

the american dream literature

the american dream literature has long occupied a central place in American culture, reflecting both the aspirations and complexities of society. From classic novels to contemporary works, writers have continually explored the idea of the American Dream—its promise, challenges, and consequences. This article delves into the evolution of the American Dream in literature, examining its origins, key themes, notable authors, and how it has been interpreted across eras and genres. Readers will gain valuable insights into the significance of the American Dream in shaping literary narratives and cultural identity, the recurring motifs that define it, and the reasons it remains a powerful concept in American storytelling. By exploring representative texts, major literary movements, and the ongoing relevance of this theme, this comprehensive guide offers a thorough understanding of the American Dream in literature for students, enthusiasts, and scholars alike.

- Origins of the American Dream in Literature
- Key Themes in the American Dream Literature
- Notable Works and Authors Shaping the American Dream
- The American Dream in Different Literary Eras
- Contemporary Perspectives on the American Dream
- Recurring Motifs and Symbols
- The Enduring Influence of the American Dream Literature

Origins of the American Dream in Literature

The concept of the American Dream first emerged in the early years of the United States, rooted in ideals of freedom, opportunity, and self-determination. Early American literature played a vital role in shaping and disseminating these ideals. Writers from the colonial and revolutionary periods, such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, infused their works with notions of personal success and national progress. As the country expanded westward, the literature mirrored the optimism and ambition of settlers seeking new beginnings.

The phrase "American Dream" itself was popularized in the 20th century but the underlying themes appeared much earlier. Literature became a vehicle for expressing hopes of prosperity and equality, as well as the tension between reality and aspiration. The stories and essays of this era laid the groundwork for future explorations of the American Dream, establishing its place as a defining motif in American culture and literary tradition.

Key Themes in the American Dream Literature

The American Dream has been interpreted and critiqued in a variety of ways throughout literary history. Authors often use their works to explore the complexities and contradictions of this ideal, shedding light on both its promise and its limitations. Several key themes consistently emerge in American Dream literature, reflecting the diverse experiences and perspectives of characters pursuing their own visions of success.

Ambition and Self-Made Success

A central aspect of the American Dream is the belief that anyone, regardless of background, can achieve success through hard work and determination. This theme is frequently depicted through

characters who rise from humble beginnings to achieve their goals, embodying the spirit of self-reliance and perseverance.

Materialism and Social Status

While the American Dream is often associated with personal fulfillment, many literary works highlight its materialistic side. Novels and stories may critique the pursuit of wealth and status, questioning whether financial success truly leads to happiness or moral decay.

Disillusionment and Failure

Not all literary explorations of the American Dream end in triumph. Many authors focus on characters who fail to attain their dreams, emphasizing the obstacles and inequalities that undermine the ideal. These narratives reveal the darker side of the American Dream, including themes of exclusion, disappointment, and loss.

Identity and Belonging

For many, the American Dream is tied to the search for identity and a sense of belonging. Literature often examines how race, class, gender, and immigration status intersect with the pursuit of the Dream, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges faced by diverse groups in America.

Notable Works and Authors Shaping the American Dream

Throughout history, numerous authors have contributed to the development of the American Dream in

literature. Their works not only reflect the values and anxieties of their time but also shape the ongoing conversation about what the Dream means for individuals and society.

- **F. Scott Fitzgerald – "The Great Gatsby":** Perhaps the most iconic exploration of the American Dream, this novel scrutinizes wealth, love, and illusion in 1920s America.
- **Arthur Miller – "Death of a Salesman":** This classic play examines the pitfalls of chasing material success and the illusions of self-worth tied to the Dream.
- **John Steinbeck – "Of Mice and Men" and "The Grapes of Wrath":** Steinbeck's works focus on working-class struggles and the pursuit of dignity amid adversity.
- **Ralph Ellison – "Invisible Man":** Ellison addresses the complexities of race and identity in the context of the American Dream.
- **Jhumpa Lahiri – "The Namesake":** Contemporary literature often explores immigrant experiences, with Lahiri's novel highlighting generational tensions and cultural adaptation.

These and other authors use vivid storytelling to interrogate the promises and paradoxes of the American Dream, ensuring its continued relevance in literary circles.

The American Dream in Different Literary Eras

The interpretation of the American Dream has evolved alongside American society, with each literary era offering unique perspectives and critiques. From the optimism of the 19th century to the skepticism of modern and postmodern literature, the Dream has been constantly redefined.

19th Century and the Frontier Spirit

In the 19th century, literature celebrated expansion, innovation, and the possibilities of the frontier. Novels and poetry from this period often depicted the American Dream as attainable through courage, exploration, and ingenuity, reflecting national optimism.

The Jazz Age and Lost Generation

The 1920s brought a focus on glamour, wealth, and the excesses of the Roaring Twenties. Writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway explored both the allure and the emptiness of chasing material success, capturing the disillusionment of a generation after World War I.

Depression-Era and Postwar Literature

During the Great Depression and after World War II, literature increasingly questioned the attainability of the American Dream. Authors examined class struggles, systemic barriers, and the harsh realities faced by ordinary Americans, leading to more critical and nuanced portrayals.

Contemporary and Multicultural Perspectives

Modern literature often explores the American Dream through the lens of multiculturalism and globalization. Writers from diverse backgrounds highlight the changing nature of identity, opportunity, and belonging in an increasingly complex society. These works expand the definition of the Dream to include voices previously marginalized in mainstream narratives.

Contemporary Perspectives on the American Dream

Today, the American Dream remains a vital theme in literature, though its meaning continues to evolve. Contemporary authors frequently address issues such as economic inequality, systemic racism, immigration, and the digital divide, reflecting current social and political realities. Literature serves as a mirror for society's hopes and anxieties, questioning whether the Dream is still attainable or relevant in the modern world.

Recent novels, memoirs, and plays often incorporate global perspectives, depicting the experiences of immigrants and first-generation Americans. These stories challenge traditional notions of the Dream, emphasizing resilience, adaptability, and the redefinition of success in a rapidly changing landscape.

