

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
SECTION II
Total time—2 hours

Question 1¹

(Suggested Time—40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

Introduction

The *Roaring 20's* was a time of perceived economic prosperity that laid the groundwork for what would eventually become commonly known as the *American Dream*—an early depression-era ideology that is rooted in the principle of having the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Although the concept itself was initially coined in 1931, throughout the country’s history there have been multiple examples of man’s quest to obtain it: from immigrant pilgrims to contemporary *Dreamers* and all in-between (e.g., Gold Rush ‘49ers, Oil Boomers, California Farm Workers, etc.). Nonetheless, when considering it in a contemporary sense, some suggest the *American Dream* is quixotic nonsense, while others consistently argue that it’s alive and well and certainly obtainable.

Assignment

Carefully read the following six (6) sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then **write an essay that synthesizes material from at least three (3) of the sources to develop your position on the attainability of the *American Dream*.**

Directions:

Make sure that your argument is central; use the sources to illustrate and support your reasoning. Avoid merely summarizing the sources. Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from, whether through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. You may cite the sources as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the descriptions in parentheses.

- Source A (“The Declaration”)
- Source B (Steinbeck)
- Source C (“New American Dream”)
- Source D (Evans)
- Source E (Amadeo)
- Source F (*The Statue of Liberty*)
- Alt-Source F (“Chapter 9”)

¹ Modified from an original version produced by Meghan Hobbs Chandler and Modeled after AP Stable Prompt Wording

Source A

"The Declaration of Independence." *Ushistory.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 July 2011.
<<http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>>.

The following is the beginning of a historical document

In Congress, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government.

Source B

Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men: with an Introduction*. Random House, 1965.

The following excerpt is taken from the beginning of a famous American novel about two travelling friends named George and Lennie.

Lennie spoke craftily, “Tell me—like you done before.”

“Tell you what?”

“About the rabbits.”

George snapped, “You ain’t gonna put nothing over on me.”

Lennie pleaded, “Come on, George. Tell me. Please, George. Like you done before.”

“You get a kick outa that, don’t you? Awright, I’ll tell you, and then we’ll eat our supper”

George’s voice became deeper. He repeated his words rhythmically as though he had said them many times before. “Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no fambly. They don’t belong no place. They come to a ranch an’ work up a stake and then they go into town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they’re poundin’ their tail on some other ranch. They ain’t got nothing to look ahead to.”

Lennie was delighted. “That’s it—that’s it. Now tell how it is with us.”

George went on. “With us it ain’t like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us. We don’t have to sit-in no bar room blowin’ in our jack jus’ because we got no place else to go. If them other guys gets in jail they can rot for all anybody gives a damn. But not us.”

Lennie broke in. “But not us! An’ why? Because . . . because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that’s why.” He laughed delightedly. “Go on now, George!”

“You got it by heart. You can do it yourself.”

“No, you. I forget some a’ the things. Tell about how it’s gonna be.”

“O.K. Someday—we’re gonna get the jack together and we’re gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an’ a cow and some pigs and—”

“An’ live off the fatta the lan’,” Lennie shouted. “An’ have rabbits. Go on, George! Tell about what we’re gonna have in the garden and about the rabbits in the cages and about the rain in the winter and the stove, and how thick the cream is on the milk like you can hardly cut it. Tell about that, George.”

“Why’n’t you do it yourself? You know all of it.”

“No you tell it. It ain’t the same if I tell it. Go on George. How I get to tend the rabbits.”

“Well,” said George, “we’ll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we’ll just say the hell with goin’ to work, and we’ll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an’ listen to the rain comin’ down on the roof—Nuts!” He took out his pocket knife. “I ain’t got time for no more.” He drove his knife through the top of one of the bean cans, sawed out the top and passed the can to Lennie. Then he opened a second can. From his side pocket he brought out two spoons and passed one of them to Lennie. They sat by the fire and filled their mouths with beans and chewed mightily

[For the sake of this source, it's assumed students have read all of *Of Mice and Men*]

The following excerpt is taken from the end of a famous American novel about two travelling friends named George and Lennie.

George said, "Guys like us got no fambly. They make a little stake an' then they blow it in. They ain't got nobody in the worl' that gives a hoot in hell about 'em—"

"But not us," Lennie cried happily. "Tell about us now."

George was quiet for a moment. "But not us," he said. [...] The little evening breeze blew over the clearing and the leaves rustled and the wind waves flowed up the green pool.

[...]The shadow in the valley was bluer, and the evening came fast. On the wind the sound of crashing in the brush came to them. Lennie said, "Tell how it's gonna be."

