

The idea of the american dream essay



The American Dream What is the American Dream? Is it even attainable for the average citizen? Everyone has their own opinions on how they view the American dream. It can be different for almost everyone when you take into consideration their gender, age, nationality, and the transition of this idea between each generation.

Can we obtain this dream by having a big house, luxury items, a non dysfunctional family, and the perfect job one would never complain about? Or is it simply what our nation is told by authorities such as parent figures and the media? Most people would consider this fantasy as the “ perfect life” which, most comprehend as going to college, getting a good job, making a family, and having more money than needed. This idea of the so called perfect life is thought of as the universal dream for Americans. This dream is thought of as the pursuit of happiness, but this idea is no longer a selfless goal. Instead, the pursuit of happiness has transitioned into a self-serving fantasy for most Americans. This transition of the American dream has caused most people in this nation to lose focus on what is really important in our lives and brainwashed us to believe the allusion that possessing material items will bring us happiness.

Many immigrants who reside in America have the idea that the American dream is escaping poverty and simply living a better life, while other immigrants and main stream American society view America as a place of opportunity to become more successful financially. The idea of the American dream and the pursuit of happiness may be universal for mature Americans, but completely different for other types of people according to their age, gender, nationality, and historic generation. People who were the supporters

of their families over 50 years ago had only one idea of happiness, and that idea was a goal to make sure there was food on the table and a roof over their heads. That simple dream no longer exists in the majority of America. Now the type of happiness is different between age and gender. People of different ages have different desires.

As people get older their needs are not as materialistic to a degree, but more focused on what makes them comfortable. When they mature they realize that materialistic items are a waste of money and focus more on how they should spend their money more wisely on things that could actually benefit their needs such as health care. Their happiness comes from feeling secure and comfortable. Although a child may not realize what the American dream is, they live it. They focus on what new toys they are going to get whereas adults focus more on their career.

Men and women also view the American dream differently. For many men it's more about ego, having the "macho" image, and driving the hot car. Men want to have a certain image that every other man would desire to have. .

On the other hand, many women who have children are more focused on how they look as a mother. They want to be seen as the perfect mother with the smartest and most talented children. Aside from those ideas of the pursuit of happiness, people from different countries have the most legitimate idea of the American dream. The idea of the pursuit of happiness is an altered dream for those of different ethnicities and those who are born in America. Michael Schudson states that, "[i]mmigrants have an American

dream knowing hardly anything of the US—except that they will find opportunity there, abundance and a chance to share in it” (1).

They view the American dream as an opportunity to enhance their style of living, become a free independent person, and have equal opportunities. It allows them the opportunity to achieve more prosperity than they could in their countries of origin. Whereas, those who are born in America have a completely different understanding of what the American dream is. This dream to American society is making money so we can buy things that we think will make us happy. A clear example of this difference in comprehension of the American dream is provided by Raymund A.

Paredes. He explains that, “ Mexico has always been a poor and underdeveloped land where the evolution of a national myth of abundance and well-being would be unthinkable. On both sides of the border, writers of Mexican blood have dreamed not of wealth but only of relief from relentless poverty” (Paredes 71). To him and people of his culture, the true America dream is not in being able to buy unnecessary gadgets, but what really brings them happiness is to simply live a more comfortable and worry-free life.

Parents are teaching their children a false sense of happiness by telling them they need money so they can have whatever they want in life. Many parents view America as the opportunity for their children to group up with an education and career opportunities. They will dedicate their lives to make sure their children will have a better childhood than they did themselves. In most cases they will also push their children to go to college so their children

will be successful and have the money to buy the luxury items they are unable to afford. Education, for the most part, determines a person's job opportunities and level of income. It has become an understanding that without an education the idea of the American Dream seems to be out of reach.

Education has become one of the central institutions in making the American Dream a reality. In the essay "What is Happiness?" a valid point is proven when the author John Ciardi explains that "We are taught that to possess is to be happy, and then we are made to want" (Ciardi 293). The true meaning of being successful is to be able to support a family and not worry about making ends meet with the next pay check. This is a noble goal indeed, but the fact of the matter is that, subconsciously or not, people want money to buy whatever they want which they believe will bring them happiness. The sole reason for most people to get a college education is to make a lot of money when they achieve their degree in a desired discipline.

Is happiness really the result of having a lot of money? Ultimately, the American dream has to be achieved from one's own personal motivations. Other's motivations may create a false layer of make-up to another, but in reality no one else's motivations can take the place of a person's own. Motivations can be brought upon by a variety of different sources such as parents, background, and the medias influence on American society. For example, "children of [Korean] immigrants perceive their parents; of what these immigrants do not say [...] and of what their children leave out and simply refer to as a 'typical Korean thing to do' or a characteristic of 'typical

Korean parents,' assuming that the knowledge is so common that there is no need to explain it.

