

The american dream: past and present

Business



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Defining the American dream is quite a daunting task, especially considering its lengthy existence and its transformation over time. Many who attempt to do so focus on the idea of freedom, and this is certainly a major component.

In fact, the roots of the American dream consist of liberty, prosperity, equality, and opportunity. However, since its inception over two hundred years ago, the concept of the American dream has expanded to include not only its original ideals, but also a sense of materialism and entitlement. In its humble origins, the American dream simply meant proprietorship, self-reliance, and most importantly, the “unalienable rights” of the Declaration of Independence. Settlers came from impoverished backgrounds to work hard and succeed, all the while indulging in the freedoms offered by this land. Although they eventually became accustomed to their new, more prosperous circumstances, much of the rest of the world still craved the American lifestyle; thus, the immigration boom of the early 1900’s brought millions of hopeful immigrants, ambitious and appreciative of their newfound freedom from political or religious oppression.

This immigration rush reinforced the traditional sense of the American dream. However, even as early as the 1920’s, material possessions became steadily more important to the average American. Still, the American dream of this time period largely retained its original core values. Significant changes began to take place in the concept of the American dream during the post-WWII era. With the expansion of the middle-class and the suburbs, the American dream morphed to include less important ideals: two cars, a house, keeping up with the Joneses, and in general, the cliché suburban

American life. Taking for granted their unique rights, Americans began to require material possession for fulfillment.

My mother's story is one that truly illustrates the contrast of this new American dream to that of the original one. Having emigrated from the U. S. S. R.

in the early 1990's – escaping religious persecution, corruption, and virtual poverty in the process – my mother's family, like the settlers and immigrants before them, was fully content with the traditional American dream.

Furthermore, they thought it was quite laughable when most Americans lamented their life circumstances and complained about a lack of possessions. In addition to materialism, American entitlement also astounds those who are not accustomed to such opportunity and abundance.

Americans are no longer as willing to work for their success; instead, American society as a whole is turning into one desperate for an easy route to wealth, and when it does not appear, laziness and apathy quickly ensue. Not only do many Americans find their current opportunities insufficient, but their lack of ambition causes the American dream to appear as a gift, rather than an accomplishment.

Although nowadays many Americans take their rights and privileges for granted, America is still a beacon of hope for those in the world wishing for something more. Now, as before, those in America willing to work hard to achieve their goals will find that nothing is impossible. The American dream has evolved for over two hundred years, and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future; however, no matter how it expands, it will always include

the original ideals of freedom, equality, prosperity, and opportunity. The American dream lives.