

English Language and Composition  
Reading Time: 15 minutes  
Suggested Writing Time: 40 Minutes

Directions: The following prompt is based on the accompanying six sources.

This question requires you to integrate a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. When you synthesize sources you refer to them to develop your position and cite them accurately. Your argument should be central; the sources should support this argument. Avoid merely summarizing sources.

Remember to attribute both direct and indirect citations.

### Introduction

The American Dream, the idea that our country offers everyone, regardless of background or circumstance, opportunity, freedom, and the promise of prosperity, is part of the social and cultural history of the United States. From the publication of Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, in which he introduced the idea of the self-made man, to popular plays like *Death of a Salesman* and *Fences* from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, to the current debate over immigration, the idea of the American Dream remains a part of our public discourse. Does our country still provide the promise of prosperity regardless of circumstance? Is it still possible to achieve the American Dream? Has the definition of the American Dream changed?

### Assignment

In an essay that synthesizes **at least three of the sources** for support, construct an argument about the American Dream.

Source A	(Byrd)
Source B	(Obama)
Source C	(Warshauer)
Source D	("America" lyrics from <i>West Side Story</i> )
Source E	(Sanders)
Source F	(It's Our American Dream Too! Photo)
Source G	(Table)

Source A

Byrd, Robert. "Illegal Immigrants Should Not Receive Amnesty." *Opposing Viewpoints: Immigration*. Mary E. Williams. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2004. *Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center*. Gale. MARTIN L KING JR MAGNET SCHOOL. 19 Aug. 2008.

The United States today is in the midst of another immigration wave—the largest since the early 1900s. According to the latest numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau, immigrants now comprise about 10 percent of the total U.S. population. That is about 28.4 million immigrants living in the United States.

During the 1990s, an average of more than one million immigrants—legal and illegal—settled in the United States each year. Over the next 50 years, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that the U.S. population will increase from its present 284 million to more than 400 million. Immigration is projected to contribute to two-thirds of that growth.

These are unprecedented numbers. When I was born in 1917, there were about 102 million people in this country. When I graduated from high school in 1934, there were about 130 million people in this country. And today, there are 284 million people in America. This nation has never attempted to incorporate more than 28 million newcomers at one time into its society, let alone to prepare for an additional 116 million citizens over the span of the next fifty years.

Although many of the immigrants who have entered our country over the last ten years are skilled and are adjusting quickly, others have had problems. In the year 2000, according to the Center for Immigration Studies, 41.4 percent of established immigrants lived in or near poverty, compared to 28.8 percent of natives. The situation had completely reversed itself from thirty years before, when, in 1970, established immigrants were actually less likely than natives to have low incomes, with about 25.7 percent living in or near poverty compared with 35.1 percent of the native population.

The deterioration in the position of immigrants can be explained, in part, by a significant decline in the education of immigrants relative to natives and by the needs of the U.S. economy. In 1970, 7.1 percentage points separated the high school completion rate of established immigrants versus natives. By 2000, established immigrants were more than three times as likely as natives not to have completed high school, with 34.4 percent of established immigrants and 9.6 percent of natives lacking a high school diploma.

The less skilled the immigrants, the worse their employment prospects, the bigger the burden on schools, and the greater the demand for social services. The National Research Council recently estimated, in December 1999, that the net fiscal cost of immigration ranges from \$11 billion to \$20.2 billion per year. That is enough money to fund the operations of the State of West Virginia for about 3 to 6 to 8 years.

Source B

Obama, Barak. "Knox College Commencement Address," June 4, 2005.

The following selection is excerpted from the 2005 commencement address Barack Obama delivered at Knox College in Illinois.

So today I'm here to tell you what most of you already know. This is not us—the option that I just mentioned. Doing nothing. It's not how our story ends—not in this country. America is a land of big dreamers and big hopes.

It is this hope that has sustained us through revolution and civil war, depression and world war, a struggle for civil and social rights and the brink of nuclear crisis. And it is because our dreamers dreamed that we have emerged from each challenge more united, more prosperous, and more admired than before.

So let's dream. Instead of doing nothing or simply defending 20<sup>th</sup>-century solutions, let's imagine together what we could do to give every American a fighting chance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

What if we prepared every child in America with the education and skills they need to compete in the new economy? If we made sure that college was affordable for everyone who wanted to go? If we walked up to those Maytag workers and we said "Your old job is not coming back, but a new job will be there because we're going to seriously retrain you and there's life-long education that's waiting for you"—the sorts of opportunities that Knox [College] has created with the Strong Futures scholarship program.

