What is the American Dream and how real is it?

Writing Assignment and Sample Paper
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Key Points from:
'There are now two Americas. My country is a horror show' by David Simon

Two Americas:
“There are definitely two Americas.” It’s “not just about race, it's about something even more terrifying. It's about class” (Simon, 7).

Greed & Selfishness:
“… we've descended into what can only be described as greed. This is just greed. This is an inability to see that we're all connected, that the idea of two Americas is implausible, or two Australias, or two Spains or two Frances.”

Retrenchment:
The inability to see we’re all connected results in a number of problems, one of which is retrenchment, “a retrenchment in terms of family income, you're seeing the abandonment of basic services, such as public education, functional public education” (Simon, 4).

Erosion of the electoral process
“Right now capital has effectively purchased the government” so that “the popular will never actually emerged in any of that legislative process” (Simon, 7).

Capitalism, the profit metric, social compact, and & Labor:
In Simon’s view the “ultimate tragedy of capitalism in our time” is “that it has achieved its dominance without regard to a social compact, without being connected to any other metric for human progress.” In the US, he affirms, “we measure things by profit.” The “notion that capital is the metric, that profit is the metric by which we're going to measure the health of our society is one of the fundamental mistakes of the last 30 years” (Simon, 2). Throughout his essay, Simon advocates socialistic reform but maintains that he is “utterly committed to the idea that capitalism has to be the way we generate mass wealth in the coming century,” but, he maintains that “it's not a blueprint for how to build the just society” (Simon, 5). The lack of justice inherent in capitalism is “the diminishment of labour” and by extension, as Simon explains the diminishment of human beings (Simon, 5).

The horror show – marginalization:
The diminishment of labor and people in general is the hallmark of what Simon refers to as the “horror show.” “What,” he asks, “are we going to do with all these people that we've managed to marginalize” (Simon, 6)?

The American dream deferred:
“We have become something other than what we claim for the American dream,” says Simon, “and all because of our inability to basically share, to even contemplate a socialist impulse” (Simon, 4).
Key points from:
*The Declaration of Independence*

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

Write a paper about the gap between rich and poor in the United States. Make reference to David Simon’s speech, ‘There are now two Americas. My country is a horror show’ along with whatever insights you have gained from your own experiences and observations.

The paper must be 3 double-spaced pages and satisfy all of the specifications and formatting requirements on following three pages of this handout to receive credit.

Topic: The gap between rich and poor in the US.

Thesis: In his speech ‘There are now two Americas. My country is a horror show’ given at the Festival of Dangerous Ideas in Sydney, David Simon discusses the ever widening gap between rich and poor in the US and “how capitalism has lost sight of its social compact” (Simon, 1).

Conclusion: In my view, the American dream, the vision of a just and egalitarian society has never really been much more than a dream.

All arguments in the essay will be evaluated in part as to the degree that they are thesis-centered, meaning that the instructor will grade papers in part on the basis of how well the arguments support the thesis statement. Other considerations will be coherence, organization, and general proficiency with the language which includes the ability to write grammatically correct sentences.

Essay Outline:

Introduction: Write about the American dream, the idea of equal opportunity.
   Mention David Simon’s speech ‘There are now two Americas.
   My country is a horror show’

Body: Discuss key points in Simon’s speech.
   a. The two Americas – the gap between rich and poor
   b. Greed and selfishness
   c. Retrenchment
   d. Erosion of the electoral process
   e. Capitalism, the profit metric, social compact, and labor
   f. The horror show - marginalization
   g. The American Dream Deferred

Conclusion: Review the ideas discussed in the introduction and consider the possible future for the US.
Specifications for the Papers

1. Each essay must be stapled in the upper left-hand corner. **Papers that are not stapled will not be accepted.**

2. Each page of each essay must have typed page numbers in the upper right-hand corner. **Papers without typed page numbers in the upper right hand corner will not be accepted.**

3. Each essay must be typed. **Essays that are not typed will not be accepted.**

4. Font size must be 12.

5. Font style must be *Times New Roman*.

6. Each paragraph must be indented.

7. There must be no more than one double-space between paragraphs.

8. The name of the student, professor, course, and date must be flush left with a double-space between each. See example on the following page.

