American Dream: Positive And Negative Impact

The American dream plays an important part in the progression of society over time. Throughout the years, the concept has morphed. People fail to remember that the American dream cannot be measured based on people's needs to conform to society's principles on social matters and trends. It is a personal endeavor, modified to match people's goals and definitions of success. There is a lot of debate and controversy today regarding the American dream, whether it is worth pursuing or not. The American dream can be anything anyone wants it to be; it is not limited to only one dream per person, and it is not impossible to achieve. It is worth pursuing. In the novels The Great Gatsby and Of Mice and Men, Fitzgerald and Steinbeck demonstrate through characters such as Jay Gatsby, Lennie, and George on how living the outdated American dream is not as glorious as it sounds and how a simple lifestyle is still fulfilling. Modern day success stories of the American dream include celebrities like Robert Herjavec and Steve Jobs. Simultaneously, the American dream is also not worth pursuing because it can have major downfalls and catastrophes, including losing one's true self and the people who care in life.

In the young generation today, many believe in the American dream as not some elaborate facade of success and power. The American dream is considered an opportunity for success, the common opinion is that success is earning money. For others, success is all about family and happiness. The dream is realizing that, in America, society has the resources to make an honest difference. The American dream is rooted in the Declaration of Independence, which proclaims that "all men are created equal" with the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Declaration of Independence). From the birth of America to today, the driving force and the heart of America has always been the American dream. The American dream is a goal for the majority of people who live in the realms of the Americanized world. Ideas following the American dream may state that one's children should grow up and receive a good education and career without artificial barriers, while another states the idea that people should not be discriminated against according to their class, caste, religion, race, or ethnicity. The American dream can also help and support one's spirit in success, and roots for them to acquire the highest demand not only in their occupation, but also in their life. Back in the past, the American dream was more about survival rather than success in terms of money. When one struggles to provide food and shelter for one's family, any change for the better is success. During the Great Depression, people found themselves unemployed and struggling to provide for families and maintain everyday life normally. It was one of the worst events to occur in America. Statistics show how drastically the stock market crash affected people maintaining jobs: "By 1930, 4 million Americans looking for work could not find it; that number had risen to 6 million in 1931" (insert citation). The American economy entered a mild recession during the summer of 1929, as consumer spending slowed and unsold goods began to pile up, which in turn slowed factory production. Nonetheless, stock prices continued to rise, and by the fall of that year had reached stratospheric levels that could not be justified by expected future earnings. America is a place where people have the opportunity to determine their own success. The American dream is also about getting an education, building a family, and reaching happiness and satisfaction. If one just wants the typical American dream, then they should look for opportunities in their daily life. One should look for what one is good at and work at it so that they excel at it, and then work hard and try to get scholarships to get into a good college. This could all also help one to

achieve social and structural mobility. Even if sometimes things seem hopeless and like one may never achieve one's dreams, one should still work hard and try to remember that nothing is impossible. In American throughout U.S. history, the definition of happiness has changed as well. In the Roaring Twenties , it shifted from the Founders' dream of protecting opportunities to acquiring material things. The novel The Great Gatsby best exemplifies this shift. The novella, Of Mice and Men, also explains how the American dream used to be materialistic, and changed over time.

In the novels, The Great Gatsby and Of Mice and Men, F. Scott Fitzgerald and George Steinbeck both defined the aspirations of the age and warned of its consequences. The novels portray the theme that happiness based upon greed is not attainable because someone else always has more. Happiness is feeling fulfilled with what is presented in life. These authors explain how having material objects like a mansion and a farm provide happiness, but are not permanent. The Great Gatsby is a novel that shows what happened to the American Dream in the 1920's, which is a time period when the dreams became corrupted for many reasons. The American dream not only causes corruption but has caused destruction. Jay Gatsby was corrupted and destroyed by the dream. The ambition for something has thrown Gatsby over the edge. His love and chase for Daisy has taken over his whole life. He feels that he has to live up to the American dream to accomplish what he truly dreams for, which is Daisy. While Gatsby was away fighting in the war, Daisy met Tom and married him. Daisy had always been rich and Gatsby thought that in order to get Daisy back, he needs to have money so that he would be able to give Daisy anything she wanted. There was a green light where Daisy lived that Gatsby would always look out to. The green light is of great significance in this novel. It becomes evident that this green light is not Daisy, but a symbol representing Gatsby's dream of having Daisy. The fact that Daisy falls short of Gatsby's expectations is obvious. Knowing this, one can see that no matter how hard Gatsby tries to live his fantasy, he will never be able to achieve it. Through close examination of the green light, one may learn that the force that empowers Gatsby to follow his lifelong aspiration is that of the American Dream. Fitzgerald uses the green light as a symbol of hope, money, and jealousy. Gatsby looks up to the American dream and follows it so he can be the picture perfect man that every girl desires. Gatsby cares a lot about how people see him, and his appearance towards others. He wants everything to look perfect for Daisy, as he wants Daisy to view him as a perfect man. "We both looked down at the grass – there was a sharp line where my ragged lawn ended and the darker, well-kept expanse of his began. I suspected he meant my grass" (Fitzgerald, 80). This presents the theme of appearance vs. reality and how Gatsby wants everything to look nice and presentable when he meets up with Daisy for the first time in five years. Gatsby becomes corrupted because his main goal is to have Daisy. He needs to have an enormous mansion so he could feel confident enough to try and get Daisy. Gatsby was blinded by the American dream and as a result of this, caused the destruction of Gatsby himself. He didn't end up getting what he wanted because the American dream took over who he truly was. The 'American Dream' is presented as being unattainable in John Steinbeck's novel, Of Mice and Men. This is predominantly evident in the case of George, Lennie, Candy, Crooks and Curley's wife. All of these characters admit to fantasising about the 'American Dream'; untarnished happiness and the freedom to pursue their dreams.

