

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# Hollywood Dreams of Wealth, Youth, and Beauty

By Bob Mondello  
2012

*The "American Dream" refers to the idea that anyone in the United States can become successful if they just work hard enough. But is this dream realistic? Where did this idea come from? In this article, reporter Bob Mondello looks at how Hollywood films since the 1900s have depicted life in America. As you read, take notes on the different ways the author uses the word "dream" throughout the text.*

[1] Tinseltown<sup>1</sup> didn't invent the American dream, but it sure put it out there for the world to see — a dream lit by the perpetual sunshine of Southern California, steeped in the values of the immigrant filmmakers who moved there in the early 1900s and got enormously rich.

It was their own outsider experience these Italian, Irish, German and often Jewish moviemakers were putting on screen, each optimistic,<sup>2</sup> escapist fantasy a virtual American dream checklist:

- Hard work carries the day in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.
- Little guy makes good in the oil-rich world of *Giant*.
- Character matters more than birth, as no one knows better than Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*.
- And you make your success as an individual, says rugged individual John Wayne in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*.



*"Untitled" by Ahmet Yalçinkaya is licensed under CC0.*

Hollywood's not called a dream factory for nothing. It manufactures optimism, and in the process of selling it, can make the possibility of success feel wondrously real.

During the Great Depression,<sup>3</sup> for instance, the silent comedy *Modern Times* had Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp<sup>4</sup>

1. Tinseltown is another name for Hollywood, the center of the entertainment industry in the U.S.
2. **Optimistic (adjective)** hopeful and positive about the future
3. The Great Depression (1929-1932) was a period of extreme economic downturn. During this decade, industry nearly came to a halt, and many unemployed Americans lived in poverty.

imagining not great wealth, but an idyllic<sup>5</sup> middle-class existence, in a house with orange trees and grapevines so nearby he could pluck fruit through his window, and a cow in the backyard that came when called and filled a pitcher with fresh milk when Charlie patted its flank. This was a life of ease in a land of plenty, and though the Little Tramp was an outsider, even he could dream.

- [5] So could the showgirls, gangsters and cowboys who populated early Hollywood fantasies. In big-sky Westerns,<sup>6</sup> every man was his own boss; in organized-crime flicks, entrepreneurs turned to bootlegging,<sup>7</sup> where life was short but glamorous; and in the Depression, was the Hollywood musical depressed? No way! Chorus girls were turning into stars overnight. Upward mobility<sup>8</sup> was everywhere.

And yes, there were millions who were left off the dance floor. People of color rarely got to watch their dreams get realized on screen until decades later. African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latin Americans, gay Americans — the list of people who were left out of Hollywood's dreams in the first half of the last century is appallingly<sup>9</sup> long.

It wasn't until after World War II that the film industry took more than a glancing interest at the aspirations<sup>10</sup> of minorities — the transplanted Puerto Ricans in *West Side Story*,<sup>11</sup> for instance, who sang with dripping irony of why they'd left San Juan for New York.

*I like to be in America*

*OK by me in America*

*Everything free in America*

*For a small fee in America*

Hollywood had long been inspiring immigrants to come to the U.S. with images that filled them with overstated optimism about what they'd find here. The Italian film *Golden Door* depicts the dream in all its glory; made in 2006 but set a century earlier, it centers on a Sicilian immigrant who's lured here by trick photos that show American rivers flowing with milk and onions the size of wheelbarrows.

By the time he gets to Ellis Island, traveling in steerage,<sup>12</sup> he's figured out that these are false hopes. But then

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4. A character played by silent film actor Charlie Chaplin, the Tramp is a bumbling impoverished man who tries to appear as a well-off gentleman.
  5. **Idyllic (adjective)** extremely happy, peaceful, or picturesque
  6. a genre of fiction and film set in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the Western United States that glamorized the life of the American "cowboy"
  7. distributing or selling goods (especially alcohol) illegally
  8. rising from a lower to a higher social class or status
  9. **Appalling (adjective)** extremely shocking
  10. **Aspiration (noun)** a hope or dream of achieving something
  11. a musical inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* that explores the rivalry between two teenage street gangs of different ethnic backgrounds

he sees Manhattan's skyscrapers glinting in the sun. Someone calls them "golden houses 100 floors high," and his face lights up again. That is the power of the American dream.

