

## ***“The American Dream is a sham for most minority groups”***

The American Dream has been around for quite a while. In fact, the term was first used James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* which was written in 1931. In the book, Adams refers to the Dream as being the idea that each person would be free to achieve the best that they can depending on their capabilities, regardless of their age, race, sex or other such factors. In the United States' Declaration of Independence and resulting Constitution, the founding fathers laid the foundations for the American Dream by attempting to provide equal rights for all citizens. This was meant to provide a lasting law which could not be interpreted wrongly or only applied to certain people. The intention was to create a land of hope, where people could start from scratch and succeed where it would be impossible to do the same anywhere else.

The American Dream is itself a concept that is not universally identical. For each person, their vision of the Dream is affected by their background, upbringing and their own hopes and ambitions for their future. There is no one universally accepted idea of what the Dream entails, or even how to go about making it come true. Understanding of the concept is as diverse as the peoples of America. For some people, the Dream may mean owning a house or a plot of land. Maybe it means being self sufficient or making your own living. Sometimes, it means becoming well known, such as being a Hollywood star. Therefore, as can be seen, everybody expects something different from the American Dream, and each person has their own way of fulfilling it.

From the very beginning, however, it became apparent that the American Dream would be difficult, if not impossible, for some people to achieve. The biggest tragedy was that the reason for this difficulty lay in the fact that people's backgrounds were still being used, even in this new country, to judge them and to decide whether they would be eligible to participate in the Dream. In this way, minority groups such as the Black African population who had immigrated to the United States in search of a better life away from the slavery and hardship of Europe found themselves facing the same, if not worse conditions and discrimination in their new homeland in the hands of the ruling majority, who happened to be white.

By the turn of the 20th century, the promise of the American Dream had begun to lure substantial numbers of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. Many of them lived difficult lives in different countries across Europe, and therefore had big dreams which they never thought would be possible given their lifestyles.

It was these people who went to the USA, taking their own impossible dreams with them and expecting to be able to fulfil them simply because it was a new country; one which lacked the difficult histories of its European counterparts, and therefore a place where anything could be possible as long as some work was put into it.

What these people hadn't thought of, though, was that there were many other people just like them who also had the same thoughts, and this resulted in some quite large communities uprooting and relocating to the USA in search of the Dream. The result of this massive upheaval was that many separate communities formed, each occupied by people that didn't get on with other communities. In this way, exactly as there were communities in Europe that were separate by default, this happened in the USA, most notable with Black African communities, who tried to stay away from white communities, fearing the same racism and prejudices that they had to live with before entering the USA.

Another group of people who yearned for the free life offered by the young USA were the religious community. They had traditionally been persecuted by non-religious people, but even more so by other sects of the same religion. They saw the USA as offering a new beginning; somewhere where they could practise in peace, make their own communities of followers and not be intruded by others who claimed the same land. In fact, the abundance of land was one of the main triggers of the American Dream, as it offered people massive opportunities for growth and freedom. Never again would anybody need to intrude someone else's land.

This was, however, another problem with the American Dream. Sure, there was enough land for every person to take as much as they wanted, but it wasn't as easy as that, especially for later arrivals. Those who really took advantage were the early immigrants who were able to take the land because of lack of native people to guard it all. These people were the ones who would then become the owners of large farms. By the time many people found out about the Dream and found the means to make it to the USA (bearing in mind that long distance travel was in its infancy), all the good land had already been taken, and nobody would have enough money to purchase a decent plot. Therefore, these later immigrants were usually forced into a life of low paid unskilled labour, usually confined to cleaning jobs. These people were also mostly black people. However, this didn't seem to diminish the Dream, but helped to fuel it. These people saw the work as a temporary stopgap to earn enough to fulfil the dream and achieve independence and self sufficiency.

However, by this time, these people were all minority groups within a white dominated land. Whether they were religious communities or Black Africans, they were once again being controlled by the same people that were controlling

them in the lives they wanted to get away from so much. In this way, the American Dream was cruelly snatched from these people and reality commenced. Slavery was worse than ever, and even after that had been somehow stopped, segregation meant that the USA was for the first time trailing the rest of the world in terms of human rights and abuses. Many descendants of immigrants argued that they may have actually been leading a worse life in the USA than they would have done elsewhere.

In conclusion, for these and many others, the American Dream turned out to be nothing but a dream. Maybe it was a feeling that things would be different. For some, it was a whole change of lifestyle. For others, it meant being able to do anything you wanted without the fear of reprisals. But in the end, all it meant was a costly change of location for massive communities which resulted in decades of anger, frustration, dashed hopes, and worst of all, more of the same that they had dreamed of escaping one day. So it transpires that after all, the American Dream was a sham for many minority groups, and many others too. After a while, people found this out, many of them the hard way, and the Dream became all but a forgone conclusion to one of the USA's most memorable moments in history, albeit for all the wrong reasons. As the late Barbara Jordan, a US congresswoman, lawyer, and educator said, "The American dream is not dead. True, it is gasping for breath but it is not dead." These few words really do sum up the sham that was the American Dream.

***By Ruben Arakelyan***