9. Each essay must be double-spaced.

10. For citations more than one sentences, use the following specifications. See example on page 9.

   a. single-space
   b. font size 10
   c. left indent at 1 right indent at 5.5.

11. Quotation marks and the appropriate MLA citation for all quotes must be used. The absence of quotation marks where needed is **PLAGIARISM**. See example of **internal punctuation** on the following page. **WARNING:** Omission of quotation marks is grounds for an F for the paper and possibly for the final grade.

12. All sources used in the essay must be cited in a “Works Cited” page and be done according to MLA formats. See example on the page after the following page.
Formatting Your Paper

First Page
This is an example of the top of the first page of a paper.
Use double-spaces. The title must be a double-space below the date and centered.

John Smith
Professor Abraham
English 201
May 7, 2009
Greek Tragedy

Internal Punctuation

When citing a source in the text do as follows: “Oedipus in the play is a free agent” (Fagles, 149).
When paraphrasing do as follows: Fagles maintains that Oedipus has free will (Fagles, 149).

Long Quotations
This is an example of how to do a citation longer than one sentence.

“In the very first year of our century Sigmund Freud in his Interpretation of Dreams offered a famous and influential interpretation of Oedipus the King:

Oedipus Rex is what is known as a tragedy of destiny. Its tragic effect is said to lie in the contrast between supreme will of the gods and the vain attempts of mankind to escape the evil that threatens them. The lesson which, it is said, the deeply moved spectator should learn from the tragedy is submission to the divine will and realization of his own impotence.

(Trans. James Strachey)

This passage is of course a landmark in the history of modern thought, and it is fascinating to observe that this idea, which, valid or not, has had enormous influence, stems from an attempt to answer a literary problem – why does the play have this overpowering effect on modern audiences?” (Knox, Bernard. Sophocles – The Three Theban Plays. Translated by Robert Fagles. Penguin Books. Copyright by Bernhard Knox, 1982. 132. Print.)
The Works Cited page must be on a separate page.

Works Cited


The American Dream Deferred
By Andrew Gottlieb

Introduction:

The American dream is predicated on equal opportunity, the notion that everyone, regardless of class, race, religion, or ethnicity has an equal chance for success. The promise of such a dream stems from the Declaration of Independence which certifies that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” The ideal of equality so beautifully expressed by Thomas Jefferson has, throughout the course of US history, collided with a harsher reality. At the time George Washington was president only white men with property had the right to vote. Slavery was alive and well and would not end until 1865, almost a century after the signing of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Even after the slaves were liberated, segregation was the rule of the day. Jim Crow laws imposed severe limitations on the rights of former slaves. The Lousiana Car Act of 1890, which prevented African Americans from riding in the same railway carriages as whites was upheld in the Supreme Court case of 1896, Plessy v. Fergusson establishing the dubious principle of separate but equal. It wasn’t until 1954 that this unfortunate decision was overruled in Brown v. Board of Education. Not only have African Americans been deprived of equal rights; women too have historically been without equality. It has only been in the twentieth century that women attained the right to vote and even then
were not accorded the same treatment as men in the work place. When we think of inequality in America it is usually race and gender that we have in mind, but there is yet another dimension of inequality in the US, one as old as history itself. It is one which has been the basis for division from time immemorial and it is still with us today. This is the schism of class.

Economic disparity is woven into the very fabric of our society and appears to be growing wider every day. In his speech ‘There are now two Americas. My country is a horror show’ given at the Festival of Dangerous Ideas in Sydney, David Simon discusses the ever widening gap between rich and poor in the US and “how capitalism has lost sight of its social compact” (Simon, 1).

**Body a. Two Americas – the gap between rich and poor:**

Simon begins his speech by telling his audience that “America is a country that is now utterly divided when it comes to its society, its economy, its politics (Simon, 1).” He affirms that “There are definitely two Americas.” It’s “not just about race, it's about something even more terrifying. It's about class” (Simon, 7).

