

American dream

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Capitalism and its values revolve around material possessions and their acquisition. In this society, the poor man strives to be rich, and a powerless man to gain power. Many of these people however don't have access to these privileges, and so to be one of the few taking the limited seats of wealth and power they compete, most often times against each other. Such environments are not only often times promote conflict but confrontation as well, and many times the winners of these altercations are relishing in "The American Dream" While capitalism promotes the belief that this dream is achievable, it is more often than not, a literal dream, and leaves its pursuers poor, and weak. This keeps the working class powerless, and pacified to propagate capitalistic values. Clean cut examples of this are cases in such societies where people do not have the chance to advance but have the chance to succeed. A strange position that seems to contradict a culture that's "Dream" is to be powerful and wealthy at the top of the ladder. Many people in these positions only perceive themselves to be succeeding but in actuality, they are failing at achieving what they most desire, and not Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a German philosopher and economist, who was not a self-proclaimed sociologist. Although Marx did not consider himself a sociologist, he had a profound impact on historical and contemporary sociological thought. Max Weber (1864-1920) was a German sociologist and scientist who also had a profound impact on sociology. Both of these men will continue to be in Sociological teachings for many years to come. Weber had a major influence on the Conflict Theory. The Conflict Theory is one of the major sociological models for understanding the social world. The Conflict Theory has three components: The first component is that conflict is

a common and ongoing feature of society. In fact conflict is the most basic feature of social life. The second component is that society is made-up of various social groups who have conflicting values and interests. Finally, the third component states that all societal conflict occurs between dominant and subordinate social groups who are in competition over resources. The "conflict perspective", was developed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and is primarily associated with both Karl Marx and Max Weber. Karl Marx used two groups in the conflict theory. The Capitalist class owns and controls the means of production, while they also see the distribution of the goods or services. The Capitalist class is also known as the dominant group. His second class, the working class, are the people who provide the labor necessary to produce the goods and services. The dominant Group is the capitalists and the subordinate group is the working class. Max Weber also asserted that society is an "arena" of conflict and struggle" over resources between dominant and subordinate groups. But unlike Marx, Weber argues that there are many "status" groups in a society which possess varying degrees of social power. So according to Weber there are many groups, unlike Marx who believed there were two groups, the capitalist and the working group. Weber believed that power played a role in politics, ethnicity, gender, and religion. We in America and else where have dominant and subordinate groups. The dominant groups have power and wealth while the subordinate groups are just working class citizens contributing to the wealth of the capitalists. But this is a capitalist society so who can expect anything different. As I stated earlier, the basis of Marx perspective is true. But Weber's perspective is obviously true as well as more specific. They are

basically powerless and apart of many subordinate groups. The American Dream is a national ethos of the United States, a set of ideals in which freedom includes the opportunity for prosperity and success, and an upward social mobility achieved through hard work. In the definition of the American Dream by James Truslow Adams in 1931, " life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" regardless of social class or circumstances of birth.[1] The idea of the American Dream is rooted in the United States Declaration of Independence which proclaims that " all men are created equal" and that they are " endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights" including " Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The ethos today simply indicates the ability, through participation in the society and economy, for everyone to achieve prosperity. According to the dream, this includes the opportunity for one's children to grow up and receive a good education and career without artificial barriers. It is the opportunity to make individual choices without the prior restrictions that limited people according to their class, caste, religion, race, or ethnicity. Immigrants to the United States sponsored ethnic newspapers in their own language; the editors typically promoted the American Dream.[4] Ownby (1999) identifies four American Dreams that the new consumer culture addressed. The first was the " Dream of Abundance" offering a cornucopia of material goods to all Americans, making them proud to be the richest society on earth. The second was the " Dream of a Democracy of Goods" whereby everyone had access to the same products regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or class, thereby challenging the aristocratic norms of the rest of the world whereby only the rich or well-

connected are granted access to luxury. The " Dream of Freedom of Choice" with its ever expanding variety of good allowed people to fashion their own particular lifestyle. Finally, the " Dream of Novelty", in which ever-changing fashions, new models, and unexpected new products broadened the consumer experience in terms of purchasing skills and awareness of the market, and challenged the conservatism of traditional society and culture, and even politics. Ownby acknowledges that the dreams of the new consumer culture radiated out from the major cities, but notes that they quickly penetrated the most rural and most isolated areas, such as rural Mississippi. With the arrival of the model T after 1910, consumers in rural America were no longer locked into local general stores with their limited merchandise and high prices in comparison to shops in towns and cities. Ownby demonstrates that poor black Mississippians shared in the new consumer culture, both inside Mississippi, and it motivated the more ambitious to move to Memphis or Chicago. The aspirations of the " American dream" in the broad sense of upward mobility has been systematically spread to other nations since the 1890s as American missionaries and businessmen consciously sought to spread the Dream, says Rosenberg. Looking at American business, religious missionaries, philanthropies, Hollywood, labor unions and Washington agencies, she says they saw their mission not in catering to foreign elites but instead reaching the world's masses in democratic fashion. " They linked mass production, mass marketing, and technological improvement to an enlightened democratic spirit.... In the emerging litany of the American dream what historian Daniel Boorstin later termed a " democracy of things" would disprove both

