There is something magical and sometimes overpowering to the majority of mankind: It is the thing that allows people to live in mansions with helipad's as well as underground society forced to live in the many tunnels and passageways under New York City and to beg for their meals. Although this is definitely the extreme that I have described. It is sometimes indescribably cruel and other times very gracious. This thing that I write about is the American system. In Arthur Miller's moving and powerful play, "Death of a Salesman", Miller uses many characters to contrast the difference between success and failure within the system. Willy is the dreamy salesman whose imagination is much larger than his sales ability, while Linda is Willy's wife who stands by her husband even in his absence of realism. Biff and Happy are the two blind mice who follows in there father's fallacy of life, while Ben is the only member of the Loman family with that special something needed to achieve. Charlie and his son Benard, on the other hand, enjoy better success in life compared to the Lomans.

The play romanticizes the rural-agrarian dream but does not make it genuinely available to Willy. Miller seems to use this dream merely to give himself an opportunity for sentimentality. The play is ambiguous in its attitude toward the business-success dream, but does not certainly condemn it. It is legitimate to ask where Miller is going. And the answer is that he has written a confused play because he has been unwilling or unable to commit himself to a firm position with respect to American culture. Miller prepares us for stock response-relief in escape to the West and the farm; firm satisfaction in the condemnation of the tawdry business ethic. and then denies us the fulfillment of our expectations. The play makes, finally, no judgment on America, although Miller seems always on the verge of one, of telling us that America is a nightmare, a cause of and a home for tragedy. But Willy is not a tragic hero; he is a foolish and ineffectual man for whom we feel pity. We cannot equate his failure with America's (Eisinger .0 p. 174. Indeed, there is a lot of room for failure as well as great success in America. The system is not the one to blame. Willy can only blame himself for not becoming what he wanted to be.

The next character, Willy Loman's wife Linda, is not part of the solution but rather part of the problem with this dysfunctional family and their inability to see things for what they really are. Louis Gordon is in agreement stating, "Linda, as the eternal wife and mother, the fixed point of affection both given and received, the woman who suffers and endures, is in many ways, the earth mother who embodies the play's ultimate moral value, love. But in the beautiful, ironic complexity of her creation, she is also Willy's and their sons' destroyer. In her love Linda has accepted Willy's Greatness and his dream, but while in her admiration for Willy her love is powerful and moving, in her admiration for his
dreams, it is lethal. She encourages Willy's dream, yet she will not let him leave her for
the New Continent, the only realm where the dream can be fulfilled. She want to
reconcile father and son, but she attempts this in the context of Willy's false values. She
cannot allow her sons to achieve that selfhood that involves denial of these
values" (Gordon p. 316). Linda is also caught up in Willy's lies and therefore does
nothing but help fuel the fire in the inferno of their dreams and ambitions. She lets this
whole masquerade continue right in front of her instead of doing something to stop their
out of control lies.

Also, Biff the oldest son, continues to search for his purpose in life. Due mainly to all the
"hot air" Willy always feeds him, Biff continues to stumble in his fight for life. Biff has
never had the ability to hold down a job very long due to his inability to take orders and
do his time in the trenches before becoming a success at a particular job.

Richard J. Foster states, "Biff, who in the play as an amplification or reflection of Willy's
problems, has been nurtured on Willy's dreams, too. But he has been forced to see the
truth. And it is the truth—his father's cheap philandering—in its impact on a nature
already weakened by a diet of illusion that in turn paralyzes him. Biff and Willy are two
versions of the idealist, or "dreamer" may be a better work, paralyzed by reality: Biff by
the effects of disillusionment, Willy by the effects of the illusions themselves. This is how
they sum themselves up at the end of the play, just before Willy's suicide: "Pop! Biff
cries, "I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!" "I am not a dime a dozen!" Willy answers in
rage. "I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!" And the tragedy—if it is tragedy—is
that they are, in addition, Happy, the youngest son, never realizes his father's fallacy of
"be well liked and you shall never want". Happy tried to make it in the city with a similar
sales career like his father. He also lives a lie in the fact he claims to have a certain
position with his company when in reality he is in the lower bracket of the company.
Happy is not able to see himself for what he is, unlike his brother, who finally has an
epiphany of who he is and what he stands for.

