

Horatio alger and harlon dalton about success in america



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Although Mantsios does not focus on the Horatio Alger myth as does Harlon Dalton, both authors concern themselves with seeing beyond the myths of success to underlying realities. Compare the ways these two writers challenge the American mythology of success. Do these two authors complement each other or do you see fundamental disagreements between them? Whose approach do you find more persuasive, insightful, or informative, and why? For your post, you can choose to respond to any one of the above prompts.

America historically owns the reputation of being the land of opportunity, and for generations immigrants have fled to the United States to experience the freedom and equality your government lays claim to. At the root of this reputation is the American Dream, the belief that with hard work anyone can succeed based solely on his or her merits, and is believed to be [American Dream] blind to race, sex, or socioeconomic status, conversely, repeated examples and statistics of the lower-classes, those continually facing the harsh reality that opportunity and equality are just myths, only prove the opposite.

The truth of the matter is that influence of a class on an individual's identity is greater than many would like to perceive. The main reason for this misconception is the fact that everyone wants to hear what they can accomplish and not what factors stand in their way, keeping them far from reality. The idea of what factors affect identity, and most importantly, what are the underlying realities of the American mythology of success has been touched upon by many writers, among them are Gregory Mantsios in "Class in America" and Harlon Dalton in "Horatio Alger. Even though these two

writers have confronted the last topic [American mythology of success] in different ways complementing each other, I still believe that Gregory Mantsios has been more persuasive, and insightful on his approach. To prove that the American Dream is not equally attainable to all, and can only be a myth to the lower classes Mantsios provides many examples and statistical data.

Many American believe that despite some economic differences, America is a “ middle-class” society, and most have the means to live comfortably (306), however, as Gregory Mantsios point out, “ There are enormous differences in the economic standing of American citizens” (Mantsios 308) “.... The middle class in the United States holds a very small share of the nation’s wealth and that share is declining steadily” (Mantsios 309). Education is known to be the key to success. However, due to unequal education in America, children are given dissimilar opportunities to achieve the American Dream.

A study conducted by Richard de Lone of the Carnegie Council on Children revealed the effects of different learning conditions when he found a direct relationship between social class and scores on standardized tests such as the SATs (Mantsios 315). Fifteen years after the original study, College Board surveys expose statistics that continue to prove, “ The higher the student's social status, the higher the probability that he or she will get higher grades” (Mantsios 315).

These examples and others are quickly used by Mantsios to establish facts on the American Dream myths, making his argument even more accurate. On the other hand, Harlon Dalton in “ Horatio Alger” present his arguments base solely on the essay “ Ragged Dick” by Alger. Although his difference of

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opinion is strong, it is still less persuasive, and consequently does not go further than just that [opinion]. Dalton first claims that an individual's success in life cannot be determined by that individual himself.

He argues that racism and judgment have an influence on the success that a person can achieve in his lifetime. He introduces Stephen Carter's "best black syndrome" saying that blacks are being recognized for being the "best black" as if they were competing against each other rather than against everyone (273). He [Dalton] also disagrees with Alger's argument saying that everyone can reach his or her own true potential.

Dalton, however, states that due to some economic circumstances, many people are never able to reach their true potential (274). Although all Dalton's arguments are fair, and well presented, considering an audience like myself who have somehow experienced the social and income inequality in the United States, he would still need to enrich them with more statistical research evidence in order for him to bring the message to every individual from every social status.