



**EXTENDED ESSAY: THE AMERICAN DREAMS IN *HOW  
STARBUCKS SAVED MY LIFE***

**WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GATES GILL**

**A FINAL PROJECT**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement  
For S-1 Degree in American Cultural Studies  
In English Department, Faculty of Humanities  
Diponegoro University

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A2B008062

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**

**DIPONEGORO UNIVERSITY**

**SEMARANG**

**2014**

## EXTENDED ESSAY: THE AMERICAN DREAMS IN HOW STARBUCKS

### SAVED MY LIFE WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GATES GILL

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#### ABSTRACT

American dream adalah sebuah konsep yang meyakini bahwa kesuksesan berawal dari suatu kerja keras. Istilah ini biasanya mengacu pada kesuksesan finansial, kecukupan materi dan ketenaran. Sejarah dari American dream sendiri dapat ditelusuri melalui sejarah dari Negara Amerika Serikat, sejak dari jaman Puritan. Orang-orang dari berbagai belahan dunia datang ke Amerika Serikat dengan satu mimpi yang sama, yaitu American dream. American dream juga menginspirasi banyak penulis novel dalam membuat karya mereka, seperti misalnya Michael Gates Gill dengan karyanya yang berjudul *How Starbucks Saved My Life*. Novel *How Starbucks Saved My Life* diciptakan sekitar tahun 2007, berkisah tentang kehidupan pribadinya sendiri sebagai seorang pengusaha periklanan terkenal dan terbesar di Amerika yang telah mencapai puncak kesuksesannya, namun kemudian ‘jatuh’ secara tiba-tiba dan harus mengalami keterpurukan dalam segala aspek kehidupannya.

*Extended essay* ini mengulas tentang American dream yang diangkat dari novel *How Starbucks Saved My Life* karya Michael Gates Gill. Dalam membuat *extended essay* ini, penulis menggunakan metode penelitian kepustakaan. Penelitian kepustakaan yang digunakan adalah pengambilan sumber dari buku-buku terkait di perpustakaan dan berbagai sumber lainnya melalui internet. *Extended essay* ini menggunakan pendekatan ekspresif karena pendekatan tersebut merupakan pendekatan yang paling cocok digunakan untuk mempelajari kisah hidup pengarangnya melalui bukunya. *Extended essay* ini fokus pada analisis American dream yang dicapai dalam fase-fase hidup tokoh utamanya, yaitu Michael Gates Gill. Penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa Gill, yang walaupun ia adalah seorang kulit putih, tetapi ia juga melakukan banyak perjuangan dan pengorbanan untuk dapat bangkit kembali dari keterpurukan yang dialami dan menggapai mimpinya, American dream. Elemen – elemen American Dream yang direpresentasikan dalam novel ini adalah *Life, Liberty (Equal Opportunity), dan Pursuit of Happiness*.

*Keywords: American Dream, Starbucks, Elements, Life, Liberty, Pursuits of Happiness.*

## **1. Introduction**

Novel is one of the literary works. Everyone who cares about the world around them tries to reflect it as a documentary picture of life. Moreover, novel also tells a story which happens in the present, past, or future. By reading a novel, people not only know the information of the events that have happened but also experience the impacts that will influence their idea of reality and history.

The story of the novel that will be discussed by the author takes place in the hectic New York City, United States. As a nation, America has a very long history and quite interesting. In a historical definition, everything that happens today is the result of the past and will shape the future. Then, this is what can be used as a benchmark to measure the changes. Thus it can be certain, that when examined historically, it would be seen the true values of this nation. The values at a time have been a dream or wishful thinking, but on the other side are able to be the direction and compass on the journey of the United States. American Dreams so these values are known. The dream is the goal, the highest desire of every individual. In this case, American Dreams is a dream of a nation and also every person who lives in it. This dream also which have colored the history of the United States to date.

Based on the explanation, the writer chooses a novel to reveal the elements of American Dream contained in the characters and the story of the novel. The novel is entitled *How Starbucks Saved My Life* written by Michael Gates Gill. This novel became one of New York Times bestsellers because many people are inspired by the story and they want to know more from Michael by his next

books.