Recurring Motifs and Symbols

The American Dream literature is rich with recurring motifs and symbols that reinforce its themes and messages. Authors use these elements to convey deeper meanings and to connect individual experiences to broader societal issues.

- **The Green Light:** In "The Great Gatsby," the green light symbolizes hope, aspiration, and the elusive nature of the Dream.
- **Roads and Journeys:** Physical and metaphorical journeys represent the pursuit of new opportunities and the challenges along the way.
- **Homes and Houses:** Ownership and the idea of a home are central to the Dream, often symbolizing stability, achievement, and belonging.
- **Broken Promises:** Literature frequently uses shattered dreams or failed ambitions to critique the limitations and inequalities inherent in the concept.

These motifs and symbols help readers understand the emotional and psychological impact of the American Dream on individuals and communities.

The Enduring Influence of the American Dream Literature

Despite changes in society and culture, the American Dream continues to be a powerful force in literature. Its enduring appeal lies in its flexibility and capacity to reflect the hopes, fears, and realities of each generation. From classic novels to contemporary works, the American Dream serves as a lens through which writers examine personal ambition, societal values, and the complex relationship between individual desire and collective identity.

By engaging with the American Dream, literature encourages readers to reflect on their own beliefs and experiences, fostering dialogue about the meaning of success, justice, and belonging in America. As new voices and perspectives emerge, the American Dream literature will continue to evolve, offering fresh insights and challenging assumptions about what it means to pursue happiness and fulfillment in the United States.

Q: What is the American Dream in literature?

A: The American Dream in literature refers to the idea that anyone in the United States can achieve success, prosperity, and upward mobility through hard work and determination. Literary works use this concept to explore themes of ambition, inequality, hope, and disillusionment.

Q: Which novel is considered the most iconic representation of the American Dream?

A: "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald is widely regarded as the most iconic literary exploration

of the American Dream. The novel examines the pursuit of wealth and status, as well as the illusions and disappointments associated with chasing the Dream.

Q: How has the portrayal of the American Dream changed over time in literature?

A: The portrayal of the American Dream has evolved from early optimism and celebration of opportunity to more critical and nuanced examinations. Modern literature often addresses barriers such as inequality, racism, and the changing definitions of success.

Q: What are common themes found in American Dream literature?

A: Common themes include self-made success, materialism, ambition, disillusionment, social mobility, identity, and the challenges faced by marginalized groups in pursuing the Dream.

Q: How do contemporary authors approach the American Dream?

A: Contemporary authors often explore the American Dream through multicultural and global perspectives, focusing on issues like immigration, generational conflict, and redefined notions of success and identity.

Q: Why is the American Dream a recurring theme in American literature?

A: The American Dream recurs in literature because it encapsulates fundamental questions about opportunity, justice, and belonging in American society. It provides a rich framework for examining personal and collective aspirations.

Q: What symbols are commonly associated with the American Dream in literature?

A: Common symbols include the green light from "The Great Gatsby," roads and journeys, houses, and broken or unattainable goals, all of which represent various aspects of hope, ambition, and disappointment.

Q: Can the American Dream be considered universally attainable in literature?

A: Literature often questions the attainability of the American Dream, highlighting systemic barriers such as class, race, and social inequality that prevent many from fulfilling it.

Q: Who are some notable authors who have shaped American Dream literature?

A: Notable authors include F. Scott Fitzgerald, Arthur Miller, John Steinbeck, Ralph Ellison, and Jhumpa Lahiri, among others who have explored and critiqued the Dream from diverse perspectives.

Q: How does the American Dream relate to identity and belonging in literature?

A: The American Dream is closely tied to themes of identity and belonging. Literature frequently examines how individuals and groups navigate their sense of self and community while striving for success and acceptance in American society.

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The American Dream in Literature: A Journey Through Aspirations and Realities

The American Dream. A phrase brimming with promise, opportunity, and the unwavering belief in self-improvement. But what does this elusive dream truly represent, and how has it been portrayed throughout American literature? This comprehensive guide delves into the multifaceted interpretations of the American Dream as depicted in seminal works, exploring its evolution, its complexities, and its enduring relevance in modern society. We'll examine how different authors have tackled this iconic theme, revealing both its idealistic allure and its harsh realities. Prepare to embark on a literary journey that unravels the layers of this potent symbol.

H2: Early Interpretations: The Promise of a New Land

Early American literature, often characterized by Puritan ideals and a spirit of frontier exploration, painted a picture of the American Dream as a tangible reward for hard work and piety. Works like *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, while exploring the societal constraints of Puritan society, subtly showcase the individual's pursuit of redemption and self-discovery – a crucial element of the nascent American Dream. Similarly, the narratives of westward expansion found in works like James Fenimore Cooper's *The Leatherstocking Tales* present the frontier as a land of possibility, where individual ambition could flourish unburdened by the rigid structures of the East. These early portrayals emphasized the themes of self-reliance, resourcefulness, and the belief that America offered a fresh start, a chance to build a better life.

H2: The Gilded Age and the Rise of Materialism

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed a shift in the American Dream's interpretation. The Gilded Age, with its unprecedented industrial growth and wealth accumulation, saw the dream increasingly associated with material success. Authors like Mark Twain and F. Scott Fitzgerald brilliantly captured this transformation. Twain's *The Gilded Age* satirizes the era's rampant corruption and social inequality, highlighting the stark contrast between the promised prosperity and the harsh realities faced by many. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, arguably the quintessential novel about the American Dream, explores the devastating consequences of chasing wealth and status, ultimately revealing the hollowness at the heart of such pursuits. *Gatsby's* relentless pursuit of Daisy Buchanan serves as a cautionary tale, illustrating the limitations and disillusionment that

can arise from a materialistic interpretation of the dream.