George had been listening to the distant sounds. For a moment he was businesslike. "Look acrost the river, Lennie, an' I'll tell you so you can almost see it." Lennie turned his head and looked off across the pool and up the darkening slopes of the Gabilans.

"We gonna get a little place," George began. He reached in his side pocket and brought out [a gun]; he snapped off the safety, and the hand and gun lay on the ground behind Lennie's back. He looked at the back of Lennie's head, at the place where the spine and skull were joined.

[...] "Go on," said Lennie.

George raised the gun and his hand shook, and he dropped his hand to the ground again.

"Go on," said Lennie. "How's it gonna be. We gonna get a little place."

"We'll have a cow," said George. "An' we'll have maybe a pig an' chickens . . . an' down the flat we'll have a . . . little piece alfalfa—"

"For the rabbits," Lennie shouted.

"For the rabbits," George repeated.

"And I get to tend the rabbits."

"An' you get to tend the rabbits." Lennie giggled with happiness. "An' live on the fatta the lan'."

"Yes." Lennie turned his head. "No, Lennie. Look down there acrost the river, like you can almost see the place." Lennie obeyed him. George looked down at the gun.

[...] "Go on, George. When we gonna do it?"

"Gonna do it soon." "Me an' you." "You . . . an' me. Ever'body gonna be nice to you. Ain't gonna be no more trouble. Nobody gonna hurt nobody nor steal from 'em."

Lennie said, "I thought you was mad at me, George."

"No," said George. "No, Lennie. I ain't mad. I never been mad, an' I ain't now. That's a thing I want ya to know."

[...] George raised the gun and listened to the voices.

Lennie begged, "Le's do it now. Le's get that place now."

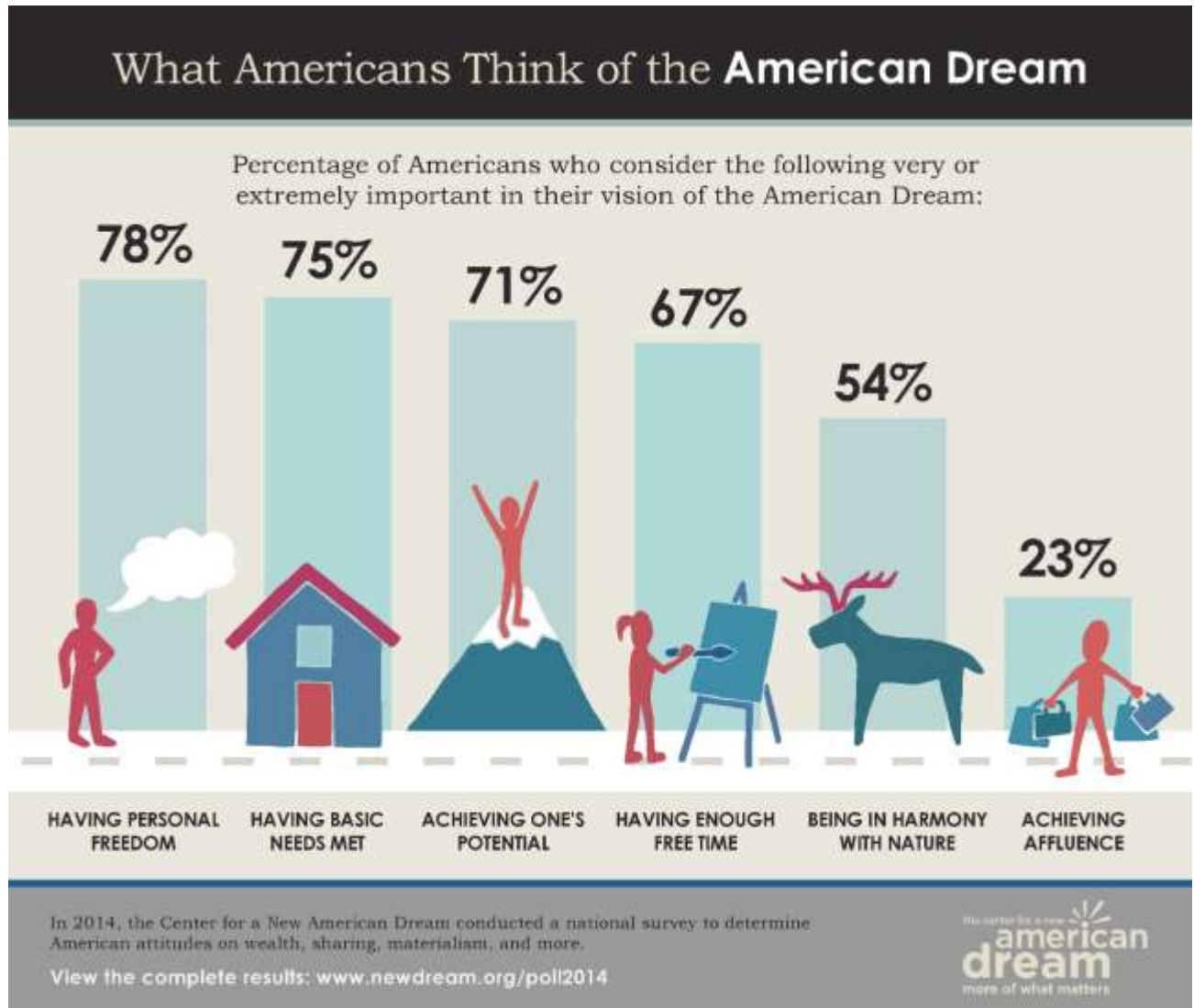
"Sure, right now. I gotta. We gotta."

