

English 101

Essay #4: American Dream

Essay Length: 1000-1250 words (3-4 typed pages)

Background

As all four of the readings make clear, there is little argument as to whether there is an income and wealth gap in this country. We are bombarded with studies and statistics that show us repeatedly how the rich are getting much richer, the poor are getting poorer, and there seems to be no end in sight to this trend. Are most Americans indifferent to this problem? Do most Americans even see it as a problem? Given all that we are taught about equality and justice, why do we pay so little attention to the tremendous gap between rich and poor in this country? Perhaps we are all so quiet because we all believe that we could someday occupy that top rung and join the 1% who own one third of the wealth in this country. Maybe this is what the American Dream is all about.

Topic

Write an essay in which you examine one specific version of the American Dream. You may select the specific version of the American Dream from one of the following sources:

- One described in a novel, a film, a television show, or a song
- One described or defined in one of the readings assigned this term
- One you learn about from an interview with a family member

Here are the tasks your essay needs to accomplish

- Your examination will need to determine what constitutes the American Dream in the source you choose. (In other words, you need to describe the American Dream defined by your source.)
- You will need to decide how realistic this version is and explain your reasoning. (In other words, is it possible? If so, how? If not, why?)
- You should discuss how other cultural forces support and or work against this version of the American Dream.
- You should make use of information found in at least two of the readings associated with this topic. You can choose from any of the following:
 - “Stephen Cruz” an oral history collected by Studs Terkel
 - “Rewards and Opportunities: The Politics and Economics of Class in the U.S.” by Gregory Mantsios
 - “The Lesson” by Toni Cade Bambara
 - “Serving in Florida” by Barbara Ehrenreich

- You will want to paraphrase or directly quote from these essays to provide yourself with someone to argue against, or to support some point you wish to make.
- Your own personal experience (stuff that has happened to you) should not be used as evidence in this essay.

Hints

1. Read the topic a couple of times and note what it requires you to do. Complete all the tasks of the assignment.
2. Take time to plan and organize your essay before you begin to write. (Scratch outlines are often quite helpful.)
3. Be sure to start with a clear main idea. (In other words, make sure you can answer this question: “What is the main point I want my readers to understand?”)
4. Make sure that you support or illustrate general points with specific examples and vivid details from your own experience and from the text (when appropriate).
5. Allow yourself enough time after writing to go back over your essay, check for errors or omissions, and make any necessary corrections.