H2: The Harlem Renaissance and the Search for Identity

The Harlem Renaissance brought a new perspective to the American Dream, focusing on the experiences and aspirations of African Americans. Authors like Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston explored themes of racial identity, social justice, and the struggle for equality. Their works challenged the dominant narrative of the American Dream, exposing the systemic barriers that prevented Black Americans from fully participating in its promise. Hughes's poetry, with its vibrant imagery and soulful rhythm, articulated the hopes and frustrations of a generation striving for recognition and opportunity. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* offers a powerful exploration of self-discovery and the pursuit of individual fulfillment within the context of racial prejudice.

H2: The Post-War Era and the Suburban Ideal

The post-World War II era saw a renewed focus on the American Dream as a suburban ideal – a picture of homeownership, family life, and economic stability. However, authors like John Steinbeck and J.D. Salinger subtly critiqued this idealized vision. Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* poignantly portrays the struggles of migrant workers during the Great Depression, highlighting the vulnerability of those excluded from the perceived prosperity of the time. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* captures the disillusionment of a young man grappling with the superficiality and conformity of post-war American society.

H2: The Modern American Dream: Ongoing Debates and Reinterpretations

Today, the American Dream continues to be a subject of ongoing debate and reinterpretation. Contemporary authors grapple with issues of economic inequality, social justice, and environmental concerns, offering nuanced perspectives on the dream's evolving meaning. The dream's accessibility, once perceived as universally attainable, is now questioned by many, particularly considering persistent disparities in wealth and opportunity. Modern literature reflects this complex reality, portraying the challenges and complexities faced by individuals striving for a better life in a rapidly changing world.

Conclusion

The American Dream, as reflected in literature, is not a static concept but a constantly evolving ideal. From early notions of religious freedom and frontier expansion to the more recent emphasis on material success and social justice, the dream's meaning has been shaped by the historical and societal contexts of its portrayal. Through the diverse voices and perspectives of American authors, we gain a deeper understanding of this powerful symbol – its promises, its pitfalls, and its enduring resonance in shaping the American identity.

FAQs

1. What are some key themes consistently explored in literature regarding the American Dream? Key themes include social mobility, economic opportunity, individual freedom, self-reliance, and the pursuit of happiness, alongside the frequent counterpoints of inequality, disillusionment, and the unattainability of the dream for many.
2. How has the portrayal of the American Dream changed over time? Initially linked to religious freedom and frontier expansion, its meaning shifted to encompass material success during the Gilded Age and then evolved to incorporate themes of racial equality and social justice. Modern literature examines its accessibility amidst economic inequality and societal challenges.
3. Are there any works of literature that directly critique the American Dream? Numerous works directly critique the American Dream, including *The Great Gatsby*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *The Catcher in the Rye*, highlighting its unattainability for many and exposing the flaws within the pursuit of its idealized version.
4. How does the American Dream relate to the concept of the "self-made man"? The "self-made man" is a central archetype within the American Dream narrative, emphasizing individual agency and the potential for upward mobility through hard work and determination. However, literature often challenges this simplistic notion, revealing systemic obstacles that hinder this upward mobility.
5. What are some contemporary examples of literature that explores the American Dream? Contemporary works often explore nuanced and critical perspectives on the American Dream, often addressing issues of economic inequality and social justice, using diverse narratives to reflect the complexities of modern American life. Finding specific titles requires further research based on your preferred genre and author focus.

the american dream literature: *The American Dream* Harold Bloom, Sterling Professor of Humanities Harold Bloom, Blake Hobby, 2009 Provides an examination of the American dream in classic literary works.

the american dream literature: *América's Dream* Esmeralda Santiago, 2009-10-13 América Gonzalez is a hotel housekeeper on an island off the coast of Puerto Rico, cleaning up after wealthy foreigners who don't look her In the eye. Her alcoholic mother resents her; her married boyfriend, Correa, beats her; and their fourteen-year-old daughter thinks life would be better anywhere but

with América. So when América is offered the chance to work as alive-in housekeeper and nanny for a family in Westchester County, New York, she takes it as a sign that a door to escape has been opened. Yet even as América revels in the comparative luxury of her new life, daring to care about a man other than Correa, she is faced with dramatic proof that no matter what she does, she can't get away from her past.

the american dream literature: American Literature and the Dream Frederic Ives Carpenter, 1955 The American dream has never been defined exactly, and probably never can be. It is both too various and too vague: many men have meant many different things by it. I shall therefore follow popular practice and use the phrase inclusively. But American Literature has been defined more exactly, and has been outlined in courses and embodied in anthologies. Most men agree that it is something very different from English literature, and many have sought to describe the difference. This book began as a series of essays in interpretation of the major American authors. But in the process of writing, an idea crystallized: American literature has differed from English because of the constant and omnipresent influence of the American dream upon it. But this influence has usually been indirect and unconscious, because the dream has remained vague and undefined. But the vague idea has influenced the plotting of our fiction and the imagining of our poetry. Almost by inadvertence our literature has accomplished a symbolic and experimental projection of it. The American dream, and the patterns of thinking and feeling which it has inspired, has given form and significance to American literature.

the american dream literature: *The American Dream?* Shing Yin Khor, 2019-08-06 As a child growing up in Malaysia, Shing Yin Khor had two very different ideas of what "America" meant. The first looked a lot like Hollywood, full of beautiful people and sunlight and freeways. The second looked more like *The Grapes of Wrath* - a nightmare landscape filled with impoverished people, broken-down cars, barren landscapes, and broken dreams. Those contrasting ideas have stuck with Shing ever since, even now that she lives and works in LA. *The American Dream? A Journey on Route 66* is Shing's attempt to find what she can of both of these Americas on a solo journey (small adventure-dog included) across the entire expanse of that iconic road, beginning in Santa Monica and ending up Chicago. And what begins as a road trip ends up as something more like a pilgrimage in search of an American landscape that seems forever shifting, forever out of place.

the american dream literature: Psychological Politics of the American Dream Lois Tyson, 1994 While it is reasonable to assume that our national literature would offer a fertile field in which to explore the interaction between the ideological and psychological dimensions of American life, critics generally have kept these two domains separate, and the dominant model has consisted of an archaic notion of the individual in society.

