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American Dream’s Critique in Literature

The American people have developed a unique blend of culture unlike the world has ever seen. It was formed by a multitude of immigrants unless other states that were formed by uniform clans. This unique composition also gave birth to a unique concept that was later termed as "American Dream" by a historian James Truslow Adams. It is a belief that anyone, regardless of their caste or creed of their birth, can attain a respectable place in American society. Adams tried to prove in his book called "Epic of America" that this upward mobility is not a product of chance, rather than success is possible through hard work and sacrifice (James Truslow Adams, 2017). This was a unique concept seeing that the Europeans had a strict class system that only gave chances of success to those of noble birth to rise in their life. Adams also insisted that this dream was not only about affluence, higher salaries and wages, and other riches; rather it was supposed to give true respect to the people in the society who had the misfortune of being born as a second-rate citizen, a term that is present in the European Culture in varying degree till this day.

But it was not only happiness and sunshine as Adams had predicted. There were some dark chapters to this concept as well as everyone did not gain respect and affluence in society. The American expansion was also done on the blood of the natives and the slaves. The voting rights were limited to white slave-owning landlords. These are only a few examples of usurpation of rights in a long list that scarred the American Dream for many who traveled to the United States for fulfillment and glory. These problems have been shown in many works of literature that not only criticized the American society in a very stringent manner, but they labeled the American Dream as a trap that lures the innocent masses to serve under the thumb of the world elite that changes its name but not its statue as world dominators.

In the subsequent paper, I will be discussing two important pieces of Literature that have revealed the ugly versions of the American Dream. These dramas are "Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller and "Fences" by August Wilson. Their protagonists were blinded by the jargon of the American Dream, but in the end, they ended up disappointed like many others that came to uplift their fortunes and fulfill their dreams.

**Willy Looman from Death of a Salesman**

The Death of the Salesman is a drama that tells the tale of a family that finds itself amid two major social shifts in American society, the Great Depression and the Second World War. Willy Looman is a salesman that is hopeful that good times are coming but it was his son, Biff who admits that his version of the American Dream was wrong. The writer, Arthur Miller further puts that the American Dream was not about a happier or fulfilling life, it was all about financial prosperity. He wants to communicate to the reader that in the 20th century American society, it was all about money and that cultivating personal relationships did not guarantee financial accomplishments.

That is purely a matter of one's perspective about life. According to the protagonist Willy, he had already at the top of the pyramid. He believed that he has fulfilled his American Dream and he was enjoying what did it for a living. Bur reality hits him when he finds that he is ridiculed by his colleagues behind his back and the customer somewhat hated him for his ideals. Subsequently, Willy finds himself in an identity crisis, as he finds that his American Dream of mental peace is not what his society wants (Miller 33). This version of linking success with the cultivation of personal relationships at work failed him as his customers wanted to increase their purse as there was a booming increase in machine-based development and business in the American society, showing that material world mattered more. Willy also noted that his neighbor Charley was respected more as he is more "economically" successful than he was (Miller 37).

The writer shows another reality in the novel as well. Willy Looman's version of the American Dream is not the presence of his ideals, but the absence of aligning himself with the society. In a way, he is not criticizing the high ideals of Looman but the ever-shifting position of the American Dream. This proves why the American Dream should be rescinded as it is an ambiguous idea at best. The character of Willy conveys the start of the rat race that we witness in any capitalist society, let alone the US. The success of the American Dream is a dream associated with heaps of cash and material goods and not successful professional relationship and human connections.

**Cory from Fences**

Fences is a drama written by August Wilson in which he is trying to explain the American Dream as a tool that serves only the ruling "Whites" as the African-American "Blacks" cannot even get the right to drive trucks. The protagonist Troy Maxson is worried about his son, as he has understood a long time ago that his skin color will never give him affluence in society (Act I). The whole drama is focused on how Cory wanted to pursue his career as a football player and how deeply he is committed to it, while his father wants to explain to his son through different means that sports cannot give him the monetary affluence that is the ideal of the society that they live in at the time.

In this drama, Wilson is criticizing the American Dream differently. Cory has the skill and the commitment that is needed to win at his dream of becoming a successful and rich football star, but as he is an African-American, he cannot achieve the American Dream due to racial prejudice. The character Cory is the symbol of hope, as he cites the “Things are different now” jargon after the abolishment of slavery (Act 1, Scene 3). But his father knows that the scars of slavery are not yet fully healed. The color of his skin had failed Troy in his pursuit of being a professional player in the Major Baseball League and he had learned the hard way that the American Dream is a hoax. The Dream is a nightmare for black people despite how talented they turn out to be in their respective professional or passions (Baharvand, 2017).

**Conclusion**

To conclude, the American Dream was the brainchild of an author that simply failed to understand the dynamics of his society. As a White American, Adams was used to a life of prosperity that did not even understand properly. Also, his views of the concept that he propagated are binary at best, as he views the world in the term of his bank account. People want a profiting business relationship (in case of Loomis) and white ancestry (in case of Cory) both to their respective American Dream. This vague concept should be refined so that all walks of the American Society should own the concept and benefit from it.

# Works Cited

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