dates the initial settlement of

what is today the US, settles who came to the thirteen British colonies in the Americas were not necessarily after simple economic opportunity. Rather, many of these individuals were industrious peoples with marketable skills and wealth-creating talents who found their growth limited by governments, religious institutions, and hostile confessional groups, which insisted on the truncation of their ambitions because they were "the other." In essence, the pursuit of happiness was a right denied them. Arriving on these shores, Americans found a land rich in natural resources and it was they who transformed the raw landscape. This was not the result of the provision of the building blocks, but rather of the freedom of individuals to work without limitation. This is the nature of the American people, a nature of adaptability and industriousness to make accomplishments with what is available, not to rely on windfall.

Next, Shames speaks of a lack of American accomplishments in the realm of "the fine," defining such finery as immeasurable achievements which can never be undone by "circumstance or a shift in social fashion." This argument is fundamentally flawed in two respects. Firstly, Shames's opinion of the value ascribed to any given accomplishment is a subjective take on value. His perspective on what is valuable does not necessarily apply to any other individuals. He thus proposes a *sine qua non* that capitalist endeavors whose primary objective is wealth production are not inherently as valuable as pursuits whose objectives are not monetary. This suggested basis can be rejected as should even a single individual disagree with its stipulations the *sine qua non* cannot stand. Second, every accomplishment is measured by

some metric or another. Often it is measured by the monetary result, such as Michael Bloomberg's development of the Bloomberg software which is used by every financial firm around the world and has yielded billions of dollars to its shareholders, and other times it is measured by the multitudes who experience its greatness, such as the writings of Dickens, the historical formulations of Plutarch, of the music of Elvis Presley. Yet, would the cello playing of Yo Yo Ma be less beautiful if no one had ever heard it? The answer is yes, because the value of his playing, the love of the music comes from the desire of people to create it and to listen to it. Shames discussed an American emphasis on quantity, scale, and money over nuance and quality of life but nuance does not ensure beauty and quality of life is not determined by any save those whose lives are being lived.

Thus, Shames' stipulation that the American cultural ethos is based on monetary accomplishments and relied on the existence of a rich frontier is flawed. Early settlers were not seeking wealth but opportunity to thrive. They made significant accomplishments with the wealth found in their new home but it was a sufficient but not necessary condition to their growth and such is the situation moving forward. In addition, the formulation of Shames' argument is fundamentally flawed. His exposition of the development of the American economy towards a less worthy objective, that being money, is a subjective notion which can hold no bearing in a logical argument in its present construct.