

Lessons 4 and 5: Determine the central ideas of chapter 1, and support analysis of the development of central ideas in Chapter 1 using textual evidence.

TLW Analyze the development of the central ideas in chapter 1 from *The American Dream* by Jim Cullen, citing textual evidence and analyze how these central ideas interact and built upon one another.

Step 1: Read your assigned passage.

Step 2: Answer the question associated with your excerpt on your guided notes.

Step 3: Determine the **main** idea(s) of your section of text, and write a **brief** summary of your section of text. Include a piece of textual evidence that proves the main idea.

Step 4: Share your findings with the class.

Step 5: Determine the two most central ideas for all of chapter 1. See the last page of this reading guide.

Step 6: Determine how they build on one another. See the last page of this reading guide.

Step 7: Synthesize all of the above, and add to your central ideas graphic organizer.

Section 1: Pages 12-13

“It is only because of their dream that those Americans who followed had theirs”(13).

Explain whether you agree or disagree with this statement. Why?

... that Americans, following them, may be happy.

Recent scholarly trends have emphasized the degree to which the Puritans were part of a broad wave of early modern European conquest in a hemisphere that was neither “discovered,” “new,” or even a “world.” In such a context, the important point is that the Puritans not only made it difficult for the people who lived *among* them; they made it impossible for anyone to live *alongside* them. In the succinct words of a literary critic in the 1980s, the Puritans were people “who massacred Indians and established the self-righteous religion and politics that

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determined American ideology.” Of course, they were not alone in this regard. From the Spaniards who enslaved natives (and imported Africans) to the British who sold disease-riddled blankets to Indians in North America, genocide was at best an incidental and at worst an avowedly embraced practice of European societies in the place they named “America.” But if the Puritans were no worse than their contemporaries, there’s little reason to think they were any better, as their track record in the Pequot (1637–38), King Philip’s (1675–76), and other wars attests. One does not have to sentimentalize the Indians—who, in many cases, gave as good as they got—to nevertheless conclude that the lives of generations of Americans were only made possible by the slaughter of countless innocents.

And yet I admire them greatly. This attachment is in some degree irrational, tethered to some of the fondest memories of my early adulthood, like driving by white clapboard churches in Maine. But there’s a firmer foundation for my feelings, too. To begin explaining why, I’ll echo an heir of people the Puritans and others enslaved: they had a dream. In and of itself, that’s not enough: so did Adolf Hitler. Nevertheless, the Puritans’ dream, however strange and even repellent, was an exceptionally powerful one that had tremendous consequences, most of them unintended. In a palpable sense, it is only because of their dream that those Americans who followed had theirs, and only because of their ambitions that later Americans had the terms and standards by which they justly condemned the Puritans.

They had a dream. You don’t have to love it, but you’ll never really understand what it means to be an American of any creed, color, or gender if you don’t try to imagine the shape of that dream—and what happened when they tried to realize it.

SECTION TWO: page 15

“The irreducible foundation of all varieties of Protestantism was this: a belief that the world was a corrupt place, but one that could be reformed. . . . This faith in reform became the central legacy of American Protestantism and the cornerstone of what became the American Dream”(15).

Why is the belief in the possibility of reform so important to the idea of the American Dream?



Amid all the various abstruse concepts that complicate discussions of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Puritanism—episcopacies and presbyteries, Arminians and Antinomians, covenants of grace and covenants of works—the irreducible foundation of *all* varieties of Protestantism was this: a belief that the world was a corrupt place, but one that could be reformed. *How* it could be reformed, of course, was another question, one that provoked all kinds of squabbling. But that it *could* be reformed has been central, a belief—actually, there were times it was an aggressive assertion—that distinguished sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestantism from Roman Catholicism (which did reactively reform itself by its own lights, though never enough for Protestants skeptical of its emphasis on institutional authority). This faith in reform became the central legacy of American Protestantism and the cornerstone of what became the American Dream. Things—religious and otherwise—could be different.