the american dream literature: *An American Dream* Norman Mailer, 2015-02-17 In this wild battering ram of a novel, which was originally published to vast controversy in 1965, Norman Mailer creates a character who might be a fictional precursor of the philosopher-killer he would later profile in *The Executioner's Song*. As Stephen Rojack, a decorated war hero and former congressman who murders his wife in a fashionable New York City high-rise, runs amok through the city in which he was once a privileged citizen, Mailer peels away the layers of our social norms to reveal a world of pure appetite and relentless cruelty. One part Nietzsche, one part de Sade, and one part Charlie Parker, *An American Dream* grabs the reader by the throat and refuses to let go. Praise for *An American Dream* "Perhaps the only serious New York novel since *The Great Gatsby*."—Joan Didion, *National Review* "A devil's encyclopedia of our secret visions and desires . . . the expression of a devastatingly alive and original creative mind."—*Life* "A work of fierce concentration . . . perfectly, and often brilliantly, realistic [with] a pattern of remarkable imaginative coherence and intensity."—Harper's "At once violent, educated, and cool . . . This is our history as Hawthorne might have written it."—*Commentary* Praise for Norman Mailer "[Norman Mailer] loomed over American letters longer and larger than any other writer of his generation."—*The New York Times* "A writer of the greatest and most reckless talent."—*The New Yorker* "Mailer is indispensable, an American treasure."—*The Washington Post* "A devastatingly alive and original creative mind."—*Life* "Mailer is

fierce, courageous, and reckless and nearly everything he writes has sections of headlong brilliance.”—The New York Review of Books “The largest mind and imagination [in modern] American literature . . . Unlike just about every American writer since Henry James, Mailer has managed to grow and become richer in wisdom with each new book.”—Chicago Tribune “Mailer is a master of his craft. His language carries you through the story like a leaf on a stream.”—The Cincinnati Post

the american dream literature: The American Dream Cal Jillson, 2016-11-18 Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness: these words have long represented the promise of America, a “shimmering vision of a fruitful country open to all who come, learn, work, save, invest, and play by the rules.” In 2004, Cal Jillson took stock of this vision and showed how the nation’s politicians deployed the American Dream, both in campaigns and governance, to hold the American people to their program. “Full of startling ideas that make sense,” NPR’s senior correspondent Juan Williams remarked, Jillson’s book offered the fullest exploration yet of the origins and evolution of the ideal that serves as the foundation of our national ethos and collective self-image. Nonetheless, in the dozen years since *Pursuing the American Dream* was published, the American Dream has fared poorly. The decline of social mobility and the rise of income inequality—to say nothing of the extraordinary social, political, and economic developments of the Bush and Obama presidencies—have convinced many that the American Dream is no more. This is the concern that Jillson addresses in his new book, *The American Dream: In History, Politics, and Fiction*, which juxtaposes the claims of political, social, and economic elite against the view of American life consistently offered in our national literature. Our great novelists, from Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville to John Updike, Philip Roth, Toni Morrison, and beyond highlight the limits and challenges of life—the difficulty if not impossibility of the dream—especially for racial, ethnic, and religious minorities as well as women. His book takes us through the changing meaning and reality of the American Dream, from the seventeenth century to the present day, revealing a distinct, sustained separation between literary and political elite. The American Dream, Jillson suggests, took shape early in our national experience and defined the nation throughout its growth and development, yet it has always been challenged, even rejected, in our most celebrated literature. This is no different in our day, when what we believe about the American Dream reveals as much about its limits as its possibilities.

the american dream literature: Behold, America Sarah Churchwell, 2018-10-09 A Smithsonian Magazine Best History Book of 2018 The unknown history of two ideas crucial to the struggle over what America stands for In *Behold, America*, Sarah Churchwell offers a surprising account of twentieth-century Americans’ fierce battle for the nation’s soul. It follows the stories of two phrases -- the American dream and America First -- that once embodied opposing visions for America. Starting as a Republican motto before becoming a hugely influential isolationist slogan during World War I, America First was always closely linked with authoritarianism and white supremacy. The American dream, meanwhile, initially represented a broad vision of democratic and economic equality. Churchwell traces these notions through the 1920s boom, the Depression, and the rise of fascism at home and abroad, laying bare the persistent appeal of demagoguery in America and showing us how it was resisted. At a time when many ask what America’s future holds, *Behold, America* is a revelatory, unvarnished portrait of where we have been.

the american dream literature: Woodcuts of Women Dagoberto Gilb, 2007-12-01 These ten stories of “intensity and bravado” by the acclaimed Chicano author explore love, lust, and longing among people struggling to find their way (Jean Thompson, The New York Times Book Review). Featuring characters of Mexican American heritage, each of these haunting stories is crafted with Gilb’s quintessentially spare yet evocative language and explores the lives of men and women at odds with each other. Steeped in an ethos of regimented gender roles, the men in these stories see the women in their lives as little more than woodcuts—crude variations of their actual complexity; symbols of seduction, mystery, and power that will ultimately bring about their undoing. At turns powerful and resonant, hopeful and humorous, *Woodcuts of Women* is a tour de force by one of America’s foremost Latino writers. “Lonely, tough stories—stories that force us to confront what’s

difficult in us, and in the people we love.” —Esquire “The gritty passions of men for women—the grand delusions and tender mercies—are the jukebox songs playing through the 10 stories of Gilb’s ‘Woodcuts of Women.’” —San Francisco Chronicle