*How Starbucks Saved My Life* is one of the popular American novels that give the reader a lot of lessons about life. One interesting point is that the novel is based on a true story directly experienced by the author. By his novel, Gill presents a story not only discussing his life and the difficulties he faced, but also many good times that he captures to share with the reader.

The same topic, American Dream, has previously discussed by Mahendra Putra Adyaksa, a student of English Department Diponegoro University class of 2008, as a final project. However, the title of the novel and the content of the discussion are different with this extended essay. He uses a novel entitled *Dreams in the Golden Country, The Diary of Zipporah Feldman, a Jewish girl immigrant* written by Kathryn Lasky as the material study. Moreover, in the discussion he also added about family value that contained in the novel. While in this extended essay, the writer wants to reveal some of the elements of American Dreams contained in the characters and the story of the novel entitled *How Starbucks Saved My Life* by Michael Gates Gill. In addition, through this essay, the author also wants to explain the reader about these elements of American Dreams one by one in more detail and relate it to the story of the novel. From the story the reader can learn how to respond to a failure in life and tried to rise again to reach a success.

The theory used to analyze this novel is expressive approach. Expressive approach is one of the theoretical approaches proposed by M.H. Abrams, that is how to analyze a literary work by connecting literature with the author.

Furthermore, Abrams explained:

This is based on the expressive theory which considers a work of art as essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the novelist's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a novel therefore are the attributes and actions of the novelist's mind. (Abrams, 1956:22).

On the other hand, Rohrberger and Woods considers this expressive approach as biographical approach. In this context, they explained:

The biographical approach refers to the necessity for an appreciation of the ideas and personality of the author to an understanding of the literary object. On the basis of this approach, a work of art is a reflection of a personality, that in the esthetic experience the reader shares the authors' consciousness, and that at least part of the readers' response is to the author's personality. Consequently, we attempt to learn and to apply this knowledge in our attempt to understand his writing(s). (Rohrberger and Woods, 1971:8)

Expressive approach is more fundamental approach to the author as the creator of the literary work and more focused studies on the author's temperament and the expression of feelings. The expressive approach is about someone's mind or feelings which are expressed and then poured into the form of the work and writings, to establish a literary work that has its own sense of values.

From the explanation above we know that literature can not present if no one created it, so the creator of literary work is extremely important position in studying and appreciating a literary work. Thoughts and feelings of the author is the primary source and subject matter in a novel. Properties and actions that come from the author thinking makes a literary work becomes media to understand the author's own life circumstances. For this expressive approach is intended to

determine the extent of the author's success in expressing ideas, imagination and spontaneity.

## **2. Elements of American Dream**

The term American Dream has a few interpretations, but one of the most popular is “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” which is the dream that most Americans strive for. In simpler terms, The American Dream is the opportunity of the pursuit of freedom, opportunity and satisfaction of needs and wants. The term was firstly initiated by James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* written in 1931. He states that American dream is the right of equal opportunity and success for all. It is the freedom of everyone in America to pursue their individual hopes and dreams. It is the pursuit of prosperity and opportunity that drives people to push their own limits and persevere in order to lead successful lives and achieve whatever goals they set.

([www.openlibrary.org/The\\_epic\\_of\\_America](http://www.openlibrary.org/The_epic_of_America))

The American Dream is a reality. Every citizen of the United States of America has the opportunity to get an achievement no matter what prejudices they may face, depending on their perseverance and luck. If people come to America underprivileged or destitute, then they have the chance to turn that around through hard work and determination. As the explanation of the term states, everyone has the opportunity to achieve the American Dream, depending on how much effort they put in or how fortunate they are. In other words, some people will be able to work hard and achieve their dreams, while others will work hard and not end up

being fortunate enough to complete their goals.