For the first generation of American Puritans, reform meant starting over, building a new society of believers for themselves and their children. Actually, this possibility had first been glimpsed in the sixteenth

“Stoddard added that they ‘would not have left England merely for their own quietness; but they were afraid that their children would be corrupted there,’ From the very beginning, then, a notion that one’s children might have a better life has been a core component of the American Dream”(16).

According to this quotation, how did fear and hope work together to motivate the Puritans?

16th century by Sir Thomas More, a man who persecuted English Protestants before himself becoming a martyr at the hands of Henry VIII, who decided they had the right idea after all and founded a Protestant sect of his own, the Church of England. In his classic work *Utopia*, first published in 1516, More imagined a place—inspired by the discovery of a previously unknown hemisphere, in which he had a keen interest—where the opportunity to create a new society would lead to religious freedom and a communitarian approach toward property. More’s *Utopia* was a relatively abstract thought experiment, but in the following century more pragmatic utopians, who weren’t much more happy with the Church of England than More himself was, moved toward actually acting on such impulses. These Separatists initially tried to achieve their goals more modestly by leaving England for Holland, where a successful struggle to achieve independence from Spanish Catholic rule inspired the belief that perhaps here was a true holy land. Yet here too they were disappointed. The most far-sighted of these Separatists “began both deeply to apprehend their present dangers [of moral corruption] and wisely to foresee the future and think of timely remedy,” their future governor, William Bradford, later recorded in *Of Plymouth Plantation*. “In the agitation of their thoughts, and much discourse of things hereabout, they began to incline to this conclusion: of removal to some other place.” Writing almost a hundred years later, the Puritan minister Solomon Stoddard added that they “would not have left England merely for their own quietness; but they were afraid that their children would be corrupted there.” From the very beginning, then, a notion that one’s children might have a better life has been a core component of the American Dream.

SECTION 4: 17-18

“Their confidence—in themselves, in their sense of mission for their children, and in a God they believed was on their side—impelled them with ruthless zeal to gamble everything for the sake of a vision. In the process they accomplished the core task in the achievement of any American Dream; they became masters of their own destiny”(18).

What individual traits seem to be important in the attempt to accomplish an American Dream? How do you see these traits in modern Americans?

Principles, hope, and liberty were powerful attractions, and would remain so for subsequent generations who came here from all over the world. But it's worth remembering that unlike many of those who followed, the Pilgrims were not immigrants with nothing to lose. Without minimizing the challenges faced by many of the teeming masses who arrived under the gaze of the Statue of Liberty, these immigrants were relatively well educated people who in many cases had substantial financial resources at their disposal, making their decision to leave everything behind all the more striking. This sense of worldly prosperity was even more true of the Puritans who arrived in Massachusetts Bay in 1630. They were certainly not the first people of means who threw away their security for the sake of an idea; figures ranging from Saint Francis to Vladimir Lenin have done similarly. But the scope of the Puritan enterprise, both in its collective nature and its logistical complications, was amazing. Here, truly, were some astonishingly committed people, people who were all the more so for *not* being solitary geniuses, battle-hardened soldiers, impoverished peasants, or unwilling slaves.

So it was that some people with a strong sense of religious mission founded a new world they hoped would become a model for the old one. Their confidence—in themselves, in their sense of mission for their children, and in a God they believed was on their side—impelled them with ruthless zeal to gamble everything for the sake of a vision. In the process, they accomplished the core task in the achievement of any American Dream: they became masters of their own destiny.

But a good Puritan would never put it that way.

Central Ideas Help Chapter 1- Be sure to add to your chart.

1. Central Idea 1: What is a cornerstone of the American Dream according to this chapter?
 - a. To get the answer:
 - i. What is the motivating factor for the Puritans to move to the new world?
 - ii. How does this motivation affect the American Dream today?

2. Central idea 2: A belief in _____ is very important to the concept of the American Dream.
 - a. To get the answer:
 - i. What do the Puritans believe in?
 - ii. What do Americans today believe must be possible in order to believe in the American Dream?

Central Ideas Development Help

1. How are the two central ideas related?
2. How does the second central idea support the first?
3. Why can't the second central idea be independent in and of itself?