Malthus's predictions of scarcity and Marx's of class conflict." It was, she says " a vision of global social progress." [41] Rosenberg calls the overseas version of the American Dream " liberal-developmentalism" and identified five critical components: "(1) belief that other nations could and should replicate America's own developmental experience; (2) faith in private free enterprise; (3) support for free or open access for trade and investment; (4) promotion of free flow of information and culture; and (5) growing acceptance of [U. S.] governmental activity to protect private enterprise and to stimulate and regulate American participation in international economic and cultural exchange. [42] " That dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement." The first use of the phrase " American Dream" was in James Truslow Adams's 1931 book THE EPIC OF AMERICA. Of course, Adams was merely naming a thread in American history that stretched from the City on a Hill to Gold Mountain. But today some critics have charged the dream has become purely materialistic - while others see its reach limited to a lucky few. Several years ago The Fetzer Institute, a funder of BILL MOYERS JOURNAL, set out on a quest to reassess the definition of The American Dream asking: Is the American Dream a vision or an illusion? Does social change depend on personal change? What values should the U. S. demonstrate in today's world? Are there ways to think beyond geographic boundaries toward a common dream for our world? A website run by the federal government (" WelcomeToUSA. gov") encourages new immigrants to the United States to apply for welfare benefits. This website is run by the Department of Homeland Security and it says that it " is the U. S.

Government's official web portal for new immigrants. " So your tax dollars were used to build and maintain a website that teaches immigrants how to come into this country and sponge a living off of federal welfare programs paid for by your tax dollars. What in the world is happening to us? Yes, we will always need some legal immigration. We are a nation of immigrants and immigration has been very good to this country. But at a time when there are millions upon millions of American citizens out of work and at a time when we are absolutely drowning in debt, do we really need to encourage millions more immigrants to come over and take advantage of our overloaded social welfare programs? WelcomeToUSA. gov actually encourages new immigrants to apply for food stamps, Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, Supplemental Security Income and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Of course not all immigrants are eligible for all of those programs, but if an immigrant can get over to the U. S. and just get signed up for a couple of programs they can enjoy a higher standard of living doing nothing here than they can working at a low paying job back home. We have created a perverse system of incentives that makes it very attractive to people all over the world to do whatever they can to hitch a ride on " the gravy train" and take advantage of all of the benefits that they possibly can. And once immigrants get on welfare, many of them never leave. For example, one study discovered that 43 percent of all immigrants who have been in the United States for at least 20 years were still on welfare. We can't even take care of our own citizens, and yet more immigrants hop on to the safety net every single day. At some point the safety net is going to break and then we won't even be able to take care of the struggling Americans

that really need it. (Read More.....) The Protestant work ethic (or the Puritan work ethic) is a concept in theology, sociology, economics and history which emphasizes hard work, frugality and prosperity as a display of a person's salvation in the Christian faith. The phrase was initially coined in 1904 by Max Weber in his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.^[1] It is argued that Protestants, beginning with Martin Luther, had reconceptualised worldly work as a duty which benefits both the individual and society as a whole. Thus, the Catholic idea of good works was transformed into an obligation to work diligently as a sign of grace. Whereas Catholicism teaches that good works are required of Catholics to be saved (viewing salvation as a future event), the Reformers taught that good works were only a consequence of an already-received salvation. However, the Calvinist theologians taught that only those who were predestined (cf. the Calvinist concept of double predestination) to be saved would be saved. Since it was impossible to know who was predestined, the notion developed that it might be possible to discern that a person was elect (predestined) by observing their way of life. Hard work and frugality were thought to be two important consequences of being one of the elect; thus, Protestants were attracted to these qualities. According to Weber (1904, 1905), it was John Calvin who introduced the theological doctrines which combined with those of Martin Luther to form a significant new attitude toward work. Calvin was a French theologian whose concept of predestination was revolutionary. Central to Calvinist belief was the Elect, those persons chosen by God to inherit eternal life. All other people were damned and nothing could change that since God was unchanging. While it was impossible to know for certain

