

Literature Review of The American Dream

NUAMES

English 1010

Southwick

Emma Thomas

10/24

Literature Review of American Dream

The American dream is something that has grown and changed over time, but what is the American Dream? Is the American Dream something that still happens to this day? After reading multiple articles, the American Dream is not just one thing. The articles show a variety of ideas and connections. The idea of this paper is to discuss what the dream is, the diversity of the dream, and what it can entail.

What the American Dream is

The first point to be covered is, what is the American Dream? The American Dream has been used over time with different definitions. The American Dream has been used for the materialistic things in life. When the phrase “The American Dream” started being used it was made for frontier life and the materialistic things it came with. One of the things that is a part of the American Dream is a home. Many people think of a home when they think of the American Dream. Also that a home is an important asset. They say that (Goodman & Mayer, 2022) “For a homeowner, a home is both a place to live and an investment,”(43). When buying a home you look at it in the long run. How it can benefit you and the wealth you want to achieve. Looking at “homeownership [it] has historically served as an effective vehicle for accumulating wealth for many reasons,” (Goodman & Mayer 2022)(52). We came to the Americas to find land and become rich. However the American Dream has other definitions.

To author Adam Coleman he explained to his son how “the American Dream isn’t given — it’s earned.” The American Dream is the knowledge, experiences, and the things you learn along the way. It's the ability to keep going even when you feel like stopping. It's like getting up in the morning and choosing to get up even if it feels too early. Hard work is required for the American Dream to succeed. Is the American Dream really accessible for everyone? “... in short,

yes, if they want it bad enough,” (Coleman 22). If you want it you have to work hard and believe that you can achieve it. Coleman talks about how he met and talked with people from different backgrounds and situations where they came to America for this dream. How they come for safety and a better life. For them the American Dream is the best dream. We take for granted that some of us have the American Dream already. If we do or do not have it, we should work to attain it.

The American Dream Definition has changed where and when we use it. The American Dream was once an “optimistic rhetorical device, albeit one that often obscured the economic and racial barriers” (Ulloa 2022). It has been recognized by many different politicians that the dream has changed and that the country isn’t capable of it any more. However it has been possible for other people. The phrase still rings true for some. Looking at political parties and legislation you can start to see a more diverse group of people. These people however have used the phrase “American Dream” in their campaigns. Ulloa states that “scholars warn us that Republicans are distorting a defining American idea and turning it into an exclusionary political message.” The American Dream in politics now, has become a way to get into politics.

Abrams worked with the American Enterprise Institute to ask people what they thought the “American Dream” was. One of the families that they talked to said “The rewards are not things, they are experiences — a meal, a conversation, a walk, a hug”. The time that you have together and how you learn to grow is what matters to this family. Abrams also mentions that the “pattern [of] seeing the American dream as more about community and individuality than material success and social mobility appeared across demographic and political categories.” Another person they interviewed said “I want my future children, everyone’s children, to grow up in a country where they have opportunities to create a better life.” We just want what's best

for the next generation. No matter what you believe, we want a good life for ourselves and our families. Author Samuel Abrams states that “Individuality and family, not wealth and real estate, are what Americans seek and believe they are finding in the national dream,”(2019). The American Dream was the dream of opportunity for the family and for the individual. Looking through time many immigrants have come to America to achieve the American Dream for their families. A parent's best goal in life is to provide a better life for their children.

Diversity of American Dream

The American Dream has become a very important part of our culture but it has also diversified to other cultures. The American Dream has led people to better lives and better selves. She says (Ulloa 2022) “The party is diversifying its ranks and recruiting candidates with powerful come-from-behind stories.” Many politicians of color and different races are coming with the idea of change. The idea that the American Dream is possible for them. The aspects of the American Dream have and have not been attainable for some. “A Panel Study of Income Dynamics... found that a higher share of Hispanic and low-income households failed to sustain homeownership, while black households had smaller gains in wealth than other groups, after controlling for income, demographics, and household composition,”(Goodman & Mayer,53). However the American Dream can be hard for those of other cultures and races. In current times it's hard for some to achieve their dream. Also many of Chetty's charts compare and show the increases and decreases of different demographics. How diverse people and groups live differently. Also that being in the right place or knowing certain things helps your upward mobility as well.

