

# What Is The American Dream?

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What is the American Dream? A look at where the idea began.  
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What is the American Dream? Is it two kids, a new car, a good job, and a big new house with a pet dog to greet you at the door? Hmm... At least there was a deeper conception of it when it was invented.

{bot\_wrgoogle}James Truslow Adams answered the question "What is the American Dream?" in his book, "The Epic of America" in 1931. In fact, that was the first time the term was used. He called it, "that 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. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is 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."

That's a nice thought. Of course, a "social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable," is something desired by most of the world, so it may be a bit presumptuous to call it the "American" dream. In any case, is that what it means to people in the United States now?

I went to a forum on this subject and found one post that summed up what all the other contributors were saying. According to this person, the American Dream is:

- A family
- A home that one owns
- A steady job
- Health
- Modest luxuries like nicer cars and clothes
- Time to relax

Nobody, by the way, mentioned the goal, "to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable." Nor was anything said about a "richer and fuller" life except in the crudest sense of having more things and "luxuries." Now, I have nothing against wealth and luxuries, but I wonder if what we call the American Dream is now just a hypnotic idea that causes stress and disappointment. In other words, has it become the American Nightmare?

For example, my wife and I choose not to start a family beyond ourselves, but how many who are not meant to be parents (seriously, not all people should have kids) do so anyhow, because they are following the dream? What are the consequences?

Does it matter to ones happiness if they own a home or rent one? If so, then perhaps some renters' unhappiness is only a result of the dream that tells them they have failed. And a job is just one way of many to pay for the necessities of life. Believe me, after forty or so jobs I can tell you that I didn't want any of them to be "steady." As for health, it's obviously a good thing, and desired by more than just Americans.

Modest luxuries? That's a wonderful goal, as is time to relax. But the dream that most Americans have pushes them to buy luxuries too soon - before they can afford them - and to buy too much. The resulting debt then requires a lifestyle of hard work. This eats up "time to relax" and causes more and more stress. The needs of children are ignored, adult toys pile up in garages and yards, and debts pile up until they threaten the loss of homes. This then, becomes the American Nightmare.

What is the American Dream? It's like all dreams created to entice us into them - a hypnotic distraction from our responsibility to discover for ourselves what we really need in life.

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