I came to the conclusion that, in common with American mainstream society and many other immigrant minorities who share the ' American Dream,' Korean immigrants consider money and prestige the criteria for success. However, it is when one understands that, for Korean-American immigrant parents, prestige is synonymous with the academic achievement of their children" (Kim 228). As a child of a Korean-American parent I can relate to this passage. Korean parents are known to push their children to do better than the average student which is an example of the " typical Korean parents. " Korean parents motivate their children to exceed excellence because of the opportunity they were unable to receive as children in Korea. With the unlimited opportunities available in America, Korean parents feel as though their children will be much happier by making more money than they know what to do with.

The idea of how money and prestige is the main criteria for success applies to both main stream American society and Korean immigrants. This idea, for Korean immigrants, is enforced by their parents whereas for main stream American society is influenced by the media. The media has a huge influence on the way society views the American dream. Advertising is everywhere, and at home it's only an arm's reach away with the remote for the television, mouse to the internet, and magazines.

How did obtaining luxury items become the American dream? Why does society feel so compelled to pursue it? Advertising has a very powerful way

of persuading the public; so powerful that the American public has been convinced by advertising to desire these luxury items. Advertising persuades society so significantly to the point that it can alter our perception of what is truly important in life. It Alters our minds to the point that they feel that the American dream is no longer a luxury, but a necessity. For example, society buys luxury items because they feel as though they need nice things to make them happy.

Through advertising, the media influences society so effectively that we no longer view the American dream as something to achieve but something we can buy. We continually see pictures of homes, cars, families, and luxury items everywhere on T. V, magazines, and billboards. It is impossible to escape these advertisements in America and these ads make sure of that. The more society is bombarded with these advertisements, the more they are persuaded toward obtaining materialistic things which they believe will bring them happiness.

Money is needed to have these luxury items, but does more money bring us more happiness? Today everyone has a goal to become more successful than they already are. We feel as though with more money so we can buy luxury items that we can use for our enjoyment, thus making us happier. Although we feel as though money will bring us happiness, research has been done to disprove this idea. Nickerson, Schwarz, Diener, and Kahneman argue that, " The present longitudinal study examining the relation between the goal for financial success, attainment of that goal, and satisfaction with various life domains found that the negative impact of the goal for financial

success on overall life satisfaction diminished as household income increased” (531).

The goal for success has increased and most people would agree that a little more money would make them a little happier. The fact of the matter is that, since around the 1950’s the average American’s income has more than doubled and with double the income comes twice as many cars and accessories that not everyone used to have in the 1950’s, such as, dishwashers, clothes dryers, and air conditioning (Myers). Today, according to statistics, we have a little more money then we used to but are we happy? “ Since 1957, the number of Americans who say they are ‘ very happy’ has declined from 35 to 32 percent. Meanwhile, the divorce rate has doubled, the teen suicide rate has nearly tripled, the violent crime rate has nearly quadrupled (even after the recent decline), and more people than ever (especially teens and young adults) are depressed” (Myers). The American dream has changed over the years and statistics show that money is not the answer to our happiness. The answer is simplicity in life and family.

The American dream is completely different now than it was over 50 years ago. Now, materialistic things are constantly being shoved in our face through the media, so we feel as though we need them in order to be happy. Over 50 years ago if a family had food on the table, a roof over their heads, and a car they were happy and thought to be living the American dream. As the years passed the American dream has become less meaningful. In the poem “ Richard Cory,” Edwin A. Robinson tells a story of a man who had everything he could possibly want in the world.

“ And he was rich-yes, richer than a kind- [...] and Richard Cory, on calm summer night went home and put a bullet through his head. This is a perfect example of how riches don't bring people true happiness. Today people are only interested in how many possessions they obtain. In reality these possessions only bring us temporary satisfaction. Once the new version of a certain gadget or car comes out we instantly want it, and we are no longer happy with what we have. It seems as though no one is happy with what they have and once they fulfill one desire they create ten more desires.

The American dream today is wasteful and the meaning has been altered into false image of happiness. The American dream is no longer a family fulfilling goal in most cases. For Mexican immigrants it is an escape from poverty, but the majority of us have been lead astray from the pursuit of happiness. Whether we are a child, adult, senior, male, or female, many Americans have a false understanding of how to pursue true happiness. Happiness doesn't come from more money or more materialistic possessions.

These possessions may only give use temporary satisfaction, but when a new gadget comes out we are no longer happy because the item we obtain is out of date. Through advertising, the media will keep creating more luxury items so society will continuously feel as if they need the newest thing. This only leads to unhappiness and our self-centered nation needs a reality check to understand what is truly important in life; simplicity and family. Work Cited Ciardi, John.

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