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Chapter 1: Background on John Steinbeck

1. John Steinbeck: The Man and His Work 19
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Nobel Prize-winning author John Steinbeck is considered among the most significant American writers of the twentieth century. He received national attention in 1937 for his novel *Of Mice and Men*, which since its publication has inspired a widely varied critical response.
2. Steinbeck's Experience as a Ranch Hand 25
Informed *Of Mice and Men*
Jay Parini
Steinbeck biographers frequently point to Steinbeck's personal experience as a ranch hand and a bindlestiff, or hobo, as being influential in his creation of *Of Mice and Men*. Steinbeck did not foresee, however, that this experience and the resulting novella would propel him to a level of celebrity he would never fully embrace.
3. The Social Environment in *Of Mice and Men* 34
Joyce Moss and George Wilson
Events in history, as well as events happening at the time Steinbeck penned *Of Mice and Men*, help readers better understand the novel. Focusing on the hopes and hopelessness in the lives of migrant workers, Steinbeck portrays a class of people who struggled for survival in a harsh and even brutal environment.

Chapter 2: *Of Mice and Men* and the American Dream

1. Characters in *Of Mice and Men* Search for the Promise of America 39
Kenneth D. Swan

Many of Steinbeck's works strive to interpret the American scene. In particular, *Of Mice and Men* portrays characters searching for the promise of America, only to be frustrated in their efforts. Ultimately, they strive for freedom and dignity in the face of constant change.

2. *Of Mice and Men* Describes Just One Phase of the American Dream 43

Frederic I. Carpenter

Steinbeck's novels describe successive phases of the American dream. *Of Mice and Men* illustrates a phase in which the American dream remains stubbornly out of reach.

3. *Of Mice and Men* Offers a Pessimistic View of the American Dream 47

Duncan Reith

Although Steinbeck was often accused of being sentimental in his work, *Of Mice and Men* is more pessimistic in nature. In that work, Steinbeck exposes inequalities and exploitation in society and proves that for some, dreams of self-sufficiency are destined to remain woefully out of reach.

4. The American Eden in *Of Mice and Men* Is an Illusion 54

Louis Owens

In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck merges the highly symbolic landscape of Salinas, California, with the novel's thematic structure. The "fallen" topography of the Salinas Valley foreshadows the elusive and illusory nature of Lennie's dreams for a new American Eden.

5. The American Dream Is Doomed in *Of Mice and Men* 62

John H. Timmerman

Through an expert use of foreshadowing and framing, Steinbeck readies readers for a series of unfulfilled dreams in *Of Mice and Men*. The novel's artistic richness helps highlight its themes of loneliness and human need in light of these unattained dreams.

6. Steinbeck Explores the American Dream Through Language, Action, and Symbols in *Of Mice and Men* 71
Peter Lisca
 Steinbeck makes use of language, action, and symbol as recurring motifs in *Of Mice and Men*. These motifs occur on realistic, social, and allegorical levels, and they occur within a pattern that presents the characters' dreams of a better life without becoming trite or mechanical.
7. Capitalism Thwarts the American Dream in *Of Mice and Men* 80
John L. Marsden
 George and Lennie's dreams of independence and land ownership conflict with capitalist practices in *Of Mice and Men*. While Lennie's physical strength makes him a commodity within the capitalist system, the fact that he cannot be controlled is a liability to those in authority.
8. Curley's Wife in *Of Mice and Men* Struggles Toward Her Own American Dream 89
Charlotte Cook Hadella
 Although Steinbeck more fully developed the character of Curley's wife for the play version of *Of Mice and Men*, she remains a misunderstood character. As suggested by her own struggles to attain the American dream, she is more than just an Eve figure responsible for the downfall of George and Lennie's Eden.
9. Curley's Wife Is Alienated from the American Dream in *Of Mice and Men* 96
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 Curley's wife is one of the loneliest characters in *Of Mice and Men*. With no one to listen to her dreams of becoming a Hollywood starlet, she resorts to using her sexuality to get attention.

10. Homelessness Creates Loneliness in *Of Mice and Men* 100

Winifred Dusenbury Frazer

In *Of Mice and Men*, characters aspire to the American dream of home ownership. When they are unable to attain this goal, they are left with a tragic feeling of loneliness and longing for companionship.

Chapter 3: Contemporary Perspectives on the American Dream

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David Kamp

Americans need to rethink what the American dream has come to mean. The traditional vision of the American dream was not about making it rich, attaining extreme success, or opening lines of credit to live beyond one's means. It was about the possibility of better, happier lives for all.

2. The Dangerous Side of the American Dream 122

Peter C. Whybrow

Attaining the American dream has become an addictive goal for many Americans. By overspending and living beyond their means, Americans have embraced immediate material rewards and have lost sight of prudence and responsibility.

3. The American Dream Is Becoming Harder to Achieve for Immigrants 131

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Hardworking immigrant business owners are especially vulnerable during the current economic depression. Unlike large corporations receiving "bail out" money from the American government, these small businesses are having a tough time keeping the American dream alive.

4. The American Dream Is Alive and Well	138
<i>Stephen Moore</i>	
Some people argue that America's rich are getting richer, while lower-income families have not progressed at all. Others claim that through hard work and risk taking, anyone can get ahead in America. A series of questions and answers helps explain what really is happening to today's American dream.	
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