The “American Dream” is different from other countries. Around the world countries have similar but also different ideas of what their countries goal should be. When looking at the

“European Dream” it's similar to the U.S in the likes of “community relationships are more important than individual autonomy.” Russia's dream is to travel. For so long Russia's country was closed off from the rest of the world. Now people can come and go and go traveling around the world. A country's “dream” is different wherever you go.

Mobility

Another main point of the American Dream is mobility. Being able to better yourself educationally or physically. Social mobility is an important idea of the American Dream. In Reeves and Krause article they use Chetty's compressed work to talk about the different demographics. The first chart shows different countries' mobility rate compared. Looking at Chetty's charts, mobility is less likely in America compared to Canada and Denmark. Many people come to America hoping for upward mobility but this shows that it's better in other countries. In a way the American Dream is in other places. Going down to chart five, it shows a map of upward mobility depending on location. It shows more dense areas where opportunities are less likely and vice versa. This chart shows that the “American Dream persists – it is just unevenly distributed,” (Reeves & Krause, 22). The American Dream is happening but it's not accessible to everyone.

However “a college education acts as a leveler” (R&K 22) and chart 11 shows that. It compares how different colleges help a person's mobility rank move up. It's a consistent increase. I think it helps the idea that an education is another idea of the American Dream. How important it is to go and be able to learn. Chart 10 also shows how kindergarten teachers who are educated and have experience, “boost earnings by \$1,104 on average,” (R&K 22). Education plays a big part in upward mobility. The more education the more upwards you move up. The American Dream for some is about the people you connect with. Working with “Harvard economist Raj

Chetty and a team of nearly two dozen other scholars” Roselsky found that the “places that have more connections between low-income and high-income folks also have much greater rates of upward mobility,” (Roselsky, 22).

The American Dream has given access to those who were at their low to be mobile and rise up. People like Maya Flores, Jason Miryares, and Gabe Vasquez have used the phrase to bring recognition and awareness that the dream is lessening and becoming a political campaign. That's why they believe they should be in power. Those that have had trials and low points are able to do great things. They are working hard and moving up to have a better life not just for themselves but those in their communities.

Chetty talks about how "Social interaction across class lines is a key factor that predicts upward mobility out of poverty," (Roselsky, 22). Be it through a helping hand, trying to stay afloat, or just plain admiration, people of low class incomes are more likely to go to college or to have a better income when put into a high income status environment. Relationships are what matter to people. In this case it's the social relationships that you have that affect the ability to move forward economically. Factors of your social relationships include “cohesiveness” and “civic engagement.” How well you know the people and how involved you are. The connection and relationships you have are in this version the American Dream.

The American Dream is a constantly changing dream. What makes the dream depends on who you ask. It's something that has inspired many to come and try for a better life. It's something that inspires social/economic mobility. The American Dream is made up of relationships and connections. The American Dream is something of change and growth. The American Dream is the people who live the dream in their way.

Resources

Abrams, S. J. (2019, February 5). The American Dream Is Alive and Well. *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/05/opinion/american-dream.html>

Coleman, A. B. (2022, July 5). *There's no greater dream than the American Dream — and anyone can attain it*. New York Post. Retrieved October 12, 2022, from

<https://nypost.com/2022/07/04/than-the-american-dream-and-anyone-can-attain-it/>

Goodman, L. S., & Mayer, C. (n.d.). *Homeownership and the American dream - american economic association*. Retrieved October 6, 2022, from

<https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.32.1.31>

Reeves, R. V., & Krause, E. (2022, March 9). *Raj Chetty in 14 charts: Big findings on opportunity and mobility we should all know*. Brookings. Retrieved October 11, 2022, from

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2018/01/11/raj-chetty-in-14-charts-big-findings-on-opportunity-and-mobility-we-should-know/>

Rosalsky, G. (2022, August 1). *Why the american dream is more attainable in some cities than others*. NPR. Retrieved October 3, 2022, from

<https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2022/08/01/1114661467/why-the-american-dream-is-more-attainable-in-some-cities-than-others>

Ulloa, J. (2022, August 21). How a Storied Phrase Became a Partisan Battleground. *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/21/us/politics/republicans-american-dream.html>