

# Shaping the american dream, defining success from the first world war to present

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Shaping the American Dream, defining success from the First World War to present Great Depression had a huge impact on the society and economy of America. Evolution of the Great Depression after the crash of stock market in 1929 laid the foundations of unemployment and poverty till early 1940s. The USA surfaced as the world's strongest nation after World War II. American economy was revived by heavy military spending. Unlike many other countries that experienced severe damages to the infrastructure during the World War II, America did not experience destruction at home. America became an example for success before other countries of the world.

American culture after World War II equated good citizenship with good consumerism. People have been encouraged to consume more and better. Leisure activities are an example of this; before the 20th century, most of the leisure time of an average American was spent in the family, church, and activities related to community. In the early half of the 20th century, leisure activities such as playing with recreational products or watching movies mostly replaced the social activities on the basis of consumption (Spring 96).

Cold War played an important role in tying American Dream to consumerism. Although the democracy in America had a strong contrast with the Soviet totalitarianism, yet the politicians in America promoted mass consumption as a way of differentiating between Americans and the Soviets. William H. Whyte, Fortune editor stated in 1957, "Thrift is now un-American" (Cohen 121). In 1959, American Exhibition was organization in Moscow whose economic highlight was demonstration of America's consumer goods to the Soviet leaders. President Richard Nixon said at the exhibition, "To us,

diversity, the right to choose...is the most important thing. ...We have many ... many different kinds of washing machines so that the housewives have a choice” (Nixon cited in Spring 137). Here, Nixon drew audiences’ attention toward the variety of ways of consumption for the Americans to explain diversity rather than giving examples of political or social significance.

The relationship between good consumerism, good citizenship, and the American Dream has lived up to date. Americans united under the leadership of President Bush after the 9/11 attacks, and a brief charitable outpouring followed. Despite having a great opportunity to foster non-consumerist behavior in the Americans, Bush simply reminded Americans of the importance of consumerism in the development of a strong economy in the post-9/11 attacks speeches. Bush said that the best action Americans could take to restore the health of the country was “ continued participation and confidence in the American economy” (Bush cited in “ Text: President Bush”).

Role models for modern Americans are people like Steve Jobs, who have taken consumerism to the next level with their innovation and creativity (Overfield and Kaiser). To conclude, while there are numerous parameters to gauge the success of a person in modern America including personal freedom, family, patriotism, law-abiding, and progressivism; financial stability and consumerism is the most overriding factor that is used to determine the success of a person in modern America. Marketing and consumerism’s role reflects in the modification of American Dream. Today, the foundations of American Dream rest on economic growth, so consumerism and marketing take the lead over all other norms and values of

the contemporary American society.

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