**Body b. Greed and selfishness:**

Another point Simon makes is that underlying this class-based inequality is the self-oriented and greedy mindset of capitalism. Simon writes: “… we've descended into what can only be described as greed. This is just greed. This is an inability to see that we're all connected, that the idea of two Americas is implausible, or two Australias, or two Spains or two Frances” (Simon, 4).

**Body c. Retrenchment:**

The inability to see we’re all connected results in a number of problems, one of which is retrenchment, “a retrenchment in terms of family income, you're seeing the abandonment
of basic services, such as public education, functional public education” (Simon, 4). Simon also refers to “an alleged war on dangerous drugs that is in fact merely a war on the poor” which he explains has resulted in making the US “the most incarcerative state in the history of mankind” (Simon, 4). “No other country on the face of the Earth,” he maintains, “jails people at the number and rate that we are” (Simon, 4).

**Body d. Erosion of the electoral process**

Another problem stemming from the mindset of self-interest is the erosion of the electoral process. “Right now” he maintains, “capital has effectively purchased the government” so that “the popular will never actually emerged in any of that legislative process” (Simon, 7).

**Body e. Capitalism, the profit metric, social compact, and & Labor:**

The selfishness from which the above mentioned problems stems is part and parcel of our capitalistic system which is rooted in the craving for profit. In Simon’s view the “ultimate tragedy of capitalism in our time” is “that it has achieved its dominance without regard to a social compact, without being connected to any other metric for human progress.” In the US, he affirms, “we measure things by profit.” The “notion that capital is the metric, that profit is the metric by which we're going to measure the health of our society is one of the fundamental mistakes of the last 30 years” (Simon, 2). Throughout his essay, Simon advocates socialistic reform but maintains that he is “utterly committed to the idea that capitalism has to be the way we generate mass wealth in the coming century,” but, he maintains that “it's not a blueprint for how to build the just society” (Simon, 5). The lack of justice inherent in capitalism is “the diminishment of labour” and by extension, as Simon explains, the diminishment of human beings (Simon, 5).
Body f. The horror show – marginalization:

This diminishment of labor and people in general is the hallmark of what Simon refers to as the “horror show” (Simon, 7). “What,” he asks, “are we going to do with all these people that we've managed to marginalize” (Simon, 6)? The marginalization of the disenfranchised is the ultimate concern. When large numbers of people become little more than outcasts, the integrity and strength of a society is endangered. Certainly, the notion of democracy under such a circumstance is more than a little dubious.

Body g. The American dream deferred:

And so, the American dream, the vision of a just, egalitarian society, is deferred. “We have become something other than what we claim for the American dream,” says Simon, “and all because of our inability to basically share, to even contemplate a socialist impulse” (Simon, 4).

Conclusion:

Simon’s assertions regarding the erosion of the electoral system and the increasing schism between rich poor, the two Americas is accurate. What his essay is missing is a broader historical perspective. As I pointed out earlier, the US has never been a truly egalitarian society. Over time, however much progress has been made to overcome some of the most fundamental shortcomings of our nation. We no longer have slavery, laws upholding segregation, and women have made great strides in their struggle for an equitable position in the workplace. Mention of these advances in no way nullifies the assertion that the gap between rich and poor has in recent years between growing wider. There are two Americas, but then there always have been, and this is not a fact exclusively relevant to the US. What country on earth can claim to be free of
such a division now or in the past? It is however likely that we are now in a phase during which this division is growing wider. Many have complained about the increasingly overwhelming concentration of wealth in the hands of a small minority. Perhaps, more and more of us are marginalized while others have succeeded in buying the system. In my view, however, the American dream, the vision of a just and egalitarian society has never really been much more than a dream. It was deferred from the very beginning when only white men with property could vote and slavery was the order of the day.
Works Cited

David Simon: ‘There are now two Americas. My country is a horror show.’ The Observer, Saturday 7 December 2013.

The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription. U.S. National Archives & Records Administration - 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD, 20740-6001, • 1-86-NARA-NARA •