- [10] There is, of course, a catch to all this dreaming. The movie industry stacks the deck pretty heavily, treating wealth — or at least financial security — much the way it treats youth and beauty. The vast majority of happy characters in movies are young, good-looking and well-off, so the subtext<sup>13</sup> is that those qualities all go hand-in-hand.

Never mind that the storyline is telling you that what matters is what's in your heart. Never mind, in fact, when it tells you that not everyone makes it. Because even the folks who aren't making it on screen are still movie stars.

"I coulda been a contender," laments Terry Malloy in *On the Waterfront*.<sup>14</sup> "I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum." Well, sure, but he's still a young Marlon Brando<sup>15</sup> — and he's earning a movie star's salary.

And that speaks to why Tinseltown's version of the American dream became so seductive. Chaplin, who played the Little Tramp, was a millionaire, a fact that was not unknown to the public. For decades there has been no greater glamour than that bestowed<sup>16</sup> by Hollywood. Even when fame is fleeting, it's flashy.

And you don't hear about the big star who lives in an ordinary house and drives an ordinary car, because that's not part of the fantasy. By leaving out the caveats,<sup>17</sup> Hollywood can make the American dream seem a persuasive American reality — even if it's not the reality most of us experience.

- [15] Which is why when people come to visit from overseas, they often remark on something that seems kind of unremarkable if you live here.

"All the cars are new," they say. "It looks like a movie."

What they can't see, of course, is the monthly car payments, or the maxed-out credit cards. But they're right, the image is like the movies. It does look American, and is kind of dream-y. All filmmakers are doing is making what they know. And then doing a little editing.

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12. the part of the ship that is reserved for people with the cheapest tickets
  13. an underlying, implied message or theme in writing or conversation
  14. a successful 1954 film focused on violence and corruption amongst longshoremen working out of the New Jersey waterfront
  15. a highly successful U.S. actor known for playing strong and often violent characters in the 1940s-1970s
  16. presented
  17. a warning or specific set of conditions and limitations

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. What connection does the author draw between Hollywood and the American Dream in the article?
  - A. Wealthy Hollywood actors are the model example for those trying to achieve the American Dream.
  - B. Modern-day Hollywood does not portray the American Dream as positively as it did in the early 1900s.
  - C. During extremely hard times, Hollywood produced more and more unrealistic portrayals of the American Dream.
  - D. Hollywood movies portray the American Dream as an attractive reality that every person who lives in America can attain.
  
2. Which detail best supports the idea that the American Dream has not been a reality for all people in the U.S.?
  - A. "During the Great Depression, for instance, the silent comedy Modern Times had Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp imagining not great wealth, but an idyllic middle-class existence" (Paragraph 4)
  - B. "And yes, there were millions who were left off the dance floor. People of color rarely got to watch their dreams get realized on screen until decades later." (Paragraph 6)
  - C. "The Italian film Golden Door depicts the dream in all its glory; made in 2006 but set a century earlier, it centers on a Sicilian immigrant who's lured here by trick photos that show American rivers flowing with milk and onions the size of wheelbarrows." (Paragraph 8)
  - D. "For decades there has been no greater glamour than that bestowed by Hollywood. Even when fame is fleeting, it's flashy." (Paragraph 13)
  
3. How does the author convey his argument in the article?
  - A. by describing his own personal experiences living in Hollywood and studying film
  - B. by discussing examples of Hollywood films that portray sudden or unlikely success
  - C. by recalling various stories of Hollywood directors who explain how they became millionaires
  - D. by presenting a list of actors who came from poor families and became famous by doing movies
  
4. How do the lyrics included after paragraph 7 contribute to the author's explanation of the American Dream in Hollywood films?
  - A. The lyrics show how Hollywood portrays the American Dream as a contradiction: something that is free but comes with a price.
  - B. The lyrics show minorities' dissatisfaction with Hollywood for not casting people of color, people with disabilities, and so on, in film.
  - C. The lyrics show how over time Hollywood began to produce more and more negative portrayals of the American Dream as a way to reduce immigration.
  - D. The lyrics show Hollywood's fascination with the American Dream, which convinced many to immigrate to the U.S. where they would later become disenchanted with the dream.