the american dream literature: *American Dreams, American Nightmares* David Madden, 1970 The pursuit of the American Dream, supposedly shaped by the edenic promises of the American land, has engaged our writers from the beginning, and much of our literature has come out of the national literary experience thus expressed. This collection of nineteen original, unpublished essays written for this book is particularly relevant today, when our collective field of vision seems obscured, and when the American Dream seems to have become a cliché, symbolic of the Dream defunct. The nineteen critics here presented include, among others, Leslie Fiedler, Oscar Cargill, Maxwell Geismar, Jules Chametzky, Louis Filler, and Ihab Hassan. Most of them seem to agree with the view expressed by the majority of our best creative writers: that in pursuing the American Dream, America has created a nightmare. Taken together, the nineteen essays provide a comprehensive view of American literature, past and present, as it has dealt with the Dream; but the emphasis is on modern works and present social, cultural, and political problems—poverty, war, and racism. Ten of the essays focus on such key works as Herman Melville's *The Two Temples*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, William Faulkner's *The Bear*, Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, and Norman Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam?*

the american dream literature: *Literary Themes for Students* Anne Marie Hacht, 2007 Provides a comprehensive, alphabetically-arranged overview of literary works including plays, poetry, short stories, novels, and nonfiction from Lonesome Dove to White House Correspondents' Association Dinner 2006 Speech.

the american dream literature: *Asian American Dreams* Helen Zia, 2001-05-15 ... about the transformation of Asian Americans ... into a self-identified racial group that is influencing every aspect of American society.--Jacket.

the american dream literature: *The Dream of the Great American Novel* Lawrence Buell, 2014-02-10 The idea of the great American novel continues to thrive almost as vigorously as in its nineteenth-century heyday, defying 150 years of attempts to dismiss it as amateurish or obsolete. In this landmark book, the first in many years to take in the whole sweep of national fiction, Lawrence Buell reanimates this supposedly antiquated idea, demonstrating that its history is a key to the dynamics of national literature and national identity itself. The dream of the G.A.N., as Henry James nicknamed it, crystallized soon after the Civil War. In fresh, in-depth readings of selected contenders from the 1850s onward in conversation with hundreds of other novels, Buell delineates four scripts for G.A.N. candidates. One, illustrated by *The Scarlet Letter*, is the adaptation of the novel's story-line by later writers, often in ways that are contrary to the original author's own design. Other aspirants, including *The Great Gatsby* and *Invisible Man*, engage the American Dream of remarkable transformation from humble origins. A third script, seen in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved*, is the family saga that grapples with racial and other social divisions. Finally, mega-novels from *Moby-Dick* to *Gravity's Rainbow* feature assemblages of characters who dramatize in microcosm the promise and pitfalls of democracy. The canvas of the great American novel is in constant motion, reflecting revolutions in fictional fashion, the changing face of authorship, and the inseparability of high culture from popular. As Buell reveals, the elusive G.A.N. showcases the myth of the United States as a nation perpetually under construction.

the american dream literature: *The American Dream* Keith Newlin, 2013 The American Dream' is a phrase that has become an essential component of the American experience, a phrase that, once entered into the national lexicon, has come to define our nation's identity, underlying nearly every aspect of our lives. And since the birth of the founding document of our nation, the Declaration of Independence, the idea of 'The American Dream' has become a pervasive and frequently deconstructed theme within the canon of American literature.

the american dream literature: *The American Dream and the Popular Novel* Elizabeth Long,

2017-10-23 This title, originally published in 1985, examines conceptions of success and the good life expressed in bestselling novels – ranging from historical sagas and spy thrillers to more serious works by Updike, Bellows, Steinbeck and Mailer – published from 1945 to 1975. Using these popular books as cultural evidence, Elizabeth Long argues that the meaning of the American dream has changed dramatically, but in a more complex fashion than has been recognised by that country's most prominent social critics. Her study presents a challenge to prevailing social-scientific views of contemporary American culture, and represents, both in theory and method, an important contribution to the study of culture and social criticism.

the american dream literature: *The Humanities and the Dream of America* Geoffrey Galt Harpham, 2011-02-15 In this bracing and original book, Geoffrey Galt Harpham argues that today's humanities are an invention of the American academy in the years following World War II, when they were first conceived as an expression of American culture and an instrument of American national interests. The humanities portray a "dream of America" in two senses: they represent an aspiration of Americans since the first days of the Republic for a state so secure and prosperous that people could enjoy and appreciate culture for its own sake; and they embody in academic terms an idealized conception of the American national character. Although they are struggling to retain their status in America, the concept of the humanities has spread to other parts of the world and remains one of America's most distinctive and valuable contributions to higher education. *The Humanities and the Dream of America* explores a number of linked problems that have emerged in recent years: the role, at once inspiring and disturbing, played by philology in the formation of the humanities; the reasons for the humanities' perpetual state of "crisis"; the shaping role of philanthropy in the humanities; and the new possibilities for literary study offered by the subject of pleasure. Framed by essays that draw on Harpham's pedagogical experiences abroad and as a lecturer at the U.S. Air Force Academy, as well as his vantage as director of the National Humanities Center, this book provides an essential perspective on the history, ideology, and future of this important topic.

the american dream literature: *The American Dream and the American Nightmare in Literature by William D. Howells and Henry James* Carolina Hein, 2008-06 Seminar paper from the year 2008 in the subject American Studies - Literature, grade: 1,7, University of Constance, 4 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: This term paper deals with the origin of the American Dream, with the American Nightmare and with the two novels *The Rise of Silas Lapham* written by William D. Howell (1885) and *The American* by Henry James (1877). The term paper mainly concentrates on the main characters and their social life and shows that the protagonists, who live the way that the term American Dream implies, experience the seamy side of the American Dream. The American Dream has a long history which goes back several hundred years. For some people the American Dream might stand for property, for others it might be the image of freedom and equality. By all means, the American Dream promises a more comfortable life and the realization of the deepest dreams. But reality can turn the American Dream into the American Nightmare. Searching for a well paid job to raise their standards of living, people acknowledge that it is difficult to move up the economic ladder. Longing for equal opportunity, people face discrimination due to their race or social class. This term paper deals with the origin of the American Dream and two novels *The Rise of Silas Lapham* written by William D. Howell, originally published in 1885, and *The American* by Henry James published in 1877. The term paper mainly concentrates on the main characters and their social life and shows that the protagonists, who live the way that the term American Dream implies, experience the seamy side of the American Dream. Before Europeans had moved to the new continent, the first immigrants living in America were Asians (Jordan, Winthrop D./Leon F. Litwack. *The United States, Conquering a Continent* Volume 1. California: North West, 2003: 1). In 1492, Christopher Columbus discovered an unknown continent which was named America after the explorer Amerigo Vespucci. Re