whether a person was one of the Elect, one could have a sense of it based on his own personal encounters with God. Outwardly the only evidence was in the person's daily life and deeds, and success in one's worldly endeavors was a sign of possible inclusion as one of the Elect. A person who was indifferent and displayed idleness was most certainly one of the damned, but a person who was active, austere, and hard-working gave evidence to himself and to others that he was one of God's chosen ones (Tilgher, 1930). Calvin taught that all men must work, even the rich, because to work was the will of God. It was the duty of men to serve as God's instruments here on earth, to reshape the world in the fashion of the Kingdom of God, and to become a part of the continuing process of His creation (Braude, 1975). Men were not to lust after wealth, possessions, or easy living, but were to reinvest the profits of their labor into financing further ventures. Earnings were thus to be reinvested over and over again, ad infinitum, or to the end of time (Lipset, 1990). Using profits to help others rise from a lesser level of subsistence violated God's will since persons could only demonstrate that they were among the Elect through their own labor (Lipset, 1990). Selection of an occupation and pursuing it to achieve the greatest profit possible was considered by Calvinists to be a religious duty. Not only condoning, but encouraging the pursuit of unlimited profit was a radical departure from the Christian beliefs of the middle ages. In addition, unlike Luther, Calvin considered it appropriate to seek an occupation which would provide the greatest earnings possible. If that meant abandoning the family trade or profession, the change was not only allowed, but it was considered to be one's religious duty (Tilgher, 1930). The norms regarding work which

developed out of the Protestant Reformation, based on the combined theological teachings of Luther and Calvin, encouraged work in a chosen occupation with an attitude of service to God, viewed work as a calling and avoided placing greater spiritual dignity on one job than another, approved of working diligently to achieve maximum profits, required reinvestment of profits back into one's business, allowed a person to change from the craft or profession of his father, and associated success in one's work with the likelihood of being one of God's Elect. The American Dream is an idea that has been preached to young Americans and immigrants almost since the Industrial Revolution. America is viewed, around the world, as a place where if a person works hard enough, then their life as well as their family's lives will improve. Meaning that if you have a strong work ethic, that you'll get where you want to go in life. We've all heard those stories about immigrants coming from their poor countries, and working in a factory to provide a better life for their families. This idea has been nostalgically represented by the house in the suburbs with a white picket fence, a car, a wife, and two children. The idea that "the American Dream is possible" seems to be the prevailing ideology of most Americans and certainly most immigrants. This idea is spread throughout the US education system, and is spread to other countries by immigrants returning home. We all are pushed to strive to attain the American Dream. For the most part, we all seem to have the notion that no matter where you start out, through hard work, you can improve your life and even become wealthy. But is this idea just myth and illusion for the lower classes? Edmond Burke argued that myth and illusion is necessary to keep the lower classes content with their meager lives, and to

convince them to not go against traditional ways. In addition to the house with the white picket fence, the American Dream conjures the image of a lower class person toiling away in a factory or office for hours in order to collect a pay check. They may work long and hard hours now, but it all pays off in the end because they have improved their situation. They don't mind putting in the work because they know it will benefit them in the end. But is the American Dream an example of bourgeoisie propaganda? Karl Marx argued that the bourgeoisie would use propaganda to keep the proletariat from starting an uprising. This propaganda would prevent the proletariat from noticing that they are being exploited; therefore, they would not want to start an uprising. My answer to both the Burke and Marx questions is yes. The American Dream is clearly a form of both myth and illusion and propaganda used by the upper classes to keep the lower classes in their place. They promise workers that they'll eventually make minor gains financially for their current suffering. It is used to distract people from how bad their lives really are, and to prevent an uprising. Basically, what the upper class is saying is, " How about I exploit you today, so that you might be able to improve your life? You should work really hard for me so that you can move up in the world. " The American Dream in our society places a large emphasis on hard work and determination, which can then lead to economic and social success. This success can allow individuals to create a home and provide a better future for one's loved ones. This notion of the American Dream has been promoted ever since the establishment of the United States, creating a sense of meritocracy in our society. However, due to the rise of capitalism and the influence of " bourgeois ideology", that notion of

the " American Dream" has all but deteriorated. Elite capitalists in our society have attempted to capitalize on our society's obsession with the accumulation of wealth, in which the end result has been a substantial disparity of wealth between the elite few and the rest of society. Karl Marx an influential political economist believed that capitalism and its effects would create a massive class struggle that would eventually lead to large-scale crisis. Karl Marx would conceptualize this notion of the American dream as a product of " bourgeois ideology", one that places false hope among the working-class of our society. The American Dream's current emphasis on home ownership has a direct correlation with the rise of capitalism in our society. Capitalism places an emphasis on borrowing capital in order to amass more capital; this emphasis however has created an influx of debt to increase substantially, allowing individuals to invest their life savings and future income into a home. According to Marx, the bourgeoisie shapes this obsession of accumulating wealth and home ownership, principles that the elite class holds in high regard. The upper class' values and ideals in a capitalist society tend to become that society's hegemonic values as well. Since the bourgeoisie own the means of production, their best interests are always prioritized. Therefore capitalists (bourgeoisie) make decisions that will solely benefit them, neglecting the well being of others. Amassing capital has become a value of large significance in our present society. This obsession with the accumulation of wealth has created a shift in our American Dream. It was once truly based on creating better opportunities for one's family and creating a better future. Unfortunately this has completely changed to one of owning property, and amassing as much capital as

