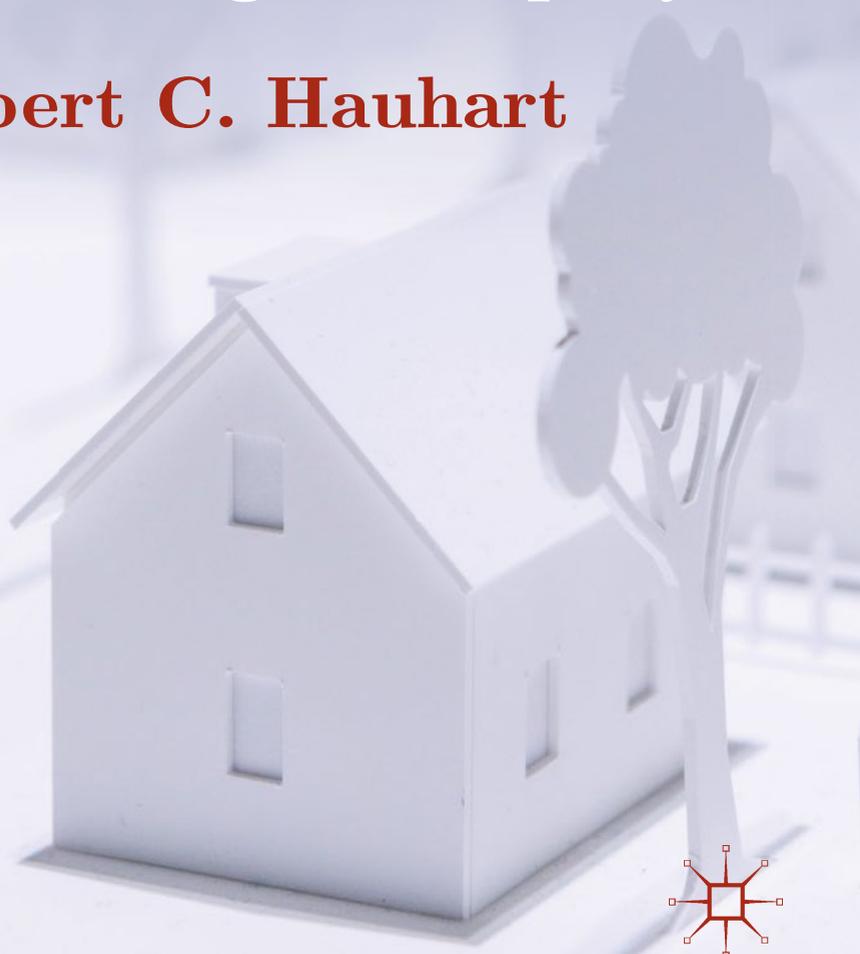# Seeking the American Dream

A Sociological Inquiry

Robert C. Hauhart

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Preface

The present inquiry had its genesis 5 years ago when I invited a colleague, Jeff Birkenstein, to co-teach an interdisciplinary course on the American Dream. We designed the course to be a combination of historical documents, literary selections, and sociological analyses. These foci made sense from several points of view. First, Birkenstein is a professor of English literature and I am a sociologist. Second, many of the ideas that led to the formulation of the American Dream arose in the historical era of our nation's founding. Therefore, including documents born from that era that illuminated the source of the American Dream also made sense. Third, there is little question but that American authors have been besotted with the notion of the American Dream for most of the last century and a half. One can readily tick off the familiar titles in our literature—starting perhaps with F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (2004)—that take up the idea seriously and as a major theme. Finally, American sociologists and criminologists have themselves frequently investigated the tenets, influence, and ways of life generated by our American Dream. We called our course "Chasing the American Dream" having concluded, without much investigation whatsoever, that the pursuit of the Dream was as much a part of the Dream as any of its core beliefs.

In the ensuing 5 years, we've taught the course three times and will likely teach it a fourth time before the present manuscript assumes its final bound and printed form. The course, taught within the university's general education program to fulfill a literature requirement, has become a popular offering. The reason is simple and has little or nothing to do with Birkenstein or me: students, whether native born, the sons or daughters

of recent immigrants, or so-called foreign students here to study from abroad, find the American Dream a fascinating topic worthy of study. What is it about the American Dream that attracts us so?

The phrase "American Dream" evokes many responses because it harbors elements, cloaked by two common, familiar words that almost everyone can readily grasp. When we hear or read the phrase, we think we know immediately what the speaker or writer is talking about; we can almost see it in our mind's eye. Yet, couched in this immediately recognizable simplicity there reside, partially hidden, many alluring threads. Thus, our initial interest in the American Dream is magnified when we begin to comprehend its scope and depth.

Many students, motivated by their early effort to investigate the meaning of the American Dream, reach a number of quick conclusions that satisfy them. Students discern, for example, that the phrase has many potential meanings. Many students will stop at this point and simply conclude that the phrase encompasses nothing more than the diversity of aspirations and ways of life pursued in our contemporary multiethnic society. Students who settle for this level of understanding will see the American Dream as simply a matter of choice. They will argue that there is no single American Dream but rather a multitude of American Dreams.

Then, however, a troubling thought intrudes for some: what if some (or more frightening still, many) of these American Dreams are such empty visions, and face such daunting barriers, that they cannot be achieved? Students who entertain this thought now enter a new realm of inquiry. Students at this level start to focus on the limitations inherent in the American Dream and concentrate their analysis on the many gaps and polarities that exist within American society. These students perceive that although the American Dream holds out the attractive possibility that one may follow the path of one's choice, it also raises the persistently nagging question of whether one has made the "right choice." One concern is whether one's choice of American Dream can be realized. A second, related concern is whether American society is so complicated, fast-moving, and inherently contradictory that perhaps no one may ever achieve what he or she envisions. Like the invitation in our *Declaration of Independence* to pursue happiness, the American Dream invites our ardent efforts but holds forth only a tantalizing grail as ephemeral and diaphanous as the distant, and ultimately unattainable, object of Jay Gatsby's desire.

The present book has evolved out of these early efforts to guide students to more precisely identify, and then seize, the meaning of the American

Dream. On the way, I've published some preliminary findings which are worth describing briefly. Among my first attempts to say something about the American Dream in print was an article my colleague Birkenstein and I published regarding our course and the Saint Martin's University students who constitute its audience (Hauhart and Birkenstein 2013). The article grew out of a Global Studies Conference presentation we offered in Victoria, BC, Canada, in 2011 where we presented a number of observations after surveying our students the first two times we conducted our course. While our in-class surveys revealed a number of intriguing points, perhaps the most consistently interesting finding was the strength with which our students maintained their faith in the American Dream. In our initial survey (2010), after querying our students about whether various life experiences formed a part of their American Dream (i.e., completing college, marriage, owning a home, etc.) we simply asked, separately, whether they believed they could achieve their American Dream. Overwhelmingly, our students responded "yes." Taking this as a sign that we perhaps had failed in our efforts to educate our students sufficiently we revised our survey in 2011. In this second iteration, we preceded our final question with a short, but sobering, recitation of some of the then widely reported, contemporary facts about the accumulation of student loan debt, the relatively difficult recent job market for college graduates, the number of college graduates who continued to live at home, and so on. Then we asked whether our respondents believed they could achieve their American Dream. While a measure of tentativeness crept into some responses, our students as a group still strongly responded "yes." (A subsequent reprise of the same survey in 2015 also produced a similar result.) This persistent production of what we might call a "true believer" effect is a remarkable feature of the American Dream that has been documented by others.

