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Interpretation of Early American Dream: Shift from Community Success to Individual Success

# Introduction

The American dream was presented by James Adams in his famous book “Epic of America”. The idea illustrated by the author in his book emphasizes on the dream of a land that provides efficient opportunities for individuals to achieve a better lifestyle. The American dream is defined as the idea of equality and freedom for each individual in American society. The concept of the American dream was presented in the twentieth century to facilitate citizens of American community. People were excited to be a part of the great American nation that provided them with hopes and dreams. The American dream was considered as a major breakthrough in American society that echoed a sense of liberty and equality rather than wealth or material items. However, with the passage of time, the American dream shifted towards the idea of individual gain and financial security rather than the financial stability and security of the American community. Here, the focus is to critically determine the shift of the American dream from the community’s success to individual success.

**Discussion**

John Winthrop in his reading “A Model of Christian Charity” has presented the idea that God has created a balance in the community by making some rich and some poor, some eminent in power and others in submission. However, God did not allow any mankind to oppress others on the basis of power and status. It is notable to mention that people of a community needs to practice gentleness, mercy, and temperance along with patience, obedience, and faith. The reading of John Winthrop is associated with the idea of the early American dream. His reading demonstrates that every individual has the right to enjoy liberty and freedom from different restrictions. Winthrop illustrates the idea of brotherly affection by stating that “all knit more nearly together in the bonds of brotherly affection” (John 1). His readings provide a better insight into the idea of an early American day of equality. The American dream was established to protect the right of citizens to improve their lives in the given community. The idea of equality is clearly mentioned by Winthrop to illustrate the fact that no man is made more honorable as compared to another person. Progress of any nation depends upon moral law to cater to the concerns of every individual in an effective and reasonable manner. The dominance of discrimination and biases is catastrophic for a community to excel and make progress in various fields of life. Winthrop emphasizes the idea of affection and justice in a community as one of the major aspects of the early American dream. The Law of Nature illustrates that a community can only prevail in the state of innocence and companionship (John 2). It is important to mention that early American dream relied on the success of the community as a whole, rather than on the success of an individual. Unfortunately, the evil desires of individuals compel them to prioritize towards individual gain rather than the success of the community.

The American nation had suffered under British rule for more than 170 years. British colonization of American communities was a part of its major idea to increase its power and wealth. The suffering of Americans under the rule of the British encouraged them to visualize their independence and freedom from cruel circumstances. The declaration of independence proved to be effective to awake the American nation to get a separate land where they can practice their religious freedom in an adequate way. The declaration of independence clearly stated of certain oppression, inequality, and unfavorable laws that made the life of Americans insufferable (Congress 1). These insufferable conditions compelled Americans to get freedom from British cruelty and injustice. The declaration of independence had made it clear for Americans that they need a homeland where they can establish justice and equality (Congress 1). The concept of justice and equality was prominent in that scenario as Americans had experienced inequality in various decisions that were made by British rulers and politicians at that time. All these crucial circumstances had established the basis for the American dream.

It is notable to mention that the industrial revolution in America significantly introduces machine-based manufacturing that enhanced the economic growth of America. American industrial revolution was one of the major aspects that tried to fulfil the vision of the American dream. In the American dream, the provision of land with better opportunities was mentioned to provide a lifestyle for every individual. Opportunities for better lifestyle were vastly provided through the industrial revolution in America. Natural resources in American along with government, inventors and entrepreneurs revolutionized the American dream. Due to these significant factors, the standard of living improved in American society. With the advancement in machine-based manufacturing processes, cities became prominent areas of industrial resolution. Waves of immigrants began to settle in these cities, which increased inequality of wealth. It is notable to mention that industrial revolution in American society was one of the major reason that shifted the concept of the American dream. The American dream was based on the success of the community as a whole, rather than the idea of self-gain. However, the industrial revolution jeopardized the idea about the success of the community as it created inequality of wealth (Johnson 223). The free-labour system was presented in American society in competition with the slave system of the Southern states. The free-labour system was a revolutionary moment for slaved labors as it indicates concepts of self-reliance, freedom, and independence. However, Abraham Lincoln argued that Americans failed to achieve potential benefit from the free labor system. The ideology of free labor was presented to incorporate the feelings of freedom among every individual in American society, but entrepreneurs managed to gain a major advantage from this perspective. Lincoln gave his widely distributed address at Agricultural society of Wisconsin State in 1859 to demonstrate the idea of mudsill theory. In his famous address, he demonstrated that labors are working as “a blind horse upon a treadmill” in accordance with mudsill theory (Johnson 228). It was highly criticized by Lincoln that labors are stuck in a critical situation where they are unable to make progress towards a better lifestyle. Therefore, he appreciated the idea of a free labor system. However, he did mention that potential to rise in any field is based on an individual’s own merit.

Individual gain has been criticized both socially morally as it has the potential to alter the lifestyle of the American community. Advancement in the industrial field and free labor ideology have provided certain benefits for an individual. However, the anxious spirit of gain has jeopardized the real happiness of American society (Johnson 231). Anxiousness of gaining more profit has given birth to a non-natural condition which is good for the interest of the race, but dangerous to the virtue of future generation.

**Conclusion**

In a nutshell, the early American dream has been jeopardizing due to the interest and anxiousness of individual gain as compared to the success of the community as a whole. The declaration of independence encouraged Americans to visualize for better living standards by getting freedom from Britain rule. The ideology of free labor system was introduced to comply with the American dream of freedom and self-sufficiency. The industrial revolution and the free labor system created income inequality among different states, which led towards individual gain. Changes in the industrial and social aspects have provided better opportunities to the American nation, but rather than focusing on the community’s success, people preferred individual gain.

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