And George raised the gun and steadied it, and he brought the muzzle of it close to the back of Lennie's head. The hand shook violently, but his face set and his hand steadied. He pulled the trigger. The crash of the shot rolled up the hills and rolled down again. Lennie jarred, and then settled slowly forward to the sand, and he lay without quivering. George shivered and looked at the gun, and then he threw it from him, back up on the bank, near the pile of old ashes.

Source C

“New American Dream Poll 2014.” *New Dream*, 29 June 2014, newdream.org/resources/poll-2014.

The following are the results of a poll taken by a political activist group.



Source D

Evans, Lynn. "The American Dream Is Alive and Well, but Redefined." *The Clarion Ledger*, Mississippi Clarion Ledger, 16 Feb. 2019, www.clarionledger.com/story/opinion/columnists/2019/02/16/american-dream-alive-and-well-but-redefined/2869342002/.

The following is an opinion piece from the USA Today network.

It is no longer big news that in today's national economy, the real transfer of wealth has been to the richest 1 percent from everybody else. Well, actually the richest 0.01 percent; we are talking here about 15,000 or so American families, according to Samuel J. Abrams of the American Enterprise Institute.

The good news is Americans are redefining the American Dream from an emphasis on wealth accumulation to being more about a good family life, job satisfaction, and freedom of choice in how to live their lives. Or so says the results of a survey of 2,411 Americans done by the American Enterprise Institute and the National Opinion Center of the University of Chicago, the results of which were released early this month. The main researcher and analyst was the same Samuel J. Abrams.

The report, subtitled Social Capital, Civic Health, and Quality of Life in the United States, found that the large majority of Americans are more satisfied with their lives than the news about income inequality might suggest.

A whopping 85 percent of survey respondents said they are satisfied with their job, and 57 percent said their job gave them a sense of identity. When asked what is most important to them in a job, these Americans ranked being able to contribute to society and having an interesting job as more important than a high income.

In the old version, the American Dream was all about owning a home, getting rich, and doing better than one's parents. In this survey, only 16 percent agreed that becoming wealthy was essential to achieving the American Dream, while 59 percent said home ownership was essential, down from previous years.

In fact, about 80 percent of the respondents believe that they are either living the American Dream or on their way to achieving it. And these results are pretty much the same across racial and income lines, and for Independents and members of the two main political parties.

What emerged from the results of this survey is that Americans rank freedom of choice in how to live one's life as the most important element in the American Dream. Eighty-five percent believe this is an essential part of being an American.

Another 83 percent believe a good family life is essential to the American Dream. Other parts of the survey reflect why that might be so. Most people rely first on family when they need support, and they believe strong families are an important part of what makes a good community.

Also on the list of what makes a good community was first, good schools, then libraries and community centers, grocery stores, and parks and other places to get outside for recreation.

The survey also asked what gives people a sense of community, and 90 percent said it was their circle of friends, their sense of American identity, and being part of the city or community in which they live. About three out of four are happy with where they live.

It seems clear from this survey that American optimism is alive and well, as is the importance Americans give to their families and their communities. Most are willing to help their neighbors and, as we see again and again in natural disasters, when they are called upon to help they do.

This past Thursday was Valentine's Day, when people remember to say "I love you" to those closest to them, and sometimes begin a start to a new family with a "Will you marry me?" If we believe that strong families make such a difference, then we should support them. If for no other reason than to keep the American Dream alive.

Source E

Amadeo, Kimberly. "Did the Recession Kill the American Dream?" *The Balance*, The Balance, 13 Feb. 2019, www.thebalance.com/the-end-of-the-american-dream-3306006.

The following is an article found on a financial website.