What if no matter where you worked or how many times you switched jobs, you had health care and a pension that stayed with you always, so you all had the flexibility to move to a better job or start a new business? What if instead of cutting budgets for research and development and science, we fueled the genius and the innovation that will lead to the new jobs and new industries of the future?

Right now, all across America, there are amazing discoveries being made. If we supported these discoveries on a national level, if we committed ourselves to investing in these possibilities, just imagine what it could do for a town like Galesburg. Ten or twenty years down the road, that old Maytag plant could re-open its doors as an ethanol refinery that turned corn into fuel. Down the street, a biotechnology research lab could open up on the cusp of discovering a cure for cancer. And across the way, a new auto company could be busy churning out electric cars. The new jobs created would be filled by American workers trained with new skills and a world-class education.

Source C

Warshauer, Matthew. "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire: Changing Conceptions of the American Dream," *American Studies Today Online*, February 2003.

The "rags to riches" legend has and continues to be a cornerstone of the American Dream. The traditional message taught that through hard work, frugality, and self-sacrifice one could achieve financial success and social mobility. Ben Franklin counseled industry, Abraham Lincoln sang the praises of the northern labor system, and Horatio Alger instilled hope in generations of Americans. All three helped to establish basic guidelines for success in a land of infinite possibility.

There are unquestionably many Americans who continue to abide by such tenets and in doing so are rewarded for their efforts. Yet there are also those who have come to believe that the American Dream's promise of riches is just that, a promise, and as such they feel entitled to instant financial success. Nor has the socio-corporate climate in America disappointed such a belief. Savvy television producers and marketing executives have latched on to the core of the American Dream. They understand that Americans are enthralled with striking it rich. Thus millionaire game shows are designed to make winning seem easy. Lotteries are marketed in such a way that one thinks they have a real shot at cashing in. The reality in both instances is that achieving the American Dream through such means is a long shot at best. Too much chance exists. Too much luck is necessary.

What is the end effect on society? Do millionaire game shows and promises of lottery millions help to further erode the ethic of work and self-reliance that once embodied the American Dream, replacing it with an ethic of luck? Or are these sources of instant gratification merely products of an ethic already lost to some Americans? Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

The even darker side to this cultural phenomenon is how the sense of entitlement has spilled over into a lack of responsibility. The fact that so many Americans are willing to utilize litigation to cash in on the American Dream is disheartening. Failing to take responsibility for their own mistakes, plaintiffs look to the legal system to make misfortune into fortune. Again, marketing and an avalanche of advertising by personal injury lawyers helps encourage would-be injury victims. Still, the readiness of people to sue is a key social factor.

Ultimately, most Americans would like to achieve the American Dream of financial independence. Yet it is the means to achieving it that are essential to the nation's ethical foundations. It seems that many Americans covet the easy road to the Dream and in the process undercut the core values that established the Dream in the first place. Equally culpable are the big businesses that capitalize on the quest for the Dream. In an ironic sense, such businesses are fulfilling the Dream for themselves while dangling the possibility of the Dream over the heads of the public. There can be little doubt that the producers of the millionaire games shows, the state lotteries, and lawyers are getting rich on other people's yearning for the American Dream.

Source D  
"America" from *West Side Story*

(Anita) Puerto Rico, My heart's devotion, let it sink back in the ocean  
Always the hurricanes blowing, always the population growing  
And the money owing, and the sunlight streaming and the natives steaming  
I like the island of Manhattan, smoke on your pipe and put that in!  
(Girls) I like to be in America, OK by me in America, Everything free in America  
(Bernardo) For a small fee in America  
(Anita) Buying on credit is so nice  
(Bernardo) One look at us and they charge twice  
(Rosalia) I'll have my own washing machine.  
(Indio) What will you have, though, to keep clean?  
(Anita) Skyscrapers bloom in America  
(Rosalia) Cadillacs zoom in America  
(Girl) Industry boom in America  
(Boys) Twelve in a room in America.  
(Anita) Lots of new housing with more space  
(Bernardo) Lots of doors slamming in our face  
(Anita) I'll get the terrace apartment  
(Bernardo) Better get rid of your accent  
(Anita) Life can be bright in America  
(Boys) If you can fight in America  
(Girls) Life is all right in America  
(Boys) If you're all white in America  
(Girls) Here you are free and you have pride  
(Boys) Long as you stay on your own side  
(Girls) Free to be anything you choose  
(Boys) Free to wait tables and shine shoes  
(Bernardo) Everywhere grime in America, organized crime in America, terrible time in  
America  
(Anita) You forget I'm in America  
(Bernardo) I think I'll go back to San Juan  
(Anita) I know what boat you can get on  
(Bernardo) Everyone there will give big cheers  
(Anita) Everyone there will have moved here.