So far we know that the American Dream is only true for immigrants who came to America. They are people who are considered as the inferior position because of their skin color. As we know that in United States, white people has the highest position, because they were the first in the country. They are considered to already have a very decent life in a very big country, so it is unlikely they will pursue what is called the American Dream. However it turns out that assumption is wrong. American Dream can be applied to everyone, including white people. In the discussion of this novel, we will see something extraordinary, that Michael Gates Gill, a white man who was at the peak of success was having a struggle of life to pursue the American Dream. Something he never imagined would happen in his life.

## **2.1 Life**

The first element mentioned in a sentence of the *Declaration of Independence* which then became the idea of the American Dream is, Life. Generation after generation, individuals and families have come to a land called America in high hopes of them to have a successful life. They come with high hopes for finding a job to support their family and in creating a new family here. These generations do not only stop here but will continue for the times to come. The American Dream is not something they simply hope to attain one day but are willing to work for it. By whatever means necessary they are willing to work for their dream.

The novel explains the life of a man, Michael Gates Gill, and his personal experiences. He is the only one son of Brendan Gill, a famous writer in New York. He came from a respectable family background so he got many privileges in life. Michael Gates Gill was born with all the material advantages that America can offer, with an acclaimed New Yorker staff writer for a father, and spent his childhood surrounded by famous intellectuals and socially connected people. He already has all the things that people call the American Dream. A large house, a successful job, a wonderful family, all of that he has achieved even since he was born until he reaches the age of fifty. Meanwhile, people around him must be hard to be able to be in his position. For example, Crystal and the other employees of Starbucks outlet, they had to work from morning to nights to fulfill their daily needs. To be able to achieve the success that is owned by Gill maybe it just a dream for them. So, it was a dream that they are pursuing, a decent and successful life. ([www.mikegatesgill.com](http://www.mikegatesgill.com))

## **2.2 Liberty (Equal Opportunity)**

American Dream actually existed first even before the United State of Independence was issued as a form that the United States has been entirely free from all forms of colonialism. Because this claim for freedom, the United States then makes itself as a country that is sensible to liberalism or ideologies based on human freedom. The idea of the American Dream appeared in about the 1600s, when the American people have a great desire to manage their own land, create



jobs themselves, realize the happiness of freedom of the colonies, and separating the basic principles of religion with governance principles.

Hard work and perseverance are not the only factors in achieving the American Dream. It also comes down to how fortunate you are. Some people will be very lucky and be able to achieve their dreams with ease. Some others unfortunately will get a “bad break” and have to work harder than most to get to where they want to be and achieve their dreams. This applies to all people with various races who live in the country, even including black people, because there is a presumption that the black people were far below the caste of white people, moreover, if the black people is a woman. The issue of discrimination already exists and growing old, and it’s possible that the issue still exists to this day. (www.ego4u.com)

In the contemporary era, the notion of the American Dream then shifted back. As a country that adopts a liberal, a resident of the United States then demanded gender equality. This happens because in the previous period, the seat of government and public sectors are controlled by men only. Therefore, as women who feel they have the ability to work in the public sector, the United States women then struggled to get the same rights and equality with men. Therefore, in this case the definition of the American Dream is shifted, the freedom not to discriminated based on race, religion, gender and origin. Thus, the implementation of public sector jobs now involves women in it.

If drawn into the novel *How Starbucks Saved My Life*, as seen in figure of Crystal, who became a manager at one of the Starbucks outlets are very well

known in America. Not only that, Crystal who is an African-American woman, even he became the boss of Michael Gates Gill, who is an American white man. Although, before Gill received the job, he thought to himself, “Would I, an old white man, be willing to work for a young black woman?” (p.15). however, Gill remained on his decision to work at Starbucks. In addition to Crystal, co-workers at the outlet Gill are also mostly African-American. But it does not make Gill give different treatment to them, and there is no discrimination as long as they are partners.

Another example, one of Michael daughter’s is also very concerned about diversity. She is very concerned for the Africa-Americans around her. Since childhood she has seen so many injustice that must be accepted by people who are not born in the right class and the right skin color. One time, when her father put her to the school there are only white students in it, she felt that her father did not understand what diversity is and what equality is. But since Michael works at Starbucks, he began to realize about it. He even worked together with people with different skin colors and they treat him very well without any difference with others.

