

## 14. The American Dream

Deeply rooted in U.S. culture is “The American Dream,” essentially, that in the U.S. anyone can work hard, apply ourselves and realize a better life, a life doing what we choose in order to achieve success, security, wealth, power, advantage and privilege. Historically, that’s rooted in and compared with European feudal systems, in which position, wealth, power and privilege were often decided by birth.

It’s a motivating improvement to believe we’re not trapped forever in occupations or social classes by our bloodlines. Our individual character and efforts determine our success. It’s inspiring to believe we can decide who we are, what we do and our quality of life, and create that, rather than being predestined to certain roles and stations by who our parents are. That American Dream has successfully motivated many to apply ourselves and achieve wonderful things. It’s been an inspiration to many.

Unfortunately, at this point, for too many, the American Dream has now become a desire to escape the American Nightmare. People are trapped in debt, dependent on broken social systems, abused by exploitative employers, living paycheck to paycheck, stuck in traffic, living unhealthy lives, deprived of nature, media addicted, feeling bad, with little leisure time, stressed, under a corrupted government, where the game is stacked in favor of those with wealth and power, observing unfairness and obscene wealth disparity. For those, the American Dream is now to get rich and get free of the ugliness of the everyday everyman’s life. The American Dream is now “get mine, so I can be free of this mess.”

Many of us tolerate the ugliness and injustice in the unlikely hope that one day we will strike it rich and be above it all, part of the wealth and privilege, where the rules don’t apply to us. The American Dream is essentially now to win a big lottery prize and transcend the brokenness. It’s extremely unlikely we will, with 10% of people owning 90% of everything, or millions to one lottery odds, but at least it’s hope.

The corruption has reached the point where it’s almost like feudal Europe in the U.S. now, where privilege determined by birth provides advantages and resources to perpetuate privilege and wealth. The American Dream is increasingly hard to achieve for too many. It is a myth.

We need a new American Dream, in which we hope and work for proactively well-designed, efficient and functional systems providing for the needs of all, where we are happy and our basic needs are met, we live in love and harmony in community with each other, and in thriving natural systems we know, each contributes according to her abilities and receives according to his needs, leisure, art and music are available to all, we’re healthy, fairness reigns and nobody has, needs or wants extreme wealth, power or privilege, all are respected, nurtured and encouraged, all have access to the combined knowledge of all, and spirit is respected, personally known and grown. We need new vision, values and dreams.