5. In paragraph 17, the author describes America as "dream-y." How does this word choice impact the meaning of the text? Cite other evidence from the text in your answer.

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## Discussion Questions

**Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.**

1. How did the immigrant experience help shape the American Dream? Is the American Dream a fantasy – or is it true that everyone can make it in America? Explain.
2. What makes America unique? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other art, literature, or history in your answer.
3. According to the text, what is the connection between beauty and the American dream? Why is this perception of what makes a "good life" problematic?

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# **Banksy and the tradition of destroying art**

By Preminda Jacob  
2018

*Banksy, an anonymous England-based street artist, recently rigged a frame holding his "Girl With Balloon" to shred the picture after it sold at auction. In this informational text, Preminda Jacob discusses other artists who have similarly destroyed their work and the meaning behind their actions. As you read, take notes on why the author thinks some artists destroy their work.*

- [1] When the British street artist Banksy shredded his "Girl With Balloon" after it was purchased for US\$1.4 million at Sotheby's, did he know how the art world would react?

Did he anticipate that the critics would claim that the work, in its partially shredded state, would climb in value to at least \$2 million? That the purchaser would not object and would instead rejoice?<sup>1</sup>



*"Banksy Girl and Heart Balloon" by Dominic Robinson  
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We have no way of really knowing, though the famously anonymous artist did suggest that the shredder malfunctioned: The painting was supposed to be fully shredded, not partially destroyed.

As an art historian, I view his act in a larger context — as the latest example of artists deploying guerrilla<sup>2</sup> tactics to expose their disdain for the critics, dealers, gallery owners and museum curators whom they depend on for their livelihood.

- [5] In shredding "Girl With Balloon," Banksy seems to be pointing to a central absurdity of his graffiti art being treated as fine art. When it appears on city streets, anyone can vandalize it; now that the same images are in galleries and auction houses, they must be handled with white gloves.

But, as he may well know, the art market is far too wealthy and adaptable to be undone by a shredder.

In fact, we've seen the same pattern play out, time and again: An artist will launch a withering<sup>3</sup> critique and instead of taking offense, the market simply tightens its embrace.

1. **Rejoice (verb)** to feel or show great joy
2. referring to actions that are performed unexpectedly and usually without authorized permission
3. **Withering (adjective)** intended to make someone feel mortified or humiliated



## The many versions of subversion

Some of the most well-known of Banksy's subversive<sup>4</sup> artistic predecessors were part of the early-20th century Dada movement.<sup>5</sup> One of their principal strategies involved denying the market of objects that could be commodified.<sup>6</sup>

French-American artist Marcel Duchamp is perhaps the most well-known Dadaist. In 1917, his "Fountain," a urinal laid on its back and remounted on a pedestal, was his first volley against the art market's intellectual pretenses about art.

- [10] Duchamp wanted to force the art world to acknowledge that its judgments about quality were based on media hype and money rather than artistic innovation.

However, years later Duchamp admitted to the futility of his gesture.

"I threw... the urinal into their faces as a challenge," he lamented,<sup>7</sup> "and now they admire [it] for [its] aesthetic beauty."

In 1920, Francis Picabia, a Cuban-French Dadaist would follow Duchamp's lead and participate in a performance purposefully designed to provoke the French art world.

Before a Parisian audience gathered at the Palais des Fêtes, Picabia unveiled a chalk drawing entitled "Riz au Nez" ("Rice on the Nose"). The artist's friend, André Breton, one of the hosts of the event, then erased the drawing. The artwork lasted for just a of couple hours and is now lost to history. The work's title, it's been noted, sounds too similar to "rire au nez" ("to laugh in one's face") to be coincidental.