So in this novel, all the characters already have their own freedom. Although at the time of the flashbacks, there are some minor characters who have to struggle to gain their freedom from discrimination that implied by Michael to the African-America that are working for him, until he realized the point of view of his daughter, Laura, to the importance of freedom or equal for every person.

Now I realized with a painful awareness how wrong I had been to try and trifle Laura's view of the "real world" as unfair to those not born in the right class with the right skin color who could afford the right higher education. (p.42)

### **2.3 Pursuit of Happiness**

America is the only country where the "pursuit of happiness" is actually guaranteed in writing. Pursuit of happiness is one of the most famous phrases in the United State *Declaration of Independence*, which was primarily written by Thomas Jefferson. He created the phrase "pursuit of happiness" in his book *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Thomas Jefferson took the phrase "pursuit of happiness" from Locke. Pursuit of happiness is a necessity, and that necessity became the foundation of liberty. Far from simply comparing "happiness" with pleasure, property, or the satisfaction of desire, Locke distinguishes between "imaginary happiness" and "true happiness." Thus, in the passage where he creates the phrase "pursuit of happiness," Locke writes:

*The necessity of pursuing happiness [is] the foundation of liberty. As therefore the highest perfection of intellectual nature lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness; so the care of ourselves, that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness, is the necessary foundation of our liberty. The stronger ties we have to an unalterable pursuit of happiness in general, which is our greatest good, and which, as such, our desires always follow, the more are we free from any necessary determination of our will to any particular action..."* (p. 348)

Pursuit of happiness in the novel *How Starbucks Saved My Life* can be seen through character of Gill as a main character in the story. Since his youth, it can be said that Gill already has life abundant with happiness, a successful job,

fame, and the perfect family. However, it has not made him feel satisfied yet. In fact, he is still trying to find happiness, until finally he had to give up all the happiness was gone. It began when Gill met a young woman in a gym, which he thought could give him 'another happiness'. Not as he expected, that forbidden relationship just make his life worse. However, Gill didn't give up. He wants to fix the relationship back with his family, which is by working hard at Starbucks. Thus, he can give a true happiness for his wife and his children, Elizabeth, Annie, Laura, and Charles, as well as of course himself. A true happiness is not about money, but it is about friends and a good attitude, and anyone can get through difficult times in life.

In this novel, Michael repeatedly said that he was really happy and enjoying his job at Starbucks. Many times he compared with the first job now. He found the atmosphere very different from when he worked at JWT with high position as compared to when he was working at a small coffee shop on Broadway. That's what makes he feels a real happiness.

*Be honest, Mike, calling myself by my new Starbucks name. You feel good about what you are doing. Just because you are wearing a green apron rather than a Brooks Brothers suit doesn't mean you can't enjoy it!*  
(p.72)

### **3. Conclusion**

Through this extended essay, it can conclude that some of the elements of American Dreams are contained in the characters and the story of the novel entitled *How Starbucks Saved My Life* by Michael Gates Gill. To make The

American Dream come true, all Americans have to work together. The American Dream is supposed to be for each American, despite all social groups. For a lot of people The American Dream is connected to becoming wealthy and the ability to achieve everything if one only works hard enough for it (From rags to riches). For others it is much more and is beyond materialism. For them it is the dream of living a simple, happy and fulfilling life and the most important features being faith and equality. The American Dream also is about liberty and America being the country of unlimited opportunities.

Gill's main argument is that people can live a better life without money and fame. His argument is created when he loses his job near the beginning of the story. From there, Gill presents the readers with an argument that money is not everything in life. All they need is friends and a good attitude, and anyone can get through difficult times in life. Gill presents many experiences which help build on this argument throughout the book, but never directly states it. However, Gill does present points stating how life at Starbucks is much better than his old job and wouldn't change his job for anything. He believes that readers can learn the lessons from his life and they can survive in their own downturns.

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Posted on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2011