Source E

Sandler, Lauren. "The American Nightmare: We Have Everything the American Dream Prescribed. So Why Aren't We Happy?" *Psychology Today* 44.2 (2011): 70-77. Print.

Over half of Americans live not just in the suburbs but in true sprawl. Suburbs were imagined to be more land, more choice, more freedom. Instead, we're stuck on the highway or striding through a parking lot that stretches from Wal-Mart to the horizon. "Sprawl is the collapse of suburbia, the betrayal of the promise," says Andres Duany, coauthor of *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*. The disconnect between "suburban expectation"--the idea of building a family and a community in a tamed expanse of land--and the blighted reality of sprawl explains much of our national dissatisfaction, says Duany. Add to that, he says, the loss of authentic connections that comes from the distinctly American notion of homeownership that plays a key part in fulfilling the dream: you purchase a private realm--your home--to replace a public sphere that no longer exists.

Today's houses are "fully equipped to compensate and mitigate the loss of the public realm," Duany says. Fifty years ago homes averaged 1,700 square feet. Now that figure is up to 2,700, and interior architecture, in Duany's mind, exists to mimic an urban world where few Americans dwell today. The double-height entry hall is the surrogate of the town square; the media room supplants the theater; the master suite practically exists as its own townhouse. Multiple dining areas further service our separation from the outside world: The breakfast nook is the diner; the formal dining room is the special-occasion white-tablecloth restaurant; even the kitchen island functions like a European tabac. "If you had a public realm," Duany says, "you wouldn't have to buy more house." Duany's own work in the New Urbanist movement--planning walkable, mixed-use areas designed to recapture a sense of community--may be the best bet for a resurgence of the public realm. But even a semi-utopian like Duany has a hard time imagining how to reverse the course of American sprawl en masse.

Of course, we've been rocketing toward this point for decades now. The growth of the interstate highway system in the 1950s and '60s accelerated the surge to the suburbs; the car, as Duany says, "has become a prosthetic device." And so we spend our lives ferrying between cubicle and soccer practice, with nary an hour to spare. Not only is all that over-scheduling making us unhappy, but the actual commuting itself is a misery. In 2008, Swiss economists Alois Stutzer and Bruno Frey discovered the so-called "commuting paradox." While people gladly trade a longer daily commute for a bigger home in the suburbs, Stutzer and Frey found a direct link between long drives to work and low well-being. In fact, they reported that people who commute roughly 45 minutes each day have to earn 19 percent more a month than they already do to make the trip worthwhile.

It's not just the bummer of getting to work, it's the reality of staying there. Americans have the longest workweek in the developed world. In Norway and the Netherlands, workers clock in 1,400 hours per year. Americans, meanwhile, average 1,900 hours. In fact, we spend more time at the office than the citizens of any other industrialized country--and all but two developing nations.

But a strong work ethic--and the freedom to spend its returns on whatever we please--is exactly what has given rise to the best of the American Dream, rendering a Canaan out of this land for hopeful immigrants around the world. What could be the issue with all that honorable labor? Plenty, says psychologist Tim Kasser of Knox College, whose recent work has found a negative correlation between the number of hours a person works and life satisfaction. "The more people focus on a materialistic pathway to happiness, the less happy they tend to be, and the less happy they make others," he says.

Source F  
It's Our American Dream Too! Photograph



Photo selected by SIRS staff

Vianney Rubio, 5, of Santa Ana, Calif., protests the arrests of Hispanic illegal immigrant workers at Southern California airports.

## Expanding the American Dream (1915-2006)

POPULATION AT	100 MILLION	200 MILLION	300 MILLION
Median house size (sq. feet)	N.A.	1,525*	2,227
Persons per household	4.5	3.3	2.6
Percentage of households that owned their home	45.9%	63.6%	68.9%
Motor vehicle registrations	2.5 million	98.9 million	273.2 million

\*1973 data

SOURCE: Census Bureau