The American Dream Assignment

Realizing the American Dream (From American Memory at the Library of Congress)

The term was first used by James Truslow Adams in his book The Epic of America which was written in 1931. He states: "The American Dream is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."

Background (from “The American Dream: Fact or Fiction?” by Jennifer A. Howell)

Our country is founded on our forefathers’ dreams of freedom and material prosperity. Many early American colonists believed that with hard work any individual could succeed and attain the “American dream.” This dream included owning both home and land, living a comfortable lifestyle, and having the opportunity to attend universities. Indeed, the American dream was not out-of-reach for colonists because our country was new and there were jobs for all who wished to work. Most of the people who lived here were of the same race and ethnic background, so there was no discrimination on those counts. Not every colonist, however, had an easy life or attained the American dream. The concept of the American dream evolved and became widespread because the people who had money to publish their own stories chronicled rags-to-riches accounts of their lives. One example of this is Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography.

Unfortunately, the American dream eludes most citizens who live in the United States today. This fact does not stop people from immigrating to the United States because conditions are frequently worse in their native countries, and the images of America—as “a land full of milk and honey whose streets are paved with gold”—persists.

Assignment

A major part of our cultural identity as Americans has to do with what is known as “The American Dream.” Despite the fact that we may have varying definitions of what this dream might entail, it is an undoubtedly important part of life in America. The essential ideas around which this course is built are “The American Dream” and the “Voices of America.” There are several essential questions which will direct and focus our learning:

- How does understanding American literature help me discover what it means to be an American?
• How does the study of American literature help me understand myself, others, and the society in which I live?
• How do central themes in American Literature continue to express themselves through literature?
• What is the American Dream?
• Does everyone achieve the American Dream? Is everyone’s dream the same?
• Who or what defines the American voice?

**ESSAY: “What does it mean to be an American?”**

After focusing your thoughts, write an essay based on the following prompt (12 point font, double spaced, minimum 1 page/maximum 2 pages): **“What does it mean to be an American?”** In your essay, you should consider the following ideas:

- What does it mean to be— and to become—an American?
- What traditions and dreams do Americans share?
- What challenges prevent Americans to meet and overcome the challenges that prevent us from living in harmony?
- How can Americans meet and overcome the challenges that prevent us from living in harmony?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEMPLATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Introduction:**
| *What is your definition of the American Dream?*
| *Write a thesis sentence that states your position (Do you agree or disagree that there is an “American Dream”?)*
| **Body:**
| *Discuss what it means to be—and to become—an American; what traditions and dreams Americans share; what challenges prevent Americans from meeting and overcoming the challenges that prevent us from living in harmony; and how Americans can meet and overcome the challenges that prevent us from living in harmony.*
| *Be sure to use two examples from articles, essays, personal experiences of yourself or others, or literature (poems, novels, plays, etc.) which support your thesis.*
| **Conclusion:** (You can use one/more of the following techniques)
| *Propose a counterargument to your feelings on the American dream; then offer a final rebuttal.*
| *Predict how the dream may change in the future* |