possible. This has allowed capitalists to try to extract as much surplus value from their workers in order to gain as much profit as possible. This extraction of "free labor" as Marx called it has created high levels of exploitation towards the working class. The working class in recent years has not been able to amass wealth due to their poor relationship with the means of production. The Proletariat class has had to deal with stagnant wages while the amount of labor expected from them rises exponentially. Capitalism and its boom and bust tendencies cannot even promise the working class the small compensation that they receive from such a flawed system. This creates alienation within the working-class according to Marx. These individuals are not able to achieve their "American Dream" mainly because the elite capitalists make large-scale decisions with only their best interests in mind. As a result, the working class becomes alienated with the process of labor, the product they are producing, their natural ability to produce, and most importantly they become alienated with each other. The working class has started to believe according to Marx that they are not able to truly move up the social ladder based on their hard work and achievements. This creates dissension amongst classes and further intensifies the class struggle that Marx believes is a consequence of capitalism. This dissension and exploitation creates class-consciousness for the working class, in which they notice that their hard work is not accounted for anything since they are not the owners of the means of production. This consciousness is heavily prevalent in today's society, as various forms of protest throughout the world have been ignited due to the exploitation that many individuals have had to deal with due to the poor decisions that our elite capitalists and leaders have

made. This class-consciousness is what ignited the " Occupy" movements throughout the United States and now throughout the world. Individuals around the world are now fed-up with not being able to achieve their own dreams since this disparity of wealth has created worse economic and social conditions for the rest of society. This specialization within individuals has only intensified this class struggle, further developing this division of labor. Emile Durkheim would reject this notion that the division of labor has ruined the " American Dream". Durkheim sees the division of labor as a means of organic solidarity in our society, allowing individuals to specialize in acts of labor according to their skill set. Durkheim would believe that the " American Dream" is very much alive, but that debt has become criminalized in our society. Too much emphasis is being put on the influx of debt, and not much is being used on how organic solidarity can perhaps allow us to help each other and relieve one another from such dire conditions. Credit according to Durkheim would be something sacred, as it can allow individuals to amass more wealth. This wealth can allow the business cycle to continue, further injecting the money supply and creating a positive chain of economic events. Durkheim would not agree with Marx in that the American Dream is just an injection of " Bourgeoisie ideology". The American Dream is something sacred that can be achieved through collective means. Owning a home creates social solidarity amongst individuals according to Durkheim, allowing individuals to have a common objective. Max Weber would disagree with both theorists, as he would blame the deterioration of the " American Dream" on increased emphasis on rationalization. This emphasis on rationalization has made efficiency the most important aspect of amassing

wealth. Capitalists are being inclined to making decisions on what is in their best interests, neglecting the values and beliefs of the workers and the citizens of that country. This often creates an iron cage in which decisions are being made to benefit one's likeliness in succeeding. This rationalization along with the rise of the protestant ethic, has led to this obsession with the accumulation wealth and owning a home in the United States. The Protestant ethic would be Weber's main reason as to why the " American Dream" is so important, but would not provide answers as to why its likeliness to be achieved is continually fading. Although each theorist is subjective in their analysis of the " American Dream", each does provide their own unique perspective in terms of explaining why things occur in society, and what shapes these events. As a scholar, I truly believe that Marx's ideology fits the deterioration of the " American Dream" better. Marx in his Economic Manuscripts of 1804 and through the words of Stuart Easterling, believed that " capitalism is an economic system that is inherently crisis-prone. It is driven by forces, which cause it to be unstable, anarchic, and self-destructive" (Easterling). Karl Marx's Economic Manuscripts of 1804 and The Communist Manifesto, give us a foreshadowing of capitalisms flawed nature, and how it can ruin things in society such as individuals hope to achieve an " American Dream". What I gathered from reading from Karl Marx is mainly that value is determined by the labor put into it, and the rarity of the object. Humans make something valuable or not based on the perceived effort put into it, not necessarily the actual effort. Regarding the " magnitudes of value" mentioned in the article, I found that rarity is a huge factor in defining something as " valuable". For example, we value an ounce of gold so much

more than a pound of iron, even though you can do more with iron. Marx states, " the determination of the magnitude of value by labor-time is therefore a secret hidden under the apparent movements in the relative values of commodities". In short, if the ' thing' makes life easier for people, it is worth more to them. It's worth can completely disregard the labor-time or quantity of the object, in order for its convenience to namely be the ' value'. People will spend more on a labor intensive item than an easier to make item. For example, people will pay \$20 for a knit wool sweater and \$3 on a can opener, without thinking about the resources being use