the american dream literature: *American Dreams in Mississippi* Ted Ownby, 2002-10-15 The dreams of abundance, choice, and novelty that have fueled the growth of consumer culture in the United States would seem to have little place in the history of Mississippi—a state long associated

with poverty, inequality, and rural life. But as Ted Ownby demonstrates in this innovative study, consumer goods and shopping have played important roles in the development of class, race, and gender relations in Mississippi from the antebellum era to the present. After examining the general and plantation stores of the nineteenth century, a period when shopping habits were stratified according to racial and class hierarchies, Ownby traces the development of new types of stores and buying patterns in the twentieth century, when women and African Americans began to wield new forms of economic power. Using sources as diverse as store ledgers, blues lyrics, and the writings of William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Richard Wright, and Will Percy, he illuminates the changing relationships among race, rural life, and consumer goods and, in the process, offers a new way to understand the connection between power and culture in the American South.

the american dream literature: The Aztec Love God Tony Diaz, 1998 The story of a Mexican-American standup comedian whose specialty is making fun of ethnic stereotypes. He is Tiofilo Duarte and the novel describes how--to survive--he is forced to stoop to this form of comedy.

the american dream literature: All American Dream Dolls David Haynes, 1997 What's an attractive, successful, all-around-together girl to do when she's dumped at 65 miles per hour on the way to a romantic getaway? If you're Deneen Wilkerson, you retreat to your mother's suburban home in St. Louis for a solitary orgy of snacks, talk shows and mental hygiene. Deneen's crash--and her wildly funny, improbable rebirth--is the basis of this new novel by the acclaimed author of *Somebody Else's Mama* and *Live at Five*.

the american dream literature: The Myth of the American Dream D. L. Mayfield, 2020-05-05 Affluence, autonomy, safety, and power—the central values of the American dream. But are they compatible with Jesus' command to love our neighbor as ourselves? In essays grouped around these four values, D. L. Mayfield asks us to pay attention to the ways they shape our own choices, and the ways those choices affect our neighbors.

the american dream literature: American Dream, American Nightmare Kathryn Hume, 2022-08-15 In this celebration of contemporary American fiction, Kathryn Hume explores how estrangement from America has shaped the fiction of a literary generation, which she calls the Generation of the Lost Dream. In breaking down the divisions among standard categories of race, religion, ethnicity, and gender, Hume identifies shared core concerns, values, and techniques among seemingly disparate and unconnected writers including T. Coraghessan Boyle, Ralph Ellison, Russell Banks, Gloria Naylor, Tim O'Brien, Maxine Hong Kingston, Walker Percy, N. Scott Momaday, John Updike, Toni Morrison, William Kennedy, Julia Alvarez, Thomas Pynchon, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Don DeLillo. Hume explores fictional treatments of the slippage in the immigrant experience between America's promise and its reality. She exposes the political link between contemporary stories of lost innocence and liberalism's inadequacies. She also invites us to look at the literary challenge to scientific materialism in various searches for a spiritual dimension in life. The expansive future promised by the American Dream has been replaced, Hume finds, by a sense of tarnished morality and a melancholy loss of faith in America's exceptionalism. *American Dream, American Nightmare* examines the differing critiques of America embedded in nearly a hundred novels and points to the source for recovery that appeals to many of the authors.

the american dream literature: The Magic of Blood Dagoberto Gilb, 1994 In this dynamic collection of short stories, including eight from *Winners on the Pass Line* (1985), Dagoberto Gilb captures the texture of the Southwest's working class in clear, ironic, and bitingly realistic fiction about regular people going about their complex lives.

the american dream literature: American Idols Bob Hostetler, 2006 Feeding off the frenzy of fleeting fame and image overload, Hostetler takes anecessary look at the false gods in modern society. This timely book can helpreaders realize and overcome their own idolatries.

the american dream literature: My Time Among the Whites Jennine Capó Crucet, 2019-09-03 From the author of *Make Your Home Among Strangers*, essays on being an “accidental” American—an incisive look at the edges of identity for a woman of color in a society centered on whiteness In this sharp and candid collection of essays, critically acclaimed writer and

first-generation American Jennine Capó Crucet explores the condition of finding herself a stranger in the country where she was born. Raised in Miami and the daughter of Cuban refugees, Crucet examines the political and personal contours of American identity and the physical places where those contours find themselves smashed: be it a rodeo town in Nebraska, a university campus in upstate New York, or Disney World in Florida. Crucet illuminates how she came to see her exclusion from aspects of the theoretical American Dream, despite her family's attempts to fit in with white American culture—beginning with their ill-fated plan to name her after the winner of the Miss America pageant. In prose that is both fearless and slyly humorous, *My Time Among the Whites* examines the sometimes hopeful, sometimes deeply flawed ways in which many Americans have learned to adapt, exist, and—in the face of all signals saying otherwise—perhaps even thrive in a country that never imagined them here.