- [15] In 1953, Robert Rauschenberg, who was then an up-and-coming American artist, plucked up the courage to ask Willem de Kooning, an established abstract expressionist, for one of his drawings. Rauschenberg didn't tell de Kooning much — just that he intended to use it for an unusual project. Although de Kooning was disapproving, he acquiesced.<sup>8</sup>

After securing his gift, Rauschenberg proceeded, over the period of a month, to carefully erase all traces of the expressive pencil, charcoal and crayon drawing that de Kooning had put to paper.

Rauschenberg then re-titled the work, now preserved in the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Art, "Erased de Kooning Drawing."

Jean Tinguely's auto-destructing work, "Homage to New York" (1960), is probably the closest parallel to Banksy's stunt. Made of scrap found in New Jersey junkyards, the massive work — 27 feet high and 23 feet in length —

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4. **Subversive** (*adjective*) seeking or intended to undermine an established system
  5. a European art movement that challenged norms and favored the new and unusual
  6. something that can be sold or mass produced
  7. Lament (verb) to mourn something
  8. **Acquiesce** (*verb*) to accept something reluctantly but without protest

was supposed to be a mechanical display, sort of like a Rube Goldberg device.<sup>9</sup>

The piece was set up in the sculpture garden of New York's Museum of Modern Art, and those attending the show included collectors Walter Arensberg and John D. Rockefeller III, and artists John Cage, Mark Rothko and Robert Rauschenberg.

[20] Tinguely briefly set the piece in motion — and then it burst into flames.

The Museum of Modern Art described the scene:

"... a meteorological trial balloon inflated and burst, colored smoke was discharged, paintings were made and destroyed, and bottles crashed to the ground. A player piano, metal drums, a radio broadcast, a recording of the artist explaining his work, and a competing shrill voice correcting him provided the cacophonous<sup>10</sup> sound track to the machine's self-destruction – until it was stopped short by the fire department."

Apart from a fragment from Tinguely's "Homage" preserved in the MoMA collection, all that remains of the work is some choppy film footage.

It's difficult to imagine anyone surpassing Tinguely's sound-and-light spectacle.

[25] But in 2001, Michael Landy of the Young British Artists group orchestrated the most comprehensive "art as destruction" work to date.

Titled "Break Down," Landy placed objects on a conveyor belt running into a machine that pulverized them. In the process, he destroyed all of his belongings — 7,227 pieces in all — including his own paintings and the art of his Young British Artist peers.

## Guerrillas in the midst

These acts of destruction are motivated by the same impulse.

In the late 19th century, art production largely became untethered from patronage<sup>11</sup> offered by the church or the state, and artists turned to powerful art dealers for their livelihood.

But many found that the radical, critical aspect of the artistic act was severely compromised — or erased altogether — when the most well-known feature of a work became the dollar sign attached to it.

[30] To many, the market symbolized nothing more than a void.

With the urban street as his studio and insurgency<sup>12</sup> as part of his artistic mission, Banksy's graffiti often

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9. a device that is unnecessarily complex in its design or construction

10. **Cacophony** (*noun*) a harsh or jarring mixture of sounds

11. funding

critiques institutions, such as the art museum, and authority figures like the police and the Queen of England.

Though the market value of his work has soared in recent years, Banksy continues to paint images in public spaces that make preservation near impossible — and even invite theft or defacement.

Still, as guerrilla theater, Banksy's recent act will be tough to beat. It's certainly his most subversive and penetrating public foray into the elite art marketplace.

But even with all his critique, the question continues to nag: Is Banksy complicit with the art market? The very society he undermines, one that feeds on spectacle, has made him famous and his art immensely profitable.

- [35] In the wake of World War I, Dadaist artists made a practice of shocking their public audiences by wantonly<sup>13</sup> destroying their own artistic creations. The public soon learned to cheer them on, and to detach themselves from the attack artists were actively waging on their sensibilities.

A century later, at Sotheby's, the initial shock of a shredded "Girl With Balloon" dissipated quickly. The hype only grew. The market adapted.