Another early attempt at grasping the influence of the American Dream, penned about the same time, responded to the impact of the so-called Great Recession of 2007–09 (Hauhart 2011). This inquiry arose in the context of my plan to attend the Ninth Annual Conference on New Directions in the Humanities in Granada, Spain, in June, 2011. In contemplating what I might present, I decided to investigate the effect of the collapse of the US mortgage and housing markets on other countries. In the course of doing so, I discovered that: (1) the popular press in many countries now routinely produces articles on the American Dream, generally with reference to comparable middle-class dreams held by each

country's own citizens; (2) many countries now rely on mortgage practices similar to those in the USA even though there was often little history of home mortgages in those countries heretofore; (3) the 2007–08 collapse of the US mortgage and housing markets produced a similar collapse in many countries from Europe to Asia (although the collapse was more pronounced in some countries—Ireland, Spain, Italy—than others); and (4) the same financial dynamics as those in the USA (such as no down-payment loans, adjustable rate "balloon" mortgages, speculative purchases, and inflated home prices) had been the directly attributable causes of these countries' own market problems as well. The discovery of this widespread congruence of factors across a number of countries suggested to me that I could argue, persuasively if only metaphorically, that the USA's principal export had now become (perhaps to the detriment of other countries) the American Dream of single-family home ownership based on deceptively "cheap" borrowed money. One measure of the validity of this contention arose when, having made the initial statement of my thesis, a conference attendee raised his hand and said in a distinctive accent, "I thought that was the Australian dream." Thus, the place of home ownership and the role of mortgage financing within the American Dream is a feature that merits more consideration.

Finally, in a recent precursor to the present volume I investigated at some length the qualities earlier American sociologists were able to identify as elements of the American Dream or related features of the American way of life, whether expressed in a fully articulated, intentional fashion or more subtly and implicitly (Hauhart 2015). The observations I will draw from this prior work that first appeared in the *American Sociologist* are many. For present purposes, it is sufficient to remark that a certain degree of the work necessary to understand the meaning and influence of the American Dream involves "teasing out" its various manifestations as exemplars take root in particular segments of American society. American sociology, born at the end of the nineteenth century and dedicated to documenting and analyzing the social lives of society's members, is especially well-suited to investigating the American Dream. We can, I believe, better grasp the meaning, influence, and impact of the American Dream if we study those sociological works that have investigated the "American way of life" over the last 125 years. This effort will constitute the essential core of the book.

For this reason, I have subtitled this work "a sociological inquiry" although, to a degree, it is a misnomer. The reason is simply that the study

of the American Dream cannot be limited to a single perspective. It would be foolish, and counterproductive, to ignore the contributions that derive from history, literature, economics, anthropology, political science, and journalism. Sociology, however, makes a distinctive contribution by recognizing that writings from any of these disciplines about social life must themselves be subjected to cultural analysis and interpretation. As sociologists are fond of reminding its audience, society is "socially constructed," and any effort to understand society needs to engage in a form of intellectual deconstruction. It is sociology, then, that will provide a frame of reference or lens that will enable us a broad understanding of what we mean by the American Dream. The plan of the book is intended to facilitate an orderly pursuit of that goal.

Chapter 1 reviews the historical antecedents upon which our idea of an "American Dream" rests. As the European quest for a more direct passage to India led the English and others to the New World, so our quest for the American Dream must start with an appreciation of the forces and motivations that led English settlers to colonize our eastern seaboard starting in the early seventeenth century. Regardless of the many other influences that by now have contributed to the form of contemporary American society, the importance of the issues that dominated English society before and during the American colonial period cannot be disregarded. Likewise, accounts of how these early English settlers lived their lives once they landed on these shores and the manner in which they explained their way of life to themselves and others necessarily form the foundation for early statements regarding our subject. Similarly, the formally adopted statements of intention that constitute our democratic heritage are particularly important for understanding the principles that men sought to inculcate in governing the American communities they were forming. Finally, contemporary and retrospective historical accounts of the USA's westward expansion, domestic initiatives, and foreign engagements shed light on the drives that consumed Americans up to the end of the nineteenth century. Cumulatively, these historical records form the bedrock sources for the ideas that animated our conception of the American Dream.

This book is not, however, primarily a history of formal pronouncements and abstract ideas. Rather, its central premise is that by examining American life closely we can identify what the American Dream has meant for various groups and how it may have changed. Chapter 2 therefore begins our examination of studies conducted by American sociologists that tell us something about the way we lived in particular eras in specific

parts of the country. Early sociological studies often relied on field methods that brought the investigators into close contact with their subjects' lives. These methods may strike us today as being somewhat unsophisticated, but these early studies typically relied on approaches that compelled the subjects of study to explain themselves to the researchers. In so doing, Americans from all ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic strata were forced to examine themselves in a way that some modern methods limited to mass social surveys do not. In particular, early researchers were often willing to listen at great length to the stories their respondents wanted to tell. These stories were filled with explanations of the reasons that the subjects, their forebears, and their contemporaries acted in the way they did as well as descriptions of their aspirations, their fears, and their struggles. Prominent among the reports one finds in these early sociological accounts of life in the USA are stories emphasizing the hopes of different generations and the means by which families addressed the conditions of their existence within American society. Often within this crucible of intersecting forces, the values that animated community life and inspired individual motivation are laid bare in a way that later studies do not fully reveal. Consequently, these early sociological reports are a fertile source of commentary on the American way of life described by the Americans living it. These accounts convey to us the constituent elements of what these Americans conceived of as their American Dream.

Chapter 3 continues our review of sociological studies of American life in the 1920s and Chap. 4 addresses the period between the two world wars. As this latter era encompasses the economic collapse known as the Great Depression, studies from this period document the changing estimates applied to American life in light of changed conditions. Notably, it is during this era, early in the Depression years, that the popular historian James Truslow Adams (1931) first committed the phrase "the American dream" to the printed page (Adams chose not to capitalize "dream" but as his iconic phrase has now entered our vocabulary with as much resonance and recognition as the "White House," capitalizing "dream" seems the better choice). Adams' definition has often been the starting point for investigations of the American Dream for that reason. While his definition offers us a touchstone to anchor some of our reflections, many of the studies we will examine question whether his definition has continuing relevance to American life.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine sociological studies of the immediate postwar years. Often characterized as a period dominated by the G.I. Bill,

prosperity, and an insular, complacent domestic politics, community studies of this era are informative about the goals sought by everyday Americans in different strata facing the challenge of thriving within an openly competitive environment. These studies reveal, as perhaps few others do, the class-based adaptations that Americans construct in making their way through society. Correspondingly, the American Dream is conceived in ways that often reflect these class-based choices. While always prominent, issues of race and ethnicity in relation to the USA's promise of "equal opportunity" also come to the fore since the economic prosperity of the period was not equally shared.

Chapter 7 addresses several sociological studies that analyze the means by which identity is formed, the social self is constructed and transmitted, and the mid-century American culture was enacted. Among these are studies that are openly critical of American culture and what the authors perceive to be the pernicious features of our national life. In articulating the grounds for their social criticism, the authors inevitably examine the premises on which they believe much of twentieth-century American life was built. These authors explore more directly than many the cultural elements that they believe epitomize Americans' dreams of the good life. While many of these theories and critiques remain persuasive, if not amenable to empirical validation, one limitation of these studies is their exclusive focus on the American middle class.

Chapter 8 reviews studies published after the tumult of the 1960s has been replaced by the political danger represented by Watergate, the first national energy crisis, economic stagnation, the deterioration of our central cities, and the new economic realities of global competition. Studies of the American way of life have often focused their attention on economic issues but those who examined the crucial forces at play during this period were nearly unanimous in according preeminence to economic analyses. American intellectuals and commentators of all stripes are currently consumed with pronouncing on the "inequality gap" yet it is worth recalling that the focus of many studies in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s were driven by this same recognition of the distance between the various economic strata in American life.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 bring our discussion up to the present by addressing contemporary subgroups in American life—black elites, welfare recipients, those who live alone, the homeless and street people, and students at private liberal arts colleges. In each instance, the goal is to understand the American Dream phenomenon through the life choices of distinctive demographic groups within our society.