the american dream literature: *American Dream Machine* Matthew Specktor, 2014-04-15 The story of two talent agents and their three troubled boys, heirs to Hollywood royalty; a sweeping narrative about fathers and sons, the movie business, and the sundry sea changes that have shaped Hollywood and, by extension, American life. *American Dream Machine* is the story of an iconic striver, a classic self-made man in the vein of Jay Gatsby or Augie March. It's the story of a talent agent and his troubled sons, two generations of Hollywood royalty. It's a sweeping narrative about parents and children, the movie business, and the sundry sea changes that have shaped Hollywood, and by extension, American life. Beau Rosenwald—overweight, not particularly handsome, and improbably charismatic—arrives in Los Angeles in 1962 with nothing but an ill-fitting suit and a pair of expensive brogues. By the late 1970s he has helped found the most successful agency in Hollywood. Through the eyes of his son, we watch Beau and his partner go to war, waging a seismic battle that redraws the lines of an entire industry. We watch Beau rise and fall and rise again, in accordance with the cultural transformations that dictate the fickle world of movies. We watch Beau's partner, the enigmatic and cerebral Williams Farquarsen, struggle to contain himself, to control his impulses and consolidate his power. And we watch two generations of men fumble and thrive across the LA landscape, learning for themselves the shadows and costs exacted by success and failure. Mammalian, funny, and filled with characters both vital and profound, *American Dream Machine* is a piercing interrogation of the role—nourishing, as well as destructive—that illusion plays in all our lives.

the american dream literature: *Class* Francesco Pacifico, 2017-05-30 Plainly the work of a forceful and ambitious writer... (Class) is like little else I've read in recent years." —Dwight Garner, *The New York Times* The breakout novel by Francesco Pacifico, one of Italy's most acclaimed writers, hailed by Dana Spiotta as "brilliantly funny and weirdly subversive" Ludovica and Lorenzo live in Rome. She works in her family's bookstore, and he's a filmmaker—or, rather, a "filmmaker": so far, all he's produced is one pretentious short film that even his friends don't take seriously. But somehow, he gets a scholarship to Columbia University, and the couple decide to head to New York—specifically, to Williamsburg: the promised land. They soon fall in with a group of Italian expats—all of them with artistic ambitions and the family money to support those ambitions indefinitely. There's Nicolino, the playboy; Marcello, the aspiring rapper; Sergio, the literary scout; and a handful of others. These languidly ambitious men and women will come together and fall apart, but can they escape their fates? Can anyone? In *Class*, Francesco Pacifico gives a grand, subversive, formally ambitious social novel that bridges Italy and America, high and low, money and art. A novel that channels Virginia Woolf and Kanye West, Henry Miller and Lil' Wayne, *Class* is an unforgettable, mordantly funny account of Italians chasing the American dream.

the american dream literature: *Bonfires of the American Dream in American Rhetoric, Literature and Film* Daniel Shaviro, 2022-06-14 How could American social solidarity have so collapsed that we cannot even cooperate in fighting a pandemic? One problem lies in how our values mutate and intersect in an era of runaway high-end inequality and evaporating upward mobility. Under such conditions, the American Dream's seeming to suggest, falsely, that those who succeed economically are winners, while the rest of us are losers, puts it in dire conflict with our traditions of

democracy and egalitarianism. In *Bonfires of the American Dream*, through close cultural studies of classic novels and films - *Atlas Shrugged*, *The Great Gatsby*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, and *The Wolf of Wall Street* - Daniel Shaviro helps to provide a better understanding of what went wrong culturally in America.

the american dream literature: *The American Dream* Jim Cullen, 2004 Cullen particularly focuses on the founding fathers and the Declaration of Independence (the charter of the American Dream); Abraham Lincoln, with his rise from log cabin to White House and his dream for a unified nation; and Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of racial equality. Our contemporary version of the American Dream seems rather debased in Cullen's eyes-built on the cult of Hollywood and its outlandish dreams of overnight fame and fortune.

the american dream literature: *Race Characters* Swati Rana, 2020-10-06 A vexed figure inhabits U.S. literature and culture: the visibly racialized immigrant who disavows minority identity and embraces the American dream. Such figures are potent and controversial, for they promise to expiate racial violence and perpetuate an exceptionalist ideal of America. Swati Rana grapples with these figures, building on studies of literary character and racial form. Rana offers a new way to view characterization through racialization that creates a fuller social reading of race. Situated in a nascent period of ethnic identification from 1900 to 1960, this book focuses on immigrant writers who do not fit neatly into a resistance-based model of ethnic literature. Writings by Paule Marshall, Ameen Rihani, Dalip Singh Saund, Jose Garcia Villa, and Jose Antonio Villarreal symbolize different aspects of the American dream, from individualism to imperialism, assimilation to upward mobility. The dynamics of characterization are also those of contestation, Rana argues. Analyzing the interrelation of persona and personhood, *Race Characters* presents an original method of comparison, revealing how the protagonist of the American dream is socially constrained and structurally driven.

the american dream literature: *The American Dream* Edward Albee, 1961

the american dream literature: *The Real American Dream* Andrew Delbanco, 2000-09 One of the nation's premier literary scholars takes a broad look at the way Americans have reached beyond worldly desires for a spirituality. Copyright © Libri GmbH. All rights reserved.

the american dream literature: *The Epic of America* James Truslow Adams, 2001-10-01 A beautifully written story of America's historical heritage, by one of the country's greatest historians.

the american dream literature: *Our American Dream* Fiona McEntee, 2020-01-21 Immigrants come from countries far, to dream their dreams beneath American stars. Let's see who's here in this great place, a land of diversity: the United States! *Our American Dream* is written by Fiona McEntee, an award-winning nationally recognized immigration lawyer. As an immigrant, mom of two young children, and lawyer who fights for justice every day, Fiona wrote *Our American Dream* to help explain the importance of a diverse and welcoming America. *Our American Dream* is the first in a series that celebrates immigrants and immigration. You can find out more at ouramericandreambooks.com.

the american dream literature: *Dismembering the American Dream* Kate Charlton-Jones, 2014-08-30 A detailed study of Yates's novels and stories-- Provided by publisher.