Sotheby's has since released a statement declaring that the piece — renamed "Love is in the Bin" — is "the first artwork in history to have been created live during an auction."

*"Banksy and the tradition of destroying art" by Preminda Jacob, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, October 19, 2018. Copyright (c) The Conversation 2018, CC-BY-ND.*

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12. **Insurgency** (*noun*) an act of protest  
13. **Wanton** (*adjective*) done spitefully and unprovoked

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best expresses the central idea of the text?
  - A. Artists have realized that their art is more valuable when it's destroyed or performative, which has led to many shocking artistic performances.
  - B. The public is most moved by self-destructive art, as it can't be preserved or truly owned by anyone.
  - C. Artists have created destructive or shocking art to criticize the art world, but are instead celebrated by the art world.
  - D. Professional artists aren't capable of truly challenging the art world and market, as they directly benefit from it.
  
2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "'I threw ... the urinal into their faces as a challenge,' he lamented, 'and now they admire [it] for [its] aesthetic beauty.'" (Paragraph 12)
  - B. "'Made of scrap found in New Jersey junkyards, the massive work — 27 feet high and 23 feet in length — was supposed to be a mechanical display, sort of like a Rube Goldberg device.'" (Paragraph 18)
  - C. "'In the process, he destroyed all of his belongings — 7,227 pieces in all — including his own paintings and the art of his Young British Artist peers.'" (Paragraph 26)
  - D. "'The public soon learned to cheer them on, and to detach themselves from the attack artists were actively waging on their sensibilities.'" (Paragraph 35)
  
3. What is the author's overall purpose in the text?
  - A. to explore the motivations for Banksy, and other artists, to destroy their art
  - B. to show how artists have been able to increase the market value of their art
  - C. to reveal to readers how Banksy was able to destroy his own art after it sold
  - D. to show how the art world's interest is always changing and difficult to predict
  
4. How does has destructive or shocking art, according to the text, developed over time?
  - A. As more artists became popular throughout the world, new artists had to use shocking or destructive art to get the public's attention.
  - B. As the market value of art started to go down, artists no longer cared about how others perceived their work or if it could be preserved.
  - C. As technology developed over time, art was created and destroyed in new ways that shocked and intrigued the public.
  - D. As art became defined by its monetary value, artists used shocking or destructive acts to challenge people's assumptions and expectations about their art.

5. What is the relationship between artists and the market? Cite textual evidence to support your response.

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## Discussion Questions

**Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.**

1. In the text, the author discusses how artists often intentionally created absurd or shocking art to challenge what people considered to be art. What do you consider to be art and why?
2. Banksy is a well-known graffiti artist. Do you think all graffiti counts as art? Why or why not? What makes Banksy's street art so popular and valuable?
3. A lot of Banksy's art challenges authority figures and institutions, including the art world. Do you think Banksy and other artists can create social or political change with their art? Why or why not?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Forever Young: America's Obsession with Never Growing Old

By Dale Archer  
2013

*According to Dale Archer, our culture puts a high premium on youth—looking and acting young. As you read, identify the causes and effects of this shift in values.*

- [1] Today's culture is so obsessed with looking and acting young, it's difficult to believe that our founding fathers powdered their wigs gray in order to appear older and wiser. That's right—being old was in. No more! From hair dyes to Botox to Viagra to wrinkle creams to a plethora of surgical procedures, the race is on to remain forever young.

We are bombarded daily with images via magazines, billboards, television and the internet. It's all about the look and the image, not about the experience and wisdom behind the eyes. Virtually every public figure from politicians to actors to TV talking heads have had "work" done to their face or body. This mirrors our superficial culture, where anything important can be defined by 140 characters or less.



*"Dorothy Gray 1958" by 1950s Unlimited is licensed under CC BY 2.0.*

There are many reasons America is so obsessed with youth, but perhaps nothing has done more to further the cause than the technological revolution. Let's face it—the old are by and large slower and not as connected. How many over 60 do you know that have Twitter, Facebook or a cutting edge smartphone? But is this a bad thing?