Is this the end of the [American Dream](#)? For most, the American Dream is stable [economic growth](#), better jobs for our kids, and retirement at 65. Thanks to the [Great Recession](#), it now seems no longer attainable for many. Did the worst [recession](#) since the [Great Depression](#) kill it? Or was the American Dream just a myth? The recession forced us to rethink [today's American Dream](#) and return to one envisioned by our country's founders.

The Myth of the American Dream

The economy before the [2008 financial crisis](#) relied on debt and [derivatives](#). Debt said, "Eat, drink, and be merry... you don't have to pay until tomorrow." Derivatives said, "Trust me. Your investment will increase in value." The derivative bubble burst with the financial crisis. All we have left is the debt: \$22 trillion in [federal debt](#) and \$3.9 trillion in [consumer debt](#). Combined, that's much more than the [U.S. gross domestic product](#) of \$20.6 trillion.

Other statistics sounded an alarm. Years of high unemployment led to [underemployment](#) for those who were working. It led to [long-term unemployment](#) for those who weren't. Also, [gas prices remained stubbornly high](#) even though oil prices dropped. That created [high food prices](#) and health care costs. In 2010, the White House Task Force on the Middle Class reported, "It is more difficult now than in the past for many people to achieve [middle-class](#) status because prices for certain key goods — health care, college, and housing — have gone up faster than income."

Even before the recession, most Americans had lost hope in the Dream. A 2004 survey found that two-thirds felt the [Dream was becoming harder to achieve](#), especially for young families. They blamed financial insecurity, poor quality education, and even the government itself. More than 30 percent felt they weren't living the Dream, and nearly half thought it was unattainable for them.

Is the American Dream a myth? [Research shows](#) that the best route to high income is education. But the United States has lower rates of [income mobility](#) than other developed countries. [America scores lower](#) than France, Germany, Sweden, Canada, Finland, Norway, and Denmark. The researchers concluded that the idea of America as the land of opportunity was misplaced. Sociologist [Richard Wilkinson](#) commented that "if Americans want to live the American dream, they should go to Denmark."

Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Chris Hedges echoed this sentiment. In his 2012 book, "[Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt](#)," Hedges said, "*The vaunted American dream, the idea that life will get better, that progress is inevitable if we obey the rules and work hard, that material prosperity is assured, has been replaced by a hard and bitter truth. The American dream, we now know, is a lie. We will all be sacrificed. The virus of corporate abuse - the perverted belief that only [corporate profit](#) matters - has spread to [outsource our jobs](#), cut the budgets of our schools, close our libraries, and plague our communities with foreclosures and unemployment.*"

Rising [income inequality](#) created a sense of hopelessness and frustration. In 2005, the top 1 percent of workers earned more than the bottom 40 percent put together. One-fourth of Americans made less than the [federal poverty level](#). When adjusted for [inflation](#), most Americans made less than they did when [Bill Clinton](#) was president.

Income inequality meant that many tried to attain their version of the American Dream through credit cards. In her book, "[Did You Buy the American Dream?](#)" author Jean Riall said, "Somewhere along the way, we decided we deserved everything, all at once. So we bought it on credit."

The Death of the American Dream?

Others believe the American Dream, while once alive, is now dead and buried. As a result, they predict [U.S. economic collapse](#). For example, "[The End of the American Dream](#)" saw slow economic growth as proof that the recession never ended. It just took a break until the [second Great Depression](#). They warned that [China's growth](#) would eclipse that of the United States. Then the Chinese will tell Americans what to do. They also see social trends as proof that the American Dream has died. That includes epidemics of obesity, child abuse, and drug addiction.

It's true that global economic conditions have changed. Now governments can't afford to give everyone the financial American Dream. But our Founding Fathers envisioned that government would provide the opportunity for everyone to work toward their vision of happiness. They never intended for it to provide world dominance and the guarantee of a good life.

The New American Dream

Are we headed for an extended lower [standard of living](#)? Perhaps the old American Dream based on material wealth *is* unsustainable. But is that so wrong? Unemployment freed many from jobs they hated anyway. Fewer loans meant we relied less on [banks](#) and more on each other. The crowd-sharing society returned us to our core strength. That's reliance on each other instead of the government.

Source F

The Statue of Liberty. New York, New York, 1898.

The following is an image (from 1898) of a national landmark in New York Harbor.



Alternate Source F (For Gatsby)

Source F

“Chapter 9.” *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott
Fitzgerald, Penguin Books, 1950, pp. 198–198.

The following is a facsimile of text about an iconic moment from a famed American novel.

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

“And as I sat there, brooding on the old unknown world, I thought of Gatsby’s wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning—

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”