

Wavering world

Business



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The idea of the “ American Dream” is placed in children’s minds as early as elementary school. Teachers and other adults begin asking children what they would like to be when they grow up and encourage them to dream big. They say, “ there’s nothing you can’t do.” During play time, they pretend to be moms or dads with babies or imagine being a teacher, firefighter, or a singer. At an early age people are thinking about what they are going to be doing the rest of their lives, which is only the beginning of the dream. The dream that everyone wants.

The beautiful house on a large piece of land with a few children and maybe a dog to play fetch with in the front lawn. It is the nice big family suburban, the dad with a wealthy job, and the mom who stays at the house and takes care of their home while she waits for the children to get off the bus. That is the most universal definition anyways, but is that still what holds true today? The American Dream is not a dream; it is a shifting expectation that became popular back in 1931 because some dude decided to write a book about it. The people of America are trying to reach an ever changing goal because we are held to this standard of greatness that our ancestors set before us. We get so caught up in the universal standard of this dream that we lose sight of what we really aspire for. In 1931, a man named James Truslow Adams first publicly defined the American Dream in his book *The Epic of America*.

Adams’ defined it as a “ dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.” Adams also said, “ It’s not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately

capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.” Initially, the “ American Dream” was just a reassurance that anyone who lived in the United States, whether they were born here or not, could make a successful living. America was considered the promise land for the hopeless, so I find it interesting that our society gave it a more specific definition as time went on. Eventually the “ Dream” turned into something more.

It became the goal to obtain bigger and better of everything. The big career with the large salary, the massive house, the fancier cars, the better technology, the superior family. According to research, “ Fifty years ago homes averaged 1, 700 square feet. Now that figure is up to 2, 700” (American Nightmare). Not only does this show how the dream has evolved; it also shows how we are spending more time commuting now than ever. To have a massive home you have to have a large piece of land to put it on.

That usually ends up outside of the city limits, which creates a longer distance to travel and in turn makes longer trips to work. Psychologists Stutzer and Frey reported, “ people that commute over forty five minutes to work each day have to earn nineteen percent more a month than they already do to make the trip worthwhile.” (American Nightmare). All this commuting causes us to overschedule our lives to get the most out of our long drive. We start spending too much time at the office and other places in between, rather than in our mansion we are spending thousands of dollars on. In other words, it is very ironic that we Americans are working more hours than ever before and commuting more to have this luxury home we spend very little time in.

To obtain a wealthy salary Americans work on average 1,900 hours a year; Americans happen to have the longest workweek in the developed world (American Nightmare). Why do we work all these hours though? Well, of course we are making money to obtain the big house and be able to commute the forty five minutes between work and home five days a week or more. We try to salvage as many hours of work as we can to keep our sparsely lived in homes. Psychologist Tim Kasser says, "The more people focus on a materialistic pathway to happiness, the less happy they tend to be, and the less happy they make others". The more we work to obtain bigger and better of everything, the more selfish we get and the more depressed we become. Let me give you an example as to why the the American Dream is one, at a constant change and two, is a joke.

When I was five years old my parents had owned their own business in which they renovated houses. My mom did the finances and stayed at home with me and got my brother off to school everyday while my dad was on site working with their employees. My parents were pretty wealthy with the profit from their business. We had a four bedroom, three bathroom house in the suburbs of Kansas City. I had a dog in the front lawn to play fetch with. We had two vehicles in the driveway; dad's truck and the family car, roomy enough to fit my twoparents, my brother, me, and even the dog for long car trips or daily outings.

At the age of five this seemed like a perfect life, but I'm not so sure it made my family happy. That is what the "American Dream" is suppose to bring though; happiness. One crucial part about life that is commonly left out of the dream, are uncontrollable situations. For instance, my parent's business

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went under and we struggled financially because their accountant committed fraud and stole all the money in their account. “ I think this happened for a reason, it was God telling us we needed to be closer to grandpa and focus more on family life rather than fast pace living with the business,” my mom said.

That’s one uncontrollable situation that steered my parents American Dream a different direction. My parents were struggling to get back up on their feet in this house. Eventually my family was not happy anymore in the big house in the city. Mom and Dad had many discussions on what to do next, about what would make our family happy again. They came to a final decision of downsizing and moving to a small community called Lathrop.

We moved in with my grandpa who lived just outside of Lathrop until they found a house suitable for us. My mom said, “ I think the American Dream is a concept which includes the opportunity for freedom, wealth and prosperity, and moving out to Lathrop gave our family just that.” My parents got knocked off their feet and struggled to get back up again which required them to figure out what would make them better, which in return helped them find their happiness again. On the other hand my “ Dream” is very different compared to my parents. When I was a kid I wanted what they had, but only because I wanted to be just like them.

I remember drawing up my dream house plans (yes it was huge) and even picking out my kids’ names. Now that I’m older and have seen more of the world; I realize I have a different dream. I want to obtain a career that makes me happy and I want to live in an apartment by myself in a city. Yes, I said

by myself, no man by my side. Quoting my mom again, being an independent working woman is what I see as an “ opportunity for freedom, wealth and prosperity.

” Now, my dream may change as I get older and go through more experiences just like my parents, but dreams are suppose to change. Otherwise, after we reach them, where do we go from there? Some people say that in this generation the American Dream is non existent, but I find that false. I believe that Millennials are just focusing on a different part of it now. In fact, maybe the most important part. Chantel Bonneau, a millennial and wealth management advisor says “ Millennials really think a satisfying career is a part of the American Dream more than anything else.” Also Benjamin Lupu business owner in Burbank, California who is from the baby boomer generation says, “ Young people still want to own a house, but not right out of college.

“ In other words millennials are waiting longer to try to obtain such things that fit the dream. The American Dream seems to have shifted to solely just a part of what it once was. The American Dream is ever changing. It shifts with each generation. It shifts within families, and even shifts within your own lifetime. Once it was just a promise that if you worked as hard as you could, you would be successful in America.

Then it became more; it became bigger and better. Now somehow it’s less. It is simplicity and independency. One constant definition about the dream is that it is suppose to make you happy, so if you are not, then find a new one.

The term “ American Dream” is not widely used anymore and the reason for that is there is no “ American Dream”, it is your dream.