In agreement, Lois Gordon remarks, "Hap, less favored by nature and his father, perhaps
as Willy was in comparison with Ben, has escaped the closeness with his father that
destroys Biff in social terms. Thus worshipping his father from afar, Hap has never fully
come to realize that phony part of his father and his father's dreams. He does have
longings to be outdoors and to get away from the crippling fifty-weeks-of-work-a-year
routine, but because he has never seen his father's feet of clay, he has more fully than Biff
accepted his father's dreams. He is not a social rebel, and he will carry on with the life of
a salesman, and, one suspects, go on to the death of a salesman. He will violate the boss'
wife out of some lonely desperation, as Willy sought support and solace in his Boston
woman. He will also prove his manliness with fast cars and fancy talk, but again like
Willy, he will never really believe in his own manliness in any mature way. Just as Willy
is called a kid throughout, and referred to as the diminutive Willy be everyone except
Benn....Happy has been trapped by the infantile American Playboy magazine vision of
the male" (Gordon p.324).
In contrast, Ben has become extremely successful in life compared to his brother Willy. Ben is the only member of the Loman family to achieve greatness. He is the example of the true entrepreneur in every sense, "Never fight fair with a stranger" was Ben's wisdom and his faith—"When I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by God I was rich!" Although, this information was never enough for a blueprint for Willy to follow, Willy always sought his brother Ben's advice to reach the pot of gold under the rainbow.

Likewise, Charlie is also Willy's opposite in many ways in the play. Charlie stands for different beliefs and ends up quite successful. Charlie tries to help Willy as well… However, Willy will not listen to Charlie's advice. For instance, Charlie warned Willy not to let his kids steal from a nearby construction site and that the night watchman would eventually catch them. Willy said, "I got a couple of fearless characters," and Charlie said, "The jails are full of fearless characters." Charlie is always being the voice of reason but Willy is too stubborn to listen to him. R. H. Gardner states, "Willy's refusal, from the standpoint of dramatic significance, seems less a product of his insanity than of his lifelong feeling of competition with Charlie. Acceptance would have been tantamount to admitting that Charlie's philosophy had proved to be the right one, and Willy simply isn't big enough a man to make such an admission" (Gardner p.320). In other words, you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. Charlie tries to lead Willy to the fountain of knowledge but Willy refuses to take in this precious liquid.

Furthermore, there is the anemic Bernard—at least that is what Willy calls him. Bernard I Charlie's son, and Biff and Happy's schoolmate. R. H. Gardner states, "A physically unattractive, spectacles-wearing lad, Bernard's chief claim to fame rests upon the fact that he is the boy who furnishes Biff, the school hero, with the right answers at exam time. In exchange for this privilege, Biff lets Bernard carry his shoulder pads into the locker room at game time and, in other small ways, bask in the glory—which is all the glory Bernard can aspire to, since, as Biff explains to his tickled father, Bernard is not "well liked." It is, therefore, interesting to note that not well liked though he may be, Bernard, through persistent application of his native intelligence, grows up to be an eminent lawyer who, the day Biff and Willy are finally forced to face the unpleasant fats of their lives, embarks for Washington to plead a case before the Supreme Court. That Mr. Miller chose to contrast Willy's and Biff's failures with an obvious example of how one can succeed in this country makes it difficult to interpret the play as an attack upon the American system, either as constituted or as popularly imagined. Bernard is, in fact, living proof of the system's effectiveness, an affirmation of the proposition that persistent application of one's talents, small though they may be, pays off. And this, after all, is the substance of the American Dream" (Gardner p.320).

In conclusion, there are many forms of failure as well as success that are spawned by our American system. The Lomans are all an example of what life is like if you continually live in a dream world and never train yourself for anything. Ben is the exception in the Loman family. He is the only one of them to turn our successful. However, Charlie and his son Bernard were able to achieve greatness and to make the system work for them. In
the end, the decision to make it in this American system is, ironically, up to the individual.*

Works Cited