the american dream literature: *Rolando Hinojosa and the American Dream* Joyce Glover Lee, 1997 Rolando Hinojosa is a Texas writer with his sense of place centered in the Texas Valley, a world in itself and a place recognizable as a discrete community. But Hinojosa's work transcends the regional, transcends the Valley, transcends Texas, while it remains rooted in all three. Hinojosa is treated here from the perspective of his place in the mainstream of American literature and with his attempts to write works that speak to a large and more diverse audience, rather than from the perspective of his place within the world of Texas-Mexican literature. Joyce Lee does not neglect the regional aspects of Hinojosa's works, but puts them into the context of what they say about the vitality of American culture at large and about the Mexican culture's variations of the American Dream. Covers Hinojosa's full-length books-- *Dear Rafe*, *Klail City*, *The Useless Servants*, *The Valley*, *Partners in Crime*, and *Rites and Witnesses* --as well as his essays and articles.

the american dream literature: Of Mice and Men John Steinbeck, 2018-11 Of Mice and Men es una novela escrita por el autor John Steinbeck. Publicado en 1937, cuenta la historia de George Milton y Lennie Small, dos trabajadores desplazados del rancho migratorio, que se mudan de un lugar a otro en California en busca de nuevas oportunidades de trabajo durante la Gran Depresión en los Estados Unidos.

the american dream literature: Race, Sport and the American Dream Earl Smith, 2014 Race, Sport and the American Dream (2007) won the annual North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Best Book Award, announced at the Society's 2008 annual conference. Race, Sport and the American Dream reports the main findings of a long term research project investigating the scope and consequences of the deepening relationship between African American males and the institution of sport. While there is some scholarly literature on the topic, author Earl Smith tries to understand through this project how sport has changed the nature of African American Civil Society and has come to be a major influence on economic opportunities, schooling and the shaping of African American family life. The third edition of Race, Sport and the American Dream improves upon the second edition in four key ways: (1) by updating the empirical data so that it is the most current on the market, (2) by expanding the discussion of the Athletic Industrial Complex (AIC) to include a robust discussion of the explosion of Conference Realignment, (3) by expanding the discussion of leadership in SportsWorld to include the most current theory in the area of sports management and (4) by adding an entirely new chapter on male athletes and violence against women. In addition, the third edition expands the discussion of the elusive American Dream and the role of sports in accessing better life chances, success and happiness. The third edition of Race, Sport and the American Dream also includes a discussion of the increased role that social media plays in SportsWorld by allowing everyone and anyone to become a sports critic as well as a discussion of race in SportsWorld in the era of changing the racial landscape of the US. Specifically, the US has become more racially diverse and critics are debating the role that the election of the first African American president plays in this changing landscape. All in all, the third edition of Race, Sport and the American Dream expands on existing discussions and provides new areas of inquiry. This book is intended to provide social scientists and others interested in sports with an understanding of carefully selected issues related to the African American athlete. Smith examines the world of amateur sports (Olympic and intercollegiate sport) using Immanuel Wallerstein's World-Systems Paradigm which provides a lens with which to examine the colonizing and exploitative nature of intercollegiate sports and the special arrangements that universities have with SportsWorld. All of the topics in this book are addressed within the context of the history of racial oppression that has dominated race relations in the United States since its inception as a nation-state in the 1620s. Across a variety of topics including sport as big business--which Smith terms the Athletic Industrial Complex--to criminal behavior by athletes, to the lack of leadership opportunities for African American athletes, to the question of the biological superiority of African American athletes, Smith argues that any discussion of race and sport must be understood within this context of power and domination. Otherwise the importance of the question itself will always be (a) misunderstood or (b) underestimated. Dr. Earl Smith's 3rd edition of Race, Sport and the American Dream is much-needed scholarship for understanding the life chances for not only young African American athletes -- competing in a new global sports marketplace -- but their family's investments in sports. His analysis is crisp, insightful and he brings to this 3rd edition new empirical evidence for understanding a whole set of interlocking and very complicated issues that have exploded in SportsWorld since the 2nd edition, including, but not limited to: NCAA conference realignment and its impact on college athletes; violence against women perpetrated by college and professional athletes; and a complex theoretical analysis of the decline of Black head coaches, especially in college and professional football and other challenges African Americans face in their lives after sports. -- Kenneth L. Shropshire, David W. Hauck Professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, Director of the Wharton Sports Business Initiative. His most recent book is Negotiate Like the Pros: A Top Sports Negotiator's Lessons for Making Deals,

Building Relationships and Getting What You Want. Earl Smith has been a scholar on the issue of race and sport for many years. His *Race, Sport and the American Dream* is essential reading for anyone interested in the subject. He organized the book in a clear layout that puts forth an important lens on the issue. He gives us theory that demonstrates the mighty struggles of African Americans in sport but also is real-life enough to help us feel both the pain of the barriers and the joy in overcoming them. -- Richard Lapchick, Director, Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, University of Central Florida This well-documented book provides insights into race and sport, as African American athletes have made their way along the path toward an equal playing field and the American dream. Summing up: Recommended. -- CHOICE Magazine

the american dream literature: *Nixon Agonistes* Garry Wills, 2017-06-20 With a new preface: A "stunning" analysis of the troubled Republican president by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (The New York Times Book Review). In this acclaimed biography that earned him a spot on Nixon's infamous "enemies list," Garry Wills takes a thoughtful, in-depth, and often "very amusing" look at the thirty-seventh US president, and draws some surprising conclusions about a man whose name has become synonymous with scandal and the abuse of power (Kirkus Reviews). Arguing that Nixon was a reflection of the country that elected him, Wills examines not only the psychology of the man himself and his relationships with others—from his wife, Pat, to his vice-president, Spiro Agnew—but also the state of the nation at the time, mired in the Vietnam War and experiencing a cultural rift that pitted the young against the old. Putting his findings into moral, economic, intellectual, and political contexts, he ultimately "paints a broad and provocative landscape of the nation's—and Nixon's—travails" (The New York Times). Simultaneously compassionate and critical, and raising interesting perspectives on the shifting definitions of terms like "conservative" and "liberal" over recent decades, *Nixon Agonistes* is a brilliant and indispensable book from one of America's most acclaimed historians.

the american dream literature: *American Saga. The History and Literature of the American Dream of a Better Life* Marjorie Barstow GREENBIE, 1939

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