Finally, it is worth commenting on the potential audience this book is intended to reach. On the one hand, this book is not a textbook; rather, it is intended to be a scholarly examination of the origin, meaning, influences, and impact of the way Americans have lived their quest for the American Dream. Yet, as a college teacher whose original inspiration for examining the American Dream was to develop a course for undergraduates, I believe the book can be used successfully as a text in a course on American society. Any learning experience depends on materials that focus the subject under study and provide a foundation for the questions to be examined. Supplemented by other resources, I believe this book could play such a role.

At the same time, I am hopeful that my review of American sociology's investigations of the role the American Dream has played in the "American way of life" will offer a platform for further studies. American sociology, like most intellectual disciplines, is a work in progress. Within its general mission, studies of how Americans live, what they believe, and what they wish to achieve offer possibilities that are sometimes neglected. As one example, since the topic is not a highly technical subject, sociological studies of the American Dream offer graduate students and younger scholars the opportunity to contribute to the discipline in a way that few other subjects offer sociologists in this day of highly segmented specialties.

In the last analysis, though, this book's potential readership is not limited to college students or sociologists. Rather, as all Americans live under the often intense shadow of the American Dream, I hope that most elusive and maligned of our national species—the educated reader—will find something of interest here, too.

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Antecedents

The ideas that form the foundation for the American Dream arose from the matrix of socioeconomic and political events that inspired exploration and settlement of the North American continent in the sixteenth and seventeeth centuries. While some of these events may be traced generally to broadly pursued European efforts at global exploration, the principal sources of migration to colonial America were, of course, English in origin and thus can only be understood in the context of the English history of the period. The influences that led to establishing the English colonies may be divided into two primary ones—commercial/economic and religious—each represented by the earliest settlements in Jamestown, Virginia, and the Massachusetts Bay Colony, respectively. Jillson (2004:16), succinctly summarizing the impetus that drove early English settlers to the American shore, noted that they came "either for quick wealth or to live in ways not permitted them" in England. In each instance, however, a third influence that has been a distinctive characteristic of Americans ever since is evident. This is the quality and drive inherent in individualism. Thus, while those English colonists dominated by economic motivations and those inspired by religious concerns may be distinctly identifiable on those grounds, both groups exhibited a willingness to put their own interests as they conceived them first and then act on the hope of achieving a better life by cutting ties with English society.

Economic Struggle/Economic Opportunity

The economic climate of England and Scotland in the late Middle Ages and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries formed the background for those migrating to the New World for economic reasons. Until the fifteenth century, feudalism prevailed in England. In its common form, peasants received the right to work on plots of royal land (generally about 30 acres each) and keep a portion of what they produced in return for protection provided by the local nobleman. This system—which had been in place for centuries—began to break down toward the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries. There were several factors at play.

First, there was a dramatically increasing rural population during this period. This mattered because farming and rural life dominated the medieval economy (Bagley 1960:23). Average life expectancy for all groups, but especially for children under the age of 5, was extraordinarily low in the early Middle Ages (Platt 1976:99). Consequently, it was quite easy for improved conditions—such as elimination of the plague for more extended periods in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—to support a doubling of the population in the countryside. Estimates suggest that as late as 1500, 95 % of England's population might have been rural (1976:15). Internal migration to the cities eventually shifted much of the excess population there, but it took most of the next two centuries for the shift to urbanism to make London and other cities a significant proportion of England's total population (1976:15). Thus, for a sustained period, a surplus population and an imbalance reigned in the countryside. This meant that there were more peasants than the land and local noblemen required for existing feudal arrangements in the villages for farming purposes. Responding to this pressure, the king authorized the nobles to "lease" certain parcels. Young workers, who would formerly have become peasants tied to the land, now became "free wage workers," a heretofore unknown economic category. Peasants would often be thrown off valuable parcels so that those parcels could then be leased (Brooks 2013:25–29).

Second, free wage workers, as the appellation implies, were free to leave their former feudal estates. Internal migration to the cities increased noticeably as leases became more expensive and competition for land to work increased. This, in turn, inspired further consolidation of lands under the direct control of large landowners and nobles through the practice of enclosure. Formerly, English lands were largely unfenced (Bagley 1960:29–30); since most lands were considered royal—and only held "in

trust" by those who worked a parcel—there was little need for fencing. As the elite gained control of more and more acreage, they began enclosing their land with fences, thus more formally marking the termination of feudal arrangements and the ascension of private property rights in its place. Customary relationships between people and the land were upended and "rents" derived from former feudal peasants could now be extracted from them as "tenants at will upon the land" (Brooks 2013:23–24).

Third, there was massive inflation in successive waves from 1520 to 1590 (Platt 1976:175). This was due in part to the long recovery from the economic and social dislocation caused by a severe outbreak of the Black Plague which first arose in 1348–49 and lasted for 3 years (Bagley 1960:157–58), followed again with a recurrence in 1361–62, and persisted in lesser outbreaks through the next century and a half. A later recurrence—called the "Great Plague" due to its virulence—struck southern England in 1664–65 (Moote and Moote 2004:5–6). Some estimates suggest, for example, that in certain regions the bubonic plague killed up to a third of the population of England during the fourteenth century. Since many who died were young and poor, the peasantry was decimated, making sufficient numbers of replacement workers in succeeding generations during the late Middle Ages often hard to find. Prices had remained stable for such a long period that the inflationary increases were sharp: the costs of food doubled between 1520 and 1550 as one example (Platt 1976:175). The combination of release from the stable social structure of entrenched feudalism, increased labor shortages, and a corresponding rise in wages—which the landowners resisted—further destabilized the rural population. However, as the inflationary period came to an end, the contrary population dynamic replaced it as the population quickly met, and then exceeded, the necessary labor requisites of the countryside.

The Lure of Economic Opportunity

The increased population and growing migration to English cities at the end of the sixteenth century also meant that competition for employment became more intense there as well. Having left the rural countryside for economic reasons, many were also prepared to leave the cities for the same reason. Yet, where could one go? This question was answered for some by opportunities in England's expanding colonial empire. The age of exploration in the sixteenth century opened up new country and unleashed simmering ambitions to share in the wealth reputed to have

been secured by Spanish and Portuguese adventurers. Those in England with capital, commercial ambitions, but no land began to look to toward the English claims in the New World as potential sources of wealth and profit. Joint stock companies, beginning with the Virginia Company of London, were formed to act as investment vehicles to support the costs involved in establishing trade settlements in the English colonies. The "free wage workers" had, by now, become a new permanent, roving proletariat of landless laborers who could be recruited to migrate and supply the labor these new enterprises would require. Trading their freedom for opportunity in the New World, many signed on as indentured servants to secure their passage. Brooks (2013:36) states that 60 % of seventeenth-century English migration to mainland colonial North America consisted of "bound" laborers. These she described as "typically young laboring men from disrupted rural areas and exhausted small industrial towns." In some of the American colonies, the percentage of indentured workers was even higher (2013:36).

Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement on the North American continent, was an early beneficiary of these social and economic trends. The town was founded in 1607 by 104 settlers who ventured to the New World under the auspices of the Virginia Company of London, a joint stock company chartered by King James I the year before. Also called the London Company, the association was inaugurated to develop colonial settlements in North America in order to produce profits through trade for the Company's investors. The lure of great wealth with less labor appealed to a number of Englishmen willing to expose themselves to the risk involved by investing in such an expedition (Breen 1980:109). The Company struggled financially due to labor shortages in the early years but also due to the fact that the colony failed to develop a viable export crop or product. Although tobacco was used since its earliest discovery by the settlers, it was not exported to England and the European continent until 1617, 10 years after the settlement was founded (1980:111). Its use remained a novelty at first that produced only a small commercial trade, but boosters trumpeted the riches to be gained from tobacco farming and there were many who would listen. Eventually, sweeter hybrid strains of tobacco replaced the native variety originally cultivated and these proved more attractive and more commercially successful with the English public. However, the years of losses the Company incurred and the constant battle between plantation owners and dependent workers could not be

overcome. In 1624, the Company lost its charter and was absorbed into the royal colony of Virginia (1980:114).

Although financially unsuccessful, the Company represented the economic opportunity and profit-seeking impulses that have, forever since, defined a significant drive within American culture. The original Jamestown settlers were willing to throw their lot in with an unproven enterprise in the hope that they would be rewarded with a materially better life in what was then a largely unknown land. They were, in short, risk takers who would venture far on the slim chance that they would find better economic opportunity at the end of their difficult—and for many, fatal—journey. These settlers embodied a self-seeking restlessness that forms an important underpinning for American individualism to this day. Ready to uproot themselves from the established order of life in England, the settlers thought first of themselves, not their community. The Jamestown adventurers were exclusively motivated by the economic benefit they hoped to personally acquire (1980:109). These Englishmen were, in short, the prototypes for contemporary Americans whose pursuit of economic success through competitive individualism within the context of a postindustrial capitalist economic order consumes their lives today.

Freedom and Religious Expression

In contrast, the settlers who formed the Massachusetts Bay Colony were inspired by a different set of overt motives. England since the time of Henry VIII was Protestant in religious orientation and English Protestantism was dominated by the Church of England. Although Henry broke with Roman Catholicism, the Church of England retained many "high" church practices and many groups opposed to practices and belief systems reminiscent of Catholicism arose. Breen (1980:8) quotes appreciatively an essay that argues a "fragmented sectarianism" appearing after 1604 produced scores of small religious groups at odds with Anglican policies. Among these were the Separatists and the Puritans. The distinction between these two groups opposing various elements of the Church of England is evident in their names.

Puritans were dedicated to restoring the "purity" of the Church of England and—correspondingly—reforming society to comport with their understanding of God's laws. Thus, Puritans were not motivated to leave the Church of England; rather, they were intent on reforming it to embrace what they considered to be its "true" or original vision. This

goal was in line with the importance they placed on personal conversion as an essential article of individual faith: just as the Church which had fallen away from its religious mission needed to be restored, the individual was conceived as needing to experience a regeneration of the soul. This spiritual revival was thought to occur through a process of remorse for one's sins, despair at the impossibility of attaining eternal life, discovery that one can still be redeemed from waywardness through one's faith, and celebration of the fact that one has been saved by their newly found, intense devotion to God's word.

The fact that Puritans disagreed with the Church of England's theology and religious practices in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England made them unpopular dissidents in conflict with the Church hierarchy. James I (1603–25) was among the many powerful antagonists the Puritans faced, but Charles I (1625–49) far exceeded him in his intense, unrelenting mission to curtail religious dissent (Breen 1980:10). The Puritans were unsuccessful in their efforts to change the Church but remained nonconforming members whose presence inspired repressive measures. In particular, William Laud's ascension to Church of England leadership as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633 refocused the Puritans' dissatisfaction. Laud moved to restrict Puritans' liturgical rituals which led further to harassment of Puritan ministers and their congregations. Laud's interference, allied with the King's avowed mission, agitated many people but especially aroused religious dissenters (1980:12).

The Separatists represented an even more disgruntled minority within the Church. They left the Church of England because they believed it could not be reformed. Since the Separatists directly challenged the exclusive ecclesiastical legitimacy of the Church of England, the Separatists—like the Puritans—evoked persecution and oppression. They emigrated, going first to the Netherlands, considered a haven for religious dissenters. However, they did not fully adapt to life there. As outsiders, they suffered economic hardship, feared absorption into Dutch life, and disdained what they considered their Dutch neighbors' religious laxity. About a third of those in the Netherlands decided to resettle in the New World and joined the Mayflower expedition that established the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts in 1620. The term "Pilgrims" was applied to those who formed the new colony as they had demonstrated a willingness to pursue a religious journey by any means, and to any place, in search of religious freedom.

The Puritans, responding to many of the same pressures as the Separatists, mounted their own expedition to Massachusetts in 1630

under the direction of John Winthrop. Thousands of Church of England religious dissenters followed over the next decade. The Puritans quickly established mutually supportive governmental and religious structures based on congregations formed through voluntary "gatherings" of like-minded observers who wished to pray together. Winthrop's address to his followers on the deck of the *Arbella* (sometimes *Arabella*) as it sat offshore in anticipation of disembarkation to the new land, united, perhaps for the first time, some of the universal themes to which the American Dream has given a later, more secular, form. Winthrop's "A Modell of Christian Charity" (1630) called upon the Puritans to form a true community where those with wealth and power recognize their responsibility to the poor and powerless. Winthrop argued that his followers should stand united in a special relation in the face of the rigors and challenges the new land would force upon them. Contending that if one member of the community suffers all must suffer, Winthrop urged that each person would learn to care for others as a mother learns to care for her child: by recognizing a resemblance in the human capacities that each shares and developing thereby the sympathy and sentiments that reciprocal exchange encourages. Having explained the means and reasons by which the community of his followers should function, Winthrop suggests that the final reason the community must cohere is that the colony will be looked upon hard by others as if "we shall be a city on a hill." Thus, the call is not simply to do one's duty but to create a standard for the world to see—both a claim, and a call, to American exceptionalism. Although acknowledging throughout that there are those with much and those with little—and always will be—Winthrop's sermon is in its living sense a true call for equality. Thus, Winthrop urges that community members all deserve to be protected and supported. They should expect those above them to help when needed and expect themselves to reach down to others below them in need when circumstances require it. In short, although members are not equal, each follower's claim on the community's concern for his or her welfare should be accepted as equal. This call for an equal opportunity to prosper in the new land has, forever after, been understood as one of the principal tenets of the American Dream—a promise that the USA embodied in its founding documents.

The above analysis, while persuasive in its primary outline, is like many explanations too neatly drawn in certain respects. Indeed, Breen (1980:53) has argued that the artificial distinction between "disgruntled tradesmen and disgruntled Puritans" makes little historical sense. John Winthrop, for

example, like many other Puritans and Pilgrims, faced his own financial difficulties. The 1620s were a general period of economic instability throughout England. Unemployment was high, especially in urban textile mills, and there were serious food shortages (Breen 1980:11, 52–53). As his biographers have noted, Winthrop's financial problems and prospects in England may well have been as influential as his desire to flee religious oppression in motivating his emigration to the English colonies. During the 1620s, crop failures and economic depression were common around Groton, where Winthrop's family estate was located (Rutman 1975:13) and consequently income from the estate's farming operations was affected. Perhaps more important, in 1628–29, Winthrop, by then a substantial landowner and rising magistrate, faced financial demands from three of his adult children, a long-running lawsuit in the Court of Chancery (over title to an estate), a dowry for his marriageable daughter, increased demands to purchase a second home in London, and many lesser claims for financial support arising from legal obligations and prior agreements (Bremer 2003:122, 125–32; Rutman 1975:24–26). Although Winthrop offered a lengthy public justification for his decision to emigrate that voiced in detail the religious themes motivating him, Rutman (1975:40) persuasively argues that the venue—a religious conference of fellow believers—invited only the rationalizations that Winthrop readily, if eloquently and elaborately, supplied. Still, the twin themes of freedom of religious thought and the desire for an equal opportunity to practice one's religion unhindered cannot easily be dismissed since both were subsequently embraced by the founding fathers, only a few of whom were direct descendants of Massachusetts ancestry. Indeed, one can argue that these form the cornerstone of the broader guarantees that constitute the right to be free from any established despotism—whether of government, religion, or some other source. Certainly, freedom per se is now widely understood to be a fundamental premise, and promise, of the American creed.