George and Lennie's dream of owning land is unattainable as a result of Lennie's careless actions caused by his ignorance of his physical strength. George constantly cautions Lennie not to retaliate if harassed. However, George knew it was inevitable that Lennie would act carelessly, thus endangering their dream. This is evident when George realises that Lennie has

murdered Curley's wife: "-I think I knowed from the very first. I think I knowed we'd never do her. He usta like to hear about it so much I got to thinking maybe we would" (Steinbeck 107). This portrays the doubt and uncertainty George had regarding his dream and the fact that he would never be successful in owning land. The 'American Dream', for George and Lennie, was unattainable due to Lennie's careless actions that caused George to murder Lennie and, consequently eradicated their dream.

Much like these famous novels, there are plenty of modern day success stories of achieving the American dream as well. Celebrities and tycoons often create success, unlike others who are born into moneyPeople like Robert Herjavec, Steve Jobs, and Oprah Winfrey serve great examples of the journey to achieve the American Dream. Robert Herjavec is a multi millionaire who derived himself from rags to riches. 'I am not even a first-generation immigrant, I am a guy off the boat,' said Herjavec, who was born in Zbjeg, Croatia. 'My dad escaped from jail in a communist country and grabbed my mom and me and we came to Halifax when I was 8 years old...My mom remembered she knew somebody in Toronto, we took a train there, and lived in their basement for 18 months. It all started from there" (insert citation). The transition proved difficult for Herjavec, who found motivation in the struggle he had adapting to a new country as a child. Herjavec also had a hard time coming to grips with the new way of life in North America, where for the first time he experienced a difference in economic classes. While Herjavec has achieved a level of success that most people dream of, he credits the passion he has in business as the reason for that success. He is an excellent example for those out there in need of inspiration. His story shows that with determination and hard work, anything is possible.

While the concept of the American Dream sounds heavenly, there are many negative downfalls and consequences. Despite working hard to achieve the American Dream and to have a prosperous and successful life in America the rising costs of college and housing as well as lower pay in some states creates debt for many Americans. Although other people around the world come to America to reach the American dream, they are halted by all of the costs that reside to become a part of it. Those are blind by how unrealistic it is to believe that those who live in poverty can achieve the American Dream. The American Dream being described as "the ideal that every US citizen should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative." American dream tends to destroy people's potential for independence, since they would wholly depend on the government's assistance programs. Based on this viewpoint, the American dream is supposed to illustrate the essence that through perseverance and hard work even people in the lower class can rise to the middle class or even above. Evidently, there is significant inequality in America, which means that the gap between the rich and the poor is quite huge. In America, it is evident that there is a wide gap in income inequality. There are some citizens that earn huge amounts of cash and can afford all sorts of luxuries that money can buy. On the other hand, there are other citizens that can partially afford to live a good life and others that can barely afford a meal. It is important to realize that people in the lower position cannot rise above their class within a very short period. Therefore, while they are at the lower status, their needs should be considered, since they are also American citizens. Majority of these individuals in the lower class can only afford a few commodities. Actually, some of these citizens rarely afford a meal leave alone other basic needs, such as education. Moreover, there are citizens in America that are single parents and have the responsibility of raising more than one child. They also experience financial strain, especially if they are financially weak. They need funds to purchase food for children and take into account other necessities.