As the world continues to speed up, the wisdom of the ages can be Googled by anyone. The analogue world has been replaced by the digital age. Who needs to ask an old guy for advice when you can become a superficial expert on any topic after 30 minutes on the computer? Few have time to slow down and become a true expert at anything anymore. Why, that could take (gasp!) days, weeks, or even months!

- [5] This constant access to information leaves the impression that a tidbit of knowledge, or a sound bite, is enough to be relevant. It suggests that a quick ten-minute read or video is equivalent to wisdom gained from years of hard-earned experience.

There's a mindset that it's better to multi-task three things at once rather than take the time to do a single project perfectly. This ever-shortening attention span is a direct result of the ever-present smartphone, a 500 channel TV culture, video games that provide escape on demand and the 24-7 media cycle which provides never ending information.

Throughout these advances in technology the quest to remain young has accelerated at warp speed. Why, when previously gray hair and wrinkles coincided with patience, self-awareness and wisdom? As Hannibal Lecter told Clarice in *Silence of the Lambs*, "We begin by coveting what we see every day."

Ads and social media portray youth as sexy, attractive, cool, and oh-so-connected. Look at any magazine, movie, video game, or TV show and it's easy to see. In 2011 alone, Americans spent \$10.4 billion on cosmetic surgery. Over \$1.2 billion is spent annually on liposuction, \$800 million on hair transplants and \$11 billion on vitamins and supplements. And there is no greater compliment we can pay another than to say, "Wow! You look so much younger!"

There is no doubt that being young is fast, fun, and exciting. But there is a time and a season for all things. Trying to hang onto the fast lane too long deprives us of the introspection, self-understanding and deep thoughts that usually accompany growing older.

- [10] Just because we can cling to youth a bit longer while life flies by at breakneck speed doesn't mean it's the best way to live. Frank Sinatra (remember him?) said it best in his introspective song "It Was A Very Good Year" that traces life from teens to twenties to thirties and beyond: "But now the days grow short, I'm in the autumn of the year. And now I think of my life as vintage wine, from fine old kegs, from the brim to the dregs. And it poured sweet and clear. It was a very good year."

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which of the following best states the central idea of the text?
  - A. Younger generations are at a disadvantage because they have lost the skills that made older generations creative and innovative.
  - B. Older generations need to better instruct young people in order to preserve expertise in various subjects.
  - C. The media's portrayal of the cosmetic surgery industry is ruining American culture because it makes people forget about the elderly.
  - D. Many Americans place too much value on youth because technology has lessened the importance of age and wisdom.
  
2. PART A: Which of the following best describes the tone of this article?
  - A. objective
  - B. informal
  - C. angry
  - D. curious
  
3. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "We are bombarded daily with images via magazines, billboards, television and the internet." (Paragraph 2)
  - B. "There are many reasons America is so obsessed with youth, but perhaps nothing has done more to further the cause than the technological revolution." (Paragraph 3)
  - C. "Why, that could take (gasp!) days, weeks, or even months!" (Paragraph 4)
  - D. "In 2011 alone, Americans spent \$10.4 billion on cosmetic surgery." (Paragraph 8)
  
4. According to the author, how does aging in contemporary society compare to aging in previous decades?
  - A. Society appreciates older people less now than in past decades.
  - B. Society values both physical age and emotional age equally.
  - C. For the first time, older people must prove their wisdom through technological knowledge.
  - D. It is easier to live into old age today than in previous decades because of advances in technology.

5. Evaluate the reasoning the author uses to support his argument that when it comes to America's obsession with youth, "nothing has done more to further the cause than the technological revolution." (Paragraph 3) Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

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## Discussion Questions

**Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.**

1. Which do you think is valued more in American culture: youth or age? Why? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
2. This article discusses one of the possible effects of the current generation's constant access to information through technological advances such as the internet. How do you think that the internet has affected people's lives? Do you think the overall effect on people's lives has been positive or negative? Why?
3. In America, why do we associate youth with beauty? What does this say about our culture?