INDIVIDUALISM AND OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICAN LIFE AND THOUGHT

The strain of individualism that traces its roots through early American thought to the present day arguably originated from those drawn to emigrate to the English colonies both for economic and for religious reasons. Those who sought improved economic circumstances and opportunity did so for themselves. The Jamestown adventurers gave little thought to

improving the economic circumstances of those communities they left behind in England. As Brooks (2013:134) summarizes, colonization can be viewed as a form of abandonment: in the course of its transition from a rural peasant economy of feudal agriculture to an urban-based mercantilism, the English economy created conditions that abandoned many newly "free" agricultural workers to conditions of unemployment and unemployability. These individuals, untethered from traditional work roles and seemingly abandoned by society as they became disposable, surplus labor, were then lured to abandon their communities—and sometimes their families—for the promise of prosperity in the colonies. Individualism, in this sense, was a concomitant and consequence of social conditions that induced individuals to tolerate separation.

Likewise, neither the Pilgrims nor the Puritans stayed to continue their efforts to reform what they conceived to be the errant ways of the Church of England. Like Martin Luther and the early sects that followed his lead in declaring themselves Protestants, they broke with the established religious order to form a new order of their own making and belief. Thus, a major tenet of both the economic and religious groups that formed the first vanguard of settlers in the English colonies was the underlying belief that the individual, not the group, was the touchstone and measure against which all human endeavor must be ultimately evaluated. Those who held primarily economic motivations for their passage to the New World believed that men should prosper from their individual efforts in direct relation to the nature and degree of effort each put forth. Those who held religious motivations for their passage possessed the latent individualism evident in all Protestant denominations. They believed that a man should be judged by his own character and conduct alone and that each man (or implicitly, person) should ascend to the heavenly firmament based on his or her own earthly work on God's behalf. Often overlooked, the theme of individualism pervaded both the economic and religious inspirations that drove the early English settlers to venture to America.

Brooks (2013:42–44) raises another related point worth considering as we attempt to parse the motivational matrix that impelled the English to depart for American colonies: arguably no land of *opportunity*—that archetypal vision we have of America—was part of many early immigrants' conception. Rather, Brooks depicts her English ancestors and other voyagers to the English New World as simply driven by profound, disruptive transformations and jarring social forces that they could not withstand. Brooks (2013:43) cites and quotes Eric Hobsbawm,

A.L. Beier, Immanuel Wallerstein, and others to the effect that a "general crisis" involving widespread and growing poverty; destabilizing economic depressions and sizable demographic shifts; massive internal migration; and the destruction of hitherto stable relationships between peasants, the land, and the nobility under feudalism gave the poor no ability to look for "opportunity." Rather, their situation was so dire the poor peasantry could only respond to their reduction from valued agricultural work-ers in enduring communities to a roving mob of unemployed beggars and thieves by nearly unreflective flight. The contention that those who ventured to colonial America did so in a rational calculation to seek better opportunity appears almost revisionist in its casual willingness to over-look, and minimize, the fundamental realities of the context in which the migration took place. Was *opportunity*, a word that Brooks associates with assessing, negotiating, and choosing freely from within an open landscape of options, even a concept that peasants could contemplate? (2013:6–7). Brooks searches the historical record and—as best she can discover—the hallowed phrase "land of opportunity" used to characterize the USA did not appear in print until the late nineteenth century in a Pennsylvania newspaper obituary (2013:7). Thus, Brooks urges that our application of nineteenth-century American usage to a seventeenth-century migratory passage obscures, rather than illuminates, our understanding. While it may be popular and comforting to attribute foresight, vigor, and perspicacity to those who first emigrated from England to the colonies, Brooks coun-ters with evidence that the nearly sacred belief we hold about our first English ancestors seeking opportunity is mostly a myth.

It is true that Frederick Jackson Turner was presenting his "frontier thesis" lauding the USA as historically providing opportunity as early as 1893, although publication of his remarks was solely limited to profes-sional historical journals at first. In his address to the American Historical Association in Chicago, Turner claimed:

> Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them. He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise. But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves. (Turner 1994:59)

Turner's statement does not explicitly use the phrase "land of opportunity" but his meaning is hardly distinguishable. Two other observations can be made about Turner's essay. First, like the American Dream, Turner associates a certain "tone" of optimism with the "incessant" westward expansion of the American frontier he is celebrating. Second, while Turner does not say that opportunity—another name for America—no longer exists in the USA once the 1890 census declared the frontier line to have been erased by settlement, he does conclude by stating that no longer will the lure of free land be the source of that opportunity.

Billington (1974:654–55), reviewing our frontier history 50 years after Turner, makes somewhat the same points. He notes:

> With progress the order of the day, men were tempted to shift their homes often as they sought more abundant opportunity….opportunity did knock, and so they moved—from east to west, from farm to town, from town to city. Others followed to fill the places they vacated,… all attracted by the dream of self-improvement.

> The frontiering experience also endowed Americans with certain attitudes that persist down to the present. The rosy optimism with which the people of the United States contemplate the future has long been recognized… pioneers were cockily confident of a better future as they hurried to reach the pot that they knew to be at the end of the rainbow.

Regardless of when the "seeking opportunity" narrative and its related tone of optimism in the outcome of such effort arose, it is apparent that both are intimately embedded in our nation's American Dream motif through the present day. It is entirely possible, as Brooks suggests, the narrative has been retroactively provided by succeeding generations. Like the "Hollywood ending," ideas regarding opportunity, American abundance, and the optimism regarding a successful venture are innately appealing. These may well constitute the essence of the American Dream so that it would not be surprising that history might be revised to accommodate such a popular conception.

Forced Migration

This brings us to a brief but important acknowledgment that the attraction "opportunity" may have held for some was, of course, inapposite for those who were forced into slavery and transported to the New World. This history

has been ably researched, confirmed, and depicted by others so there is little need to repeat the sordid details of that history here. It is perhaps enough to quote from one of many sources that eloquently stated the obvious:

> It is important for our white citizens always to remember that the Negroes alone of all our immigrants came to America against their will by the special compelling invitation of the whites; that the institution of slavery was introduced, expanded and maintained by the United States by the white people and for their own benefit; and they likewise created the conditions that followed emancipation. (Wilkerson 2010:543)

Clearly, Africans forced into slavery—as the Chicago Commission on Race Relations (1919), quoted above, articulated—were not induced to emigrate to the USA in a search for "opportunity." Although circumstances differed considerably—and the plight of English indentured workers or penurious, dissident religious outcasts and transported slaves cannot be responsibly equated—the question of "pressure" or "force" versus "lure" or "inducement" is one that pervades many instances of immigration even today. Thus, Brooks' argument that "opportunity" is a peculiarly modern concept that should be understood as applicable only where a realistic range of free choice is available carries some persuasive weight. Retrospectively suggesting that either the Puritans or the Virginia voyagers were seeking "opportunity" may misstate the actual case and clearly did not apply to Africans conscripted as slaves.

Historic Sources: The American Dream Ideals in Early American Writings

As the first English settlers made their way in the New World, America seemed to hold forth all of those things that had been unattainable in England: economic prosperity, full exercise of one's religious beliefs, and freedom to pursue one's own destiny in a country of one's own. It is little wonder then that the core beliefs that drove settlers to emigrate would form the foundation of the communities and practices they instituted in the vast expanse of the North American wilderness. The writings of early Americans—and particularly the founding documents for the republic—are rich sources for expression of the values and ideals that colonial Americans distilled from the motives and pronouncements that inspired their forebears to leave England.

The Quakers flourished as a religious group in seventeenth-century England but faced the same religious persecution, and emanated from similar poor circumstances, as many of the Puritans and Pilgrims (Tolles 1948:29–32, 35–36). Quaker writings form an early source of ideas penned on North American soil that address the newly arrived colonists' understanding of their purpose here. The historian Frederick Tolles (1948:33–34), quoting from an anonymous Quaker tract dated 1684, noted that two themes predominated in the writer's account of the reasons Quakers had forsaken England—a search for peace and prosperity. The peace sought was from the cares, vexations, and turmoil brought upon them by persecution in England that became especially severe in the 1650s. Quakers, like the Puritans before them, opposed the social and religious hierarchy within the established Church of England. As supporters of the "roundheads" in England's seventeenth-century civil war, Quaker fortunes waned whenever royalist forces maintained or re-established dominion and control over an area of England. With the restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660, the Church of England's dominance was reasserted and Parliament was induced to pass repressive religious legislation which Charles, although opposed to it, could not resist. A small contingent of Quakers, led by William Penn who acquired land in North America as settlement for a debt, fled to what later became Pennsylvania in 1682. In this peaceful setting, the anonymous writer expressed the hope that a plenteous prosperity, in which every man's talents might thrive, would naturally follow. Although the anonymous writer emphasized the priority of attending to man's "inner plantation" first, as William Penn in later writings would do (1948:45–46), both authors spoke in favor of diligence, industry, perseverance, and thrift—values that helped produce wealth over a lifetime and between generations. Thriving materially became, as in the case of other Protestant denominations, an outward sign that one was living properly within the aura of God's grace. This fusion of independent, nonconforming belief—whether essentially religious in nature or not—and material prosperity (1948:37) became indistinguishable from what we have long since understood to be a core element of the American Dream. The American Dream means for many, and perhaps most, "doing well" according to one's own standards—materially, spiritually, or in virtually any sense of the words.

A later New Englander who eventually settled in Philadelphia and whose writings encapsulated the frugal and materially ambitious virtues associated with the American Dream was Benjamin Franklin. Franklin

shared with the Quakers a decision to flee his land of birth. In his case, it was due to the restrictive Puritan religious atmosphere constructed by, among others, Cotton Mather. For Franklin, the religiously oppressed had become the oppressors. Franklin, like the anonymous Quaker writer and William Penn, preached a doctrine of self-improvement that focused on worldly success followed and supported by charity toward those in need of comfort and assistance. His *Autobiography* describes 13 virtues that Franklin discerned as crucial to earthly success. It is filled with maxims to follow in order to insure that "little advantages accrue every day" (1895:149–50). Franklin contended that the result would be the same as that envisioned by William Penn—an accumulation of wealth over many years. Franklin, like the Quakers, also believed that Providence favored those who worked diligently for themselves. Franklin saw religion as a handmaiden to personal virtue (1895:60–61) and developed six principles for a nondenominational system of belief that he contended would serve both individuals and the public well. The writings of these early Americans thus tended to unite the worldly drive for success common among those who settled in the colonies for economic reasons with the characteristics of personal virtue that would produce wealth along with submission to a divine authority. In this way, two distinctly different rationales that led to establishing the colonies as successful ventures were melded into a broader American creed.

In many ways, however, the lure of freedom, easy living, and prosperity dominated the appeal that the American colonies held for later immigrants. The early settlers were followed by wave upon wave of new emigrants, many from England but also from other European nations. Jillson (2004:51) notes that by 1773 England was worried that the remarkable growth the colonies were experiencing would, in a generation, produce a population larger than its own. A related concern was that the number of emigrants leaving for the American colonies would drain the country of much of its skilled labor (2004:52). After independence from England was achieved, interest in the USA compounded and multiplied further. Jillson (2004:52) quotes newspaper articles recounting interest in emigration to the USA from across Europe. The American population itself was growing, and the combination of external immigration and internal migration populated the territory west of the Appalachian Mountains quickly. Eleven states were added to the original 13 colonies in the 30 years from 1791 to 1821. The impetus for relocation was routinely attributed to the goal of seeking a better life elsewhere; the "better life" sought was almost

universally defined as one in which succeeding materially was understood to be easier for the common man. As Jillson (2004:53) summed it all up, "The new nation was booming and opportunity was everywhere." Jillson's summary is supported by many writings from the period, but others offered caveats regarding the exact nature of the "opportunities" that might be found. Benjamin Franklin (Koch 1965) took it upon himself to write "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America" in 1782. There Franklin tried to dispel or otherwise moderate a number of the exaggerated, or simply untruthful, ideas about the prospects for making a living and enjoying material success in the USA. Among the points he raised, Franklin observed that while America may not possess as many miserably poor people as did Europe, it also did not support as many who were wealthy (1965:133). While acknowledging that "hearty young Labouring Men, who understand the Husbandry of Corn and Cattle" can purchase land at the outskirts of the settled areas cheaply and prosper, and good workmen in the "Mechanic arts" are in short supply, Franklin is soberly realistic about European immigrants finding a welcome as artists, professors, or government officials. As he points out, while "[s]trangers indeed are not excluded from exercising those Professions" incumbents already in place are "more common than is apprehended." This being true, Franklin continues, "it cannot be worth any Man's while, who has a means of Living at home, to expatriate himself, in hopes of obtaining a profitable civil Office in America" (1965:134–36). From the beginning, it seems the material prosperity and success visions America encouraged were tinged with wishful thinking, undercut by lack of reliable information, and subject to reckless overstatement by casually unscrupulous promoters.

HISTORIC SOURCES: THE AMERICAN DREAM IN OUR FOUNDING DOCUMENTS

As the new nation formalized its independence and organized its political life after the successful revolutionary break with England, the American Dream was incorporated into our country's founding covenants. Thomas Jefferson's vision of a land-based rural democracy fused the economic goals of opportunity and prosperity with the political structure of the emerging nation. Jefferson, invited by John Adams to join the five-member committee to draft a "resolution of independence" for the Second Continental Congress in 1775, reluctantly accepted the charge to compose the first draft. Members of the committee, most notably Ben Franklin, offered

edits and amendments and the Congress as a whole radically cut certain sections, as Wills (1978) carefully demonstrated, but historians generally still credit Jefferson with the underlying vision and authorial eloquence that one perceives in the final document.

As the *Declaration's* most well-known propositions hold, Jefferson declared that it was beyond dispute (i.e., "self-evident") that "all men are created equal" and endowed by God "with certain inalienable rights" including "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (Wills 1978:374). The purpose of government, he asserted, was merely to secure those rights and, further, when government becomes destructive of the rights it was entrusted to foster, the people—who must consent to be governed— retain the right to abolish the government. They may then institute a new one in its place, in a form the people deem most likely to effectuate their "safety and happiness" (1978:374). Although the words Jefferson wrote are a powerful testament to the vision of individual rights and the relation of government to the people, it is perhaps the tone and intrinsic attitude of this preamble that has leant the most significance to the *Declaration's* formal statement of our country's promise.

Initially, one can gain a sense of the document's essential optimism from the bold claim that "all men are created equal." Clearly, this was not at all true during Jefferson's time (nor is it true during ours), but the statement's political appeal is broad and its aspiration near universal. Jefferson's statement of the individual rights that are so dear and intrinsic to the notion of citizenship that they cannot be sundered nor taken away is equally optimistic. Life and liberty have, of course, been taken away by despots and governments many times, both in times of declared war and in times of peace. Yet, in a stroke of Enlightenment brilliance, John Locke (1690), followed by Jefferson, established these rights transcendent over history and declared them forever "inalienable." Finally, Jefferson enshrined the generous and expansive promise that every citizen could pursue his (or now, her) vision of individual happiness as an equally important foundational guarantee. This concluding statement is especially important as it, too, looks forward optimistically to a future that is limited only by a person's vision of what they wish to attain and the effort one is willing to put into that pursuit. The statement ties together goal, effort, and eventual reward in a manner that disregards fate, circumstance, advantage, competition, and mortality. The phrase implicitly suggests without falsely saying, that happiness is an unambiguously tangible and realizable objective (Cullen 2003:38).

Individualism in Early Nineteenth-Century America: Tocqueville's Visit to the USA

Alexis Tocqueville, a French aristocrat, traveled to the USA in 1831, along with his friend Gustave de Beaumont, to examine the penitentiary system only recently developed and established here. Tocqueville carried out his formal mission and reported on the prison experiment while, at the same time, conducting his own inquiry into the nature of the democratic political institutions the American people had devised and the conditions, and manners of life, pursued by Americans. His account of this personal investigation was the two-volume treatise *Democracy in America* (1961), first published in 1835 (Volume I) and 1840 (Volume II). Among the themes that Tocqueville examined, and wrote about at length, were his observations about the nature and role of individualism in American life.

Tocqueville's comments on individualism in *Democracy in America* (1961) encompass more than 150 pages in Volume II depending on how one counts his various essays. It is apparent from the time, care, and attention he devotes to the topic that Tocqueville considers individualism a critical feature for understanding our political institutions and American life. Tocqueville begins his second book in Volume II by commenting on the penchant for equality brought about by the previous century's revolutionary transitions from monarchical regimes to democratic nations (1961:(II)113–17). It is in the passion for equality of conditions that Tocqueville locates the wellsprings of individualism. Tocqueville contends, "I have shown how it is that in ages of equality every man seeks for his opinions within himself. I am now about to show how it is that, in the same ages, all his feelings turned toward himself alone" (1961:(II)118). Sometimes conceived as narcissistic in the same manner as egoism, Tocqueville takes great pains to distinguish individualism from egoism.

First, Tocqueville comments that egoism is a "passionate and exaggerated love of self" which leads a person to "prefer himself to everything in the world" (1961:118). Tocqueville contrasts and defines individualism by characterizing it as a "mature and calm feeling," which inspires one to distinguish oneself out from the mass of humanity and distance oneself even from family and friends (1961:(II)118). An individual does this, in Tocqueville's view, by creating for himself or herself a small circle of intimates upon whom he builds his life, leaving society generally to itself. Tocqueville considered egoism a consequence of unreflective instinct, depraved feelings, and, thus, a blight on virtue; individualism

was simply "an erroneous judgment" about the proper priorities but one that "at first, only saps and the virtues of public life; but, in the long run, it attacks and destroys all others" (1961:(II)118). Tocqueville connected the emergence of individualism as coincident with the democratic impulse that spread the equality of social, political, and economic conditions generally (1961:(II)119).

Tocqueville's recognition of the power of individualism is expressed in some of his initial comments. He notes:

> Amongst democratic nations new families are constantly springing up, others are constantly falling away, and all that remain change their condition;… Those who went before are soon forgotten; of those who will come after no one has any idea: the interest of man is confined to those in close propinquity to himself. (1961:(II)119–20)

As more equal conditions emerge, Tocqueville observes that:

> the number of persons increases who,…, have nevertheless acquired or retained sufficient education and fortune to satisfy their own wants. They owe nothing to any man; they expect nothing from any man; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine their whole destiny is in their hands. (1961:(II)120)

Democracy seems, to Tocqueville, to separate each person from his or her contemporaries and throw each back on his or her own resources and support, isolating one "entirely within the solitude of his own heart" (1961:(II)120).

Tocqueville saw the antidote to individualism by two means. First, he noted that Americans of his day subdued the tendency for equality to separate men into uncooperative individuals by encouraging their participation in managing their own affairs. In the beginning, this occurred at the local level; it is more difficult, according to Tocqueville's reasoning, to draw a person out beyond their own circle to take an interest in affairs of state (1961:124–25). Second, he noted the tendency of Americans to form voluntary associations to achieve a common object. The wealthy, of course, can achieve a great undertaking single-handedly; the ordinary person in a democracy like the USA realizes that he or she must band together with others of equal station to pursue public goals beyond the reach of private means (1961:129–30). These, then, are the two principal means that place limitations on individualism. In the process, Tocqueville contends

that "[f]eelings and opinions are recruited, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed by no other means than the reciprocal influence of men upon each other" (1961:(II)131).

Tocqueville also proposed that Americans resisted the deleterious effects of individualism by what he termed "the principle of interest rightly understood" (1961:(II)145). In essence, this merely means that one recognizes that one can most efficaciously achieve one's own goals by combining or aligning those goals with the general good. It requires, according to Tocqueville, no great sacrifices but rather daily small acts of self-denial that lead to habits of regularity, temperance, moderation, foresight, and self-command (1961:(II)146–47). These qualities, plus the general condition of equality that Tocqueville observed in the USA, lead him to conclude that the passion for physical well-being was of paramount importance to Americans. Americans, he believed, were careful to satisfy all the body's desires, even the most minor, and to insure that every small convenience was considered and acquired (1961:(II)153). The fact that many men could acquire a reasonable number of resources to satisfy their material wants lead to a desire to acquire more of them for most people. The fact that there are still lower classes means, however, that those who have less chance of acquiring physical comforts and material satisfactions will envy them all the more, creating a divide between the "haves" and the "have nots" (1961:(II)153–55). Yet the tension that hovers over unchecked desire was common to all Americans in Tocqueville's estimation; he described Americans as "the freest and most enlightened men, placed in the happiest circumstances…: it seemed to me as if a cloud habitually hung upon their brow, and I thought them serious and almost sad even in their pleasures" (1961:(II)161). He believed the cause was simply that Americans constantly dwell on advantages they do not possess and feel compelled to pursue everything of value within reach with a feverish ardor, as though afraid of not living long enough to enjoy all they could grasp. The result is a restless spirit that Tocqueville perceives as emblematic of Americanness:

> In the United States a man builds a house to spend his latter years in it, and he sells it before the roof is on: he plants a garden, and lets it just as the trees are coming into bearing: he brings a field into tillage, and leaves other men to gather the crops: he embraces a profession, and gives it up: he settles in a place, which he soon afterward leaves, to carry his changeable longings elsewhere. (1961:(II)162)

To Tocqueville, the experience of so many frenetically restless men in the midst of abundance was at first surprising. He then reasoned that those whose primary desire is physical gratification must always be in a hurry for life is, indeed, short. This opposition between the infinitude of one's desires and the finite nature of existence lead Tocqueville to notice further that this temporal relationship also contributed to Americans' inconstancy. Those seeking physical gratification seek an object for their enjoyment, but they will continually change track, substituting some other enjoyment, if discouraged in their original pursuit. As he phrased it, "the means to reach that object must be prompt and easy, or the trouble of acquiring the gratification would be greater than the gratification itself" (1961:(II)162). Moreover, Tocqueville noted that where some of the privileges accorded the upper classes have been swept away and a general equality prevails, the vast run of mankind has opened itself to universal competition. Thus, the barrier to gratifying one's desires has changed in shape: rather than a limited number of powerful persons in opposition, there now exist numerous persons all pursuing their satisfactions, hither and yon, feverishly hustling through the dense throng. For this reason, Tocqueville thought many Americans would not persevere in the face of barriers to their efforts for gratification (1961:(II)162–63).

Tocqueville admired the USA of his day and found many characteristics of Americans to his liking. He was concerned, however, about a country where men are anxious to cast off any pursuit which could not be realized quickly and easily; Tocqueville perceived this state to be a threat to not only democracy but to the integrity of individual life and social life generally. In Tocqueville's phrasing:

> When every one is constantly striving to change his position,—when an immense field for competition is thrown open to all,—when wealth is amassed or dissipated in the shortest possible space of time amidst the turmoil of democracy, visions of sudden and easy fortunes—of great possessions easily won and lost,—of chance, under all its forms,—haunt the mind. The instability of society [under such circumstances] itself fosters the natural instability of man's desires. (1961:(II)179)

In Tocqueville's view, the restlessness and constant commotion of American society were a threat to achieving any enjoyment whatsoever unless a calm, disinterested intentionality could be achieved. Thus, he observed that the excessive attention to worldly welfare and the daily (and constant) gratification of physical desires might impair the ability

to enjoy one's welfare. He believed Americans could only prosper in the circumstances of freedom and equality where they could discover and execute "protracted undertakings" that would permit them to invest their enormous energies into enterprises of substance and significance. In essence, he saw the problem of democracy as one of harnessing the individual will in projects that challenged men to invest themselves in great efforts (1961:(II)176–81). For Tocqueville, this was the only way for modern man to prosper while society prospered, too.

Tocqueville was especially admiring of the advances Americans of his day had made in manufacturing and the immense public achievements industrial output had been harnessed to build. He held in high esteem the canals built to connect great waterways and the thousands of miles of railroad tracks laid down, the longest up to the time he wrote (1961:188). Here, too, a danger lurked, though, and one that has had a very direct bearing on the American Dream:

> The Americans make immense progress in productive industry, because they all devote themselves to it at once; and for the same reason they are exposed to very unexpected and formidable embarrassments. As they are all engaged in commerce, their commercial affairs are affected by such various and complex causes, that it is impossible to foresee what difficulties may arise. As they are all more or less engaged in productive industry, the least shock given to business all private fortunes are put in jeopardy at the same time, and the State is shaken. I believe that the return of these commercial panics is an endemic disease of the democratic nations of our age. It may be rendered less dangerous, but it cannot be cured; because it does not originate in accidental circumstances, but in the temperament of these nations. (1961:(II)189)

In sum, he foresaw that economic crises were driven by the actions of men and that it was the predisposition (i.e., the "temperament") of these men to act in a way that brought on their own economic ruin. Given that the regularity of commercial panics has persisted well beyond Tocqueville's era nearly 200 years ago, his observation turned out to be quite prescient.

CONCLUSION

The USA is routinely celebrated—and celebrates itself unabashedly—as a "nation of immigrants" and the "land of opportunity." While there is a good deal of truthful history to support these notions, conceiving of the American Dream as solely concerned with either or both of these has severe limitations

for a complete understanding of the idea. In addition to emigration to the USA, for example, there is a long history of relocation and displacement within the USA. African Americans, fleeing the antebellum South, spearheaded the Great Migration to northern cities from 1910 to 1940 and again from the war years (1940–45) to 1970 (Lemann 1992; Wilkerson 2010). Smaller internal migrations—whites from Appalachia to nearby cities like Cincinnati and beyond and from rural and small-town America to the cities more generally—also arguably were driven by some notion of the American Dream (Coles 1972:325–37; Schwarzweller et al. 1971:142–45). Yet an analysis that limits itself to movements inspired by the lure for better jobs and more (unspecified) opportunity still does not embrace the complexities of what we mean by the American Dream. We will need to begin our examination of the work of nineteenth-century sociologists to start fleshing out what the American Dream might mean for us today.

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Early Sociological Investigations of the American Dream

It is entirely fitting that one of the earliest examples of sociological research directed at examining the American way of life was conducted by W.E.B. Du Bois, the foremost African American sociologist of his day, in his magisterial study of *The Philadelphia Negro* (2007), first published in 1899. The significance of Du Bois' work can be measured along a number of dimensions, but the fact that the first sociology department had not been established at an American university—the University of Chicago—until 1892 certainly marks one standard of distinction. The scope and comprehensiveness of his effort marks a second notable standard of accomplishment.

Du Bois was direct in explaining the purpose and scope of his research: to investigate the "condition of the forty thousand or more people of Negro blood now living in the city of Philadelphia" (2007:1). As he explained in his introductory comments, Du Bois did not conceive of himself as a purely disinterested, social scientific researcher. He wrote in introducing his method and evaluating its potential contribution that the social problems he expected to find "demand[ing] careful study" and "await satisfactory answers"; this meant for Du Bois that "[W]e must study; we must investigate; we must attempt to solve;…in an earnest desire for the truth despite its possible unpleasantness" (2007:2). Du Bois conducted his research over a 16-month period in 1896–97 through a house-by-house canvas of the Seventh Ward, a historic center of Negro life in the city and home to 9000 persons. Although Du Bois was assisted in some of the work by a white woman, Isabel Eaton, in rather direct

contravention of the atmosphere of the times, Du Bois conducted all of the principal household interviews. Ms. Eaton supplied an 80-page appendix on Domestic Negro Service as her major contribution (Du Bois 1973:17, 2007:2, footnote 3).

Du Bois selected the Seventh Ward because it appeared to harbor within its perimeter all of the problems faced by Negro residents of his day, and in all other respects appeared to be entirely representative of Negro life in the city. Du Bois' method consisted of a general social survey with six schedules used for various purposes and subpopulations. The primary schedule consisted of questions about family composition and the characteristics of individual members, including whether members could read and write. An alternative individual schedule was composed of similar questions for anyone living alone. Other schedules addressed the nature of the home or apartment and the number of rooms and amenities it provided; a street schedule to collect data about the layout of byways and residences in the Seventh Ward; a schedule intended to collect data about neighborhood organizations and institutions; and a further variation on the individual schedule for use where house servants lived at their places of employment (2007:1).

The questions he sought to answer were intended to reveal "the real condition" of the lives of the Negro population in the Seventh Ward, and by extension, in the city as a whole (2007:3). Acknowledging that many would only view the Seventh Ward as a slum, Du Bois pointed out that it also was home to "the aristocracy of the Negroes" in Philadelphia which he described as including "a class of caterers, clerks, teachers, professional men, small merchants, etc." (2007:4). The information Du Bois collected in his house-by-house interviews was voluminous and comprehensive. He documented the size, age, sex, and "conjugal condition" of the Negro population of the Seventh Ward; reported on the education, literacy, and occupation of his respondents; delved into the health status and mortality rate of the inhabitants; detailed the organizational life of residents and identified the institutions that served them; analyzed the condition of the Negro family; summarized what he discovered about the Negro crime problem; and reported on rents and living conditions, contact between the races, and the extent and circumstances of Negro suffrage.

Du Bois had no occasion to reference directly "the American Dream"—a phrase that did not come into routine use until it appeared in print three decades later. Still, in reading between the lines it is apparent that Du Bois was carefully charting the (often frustrated) aspirations of

Philadelphia's Negro population for a better way of life. One finds in the course of Du Bois' reports many surprising observations that enlarge our understanding of the nature of the American Dream that are pertinent to its meaning today.

Du Bois' review of his data on residency, conjugal status, and family life are revealing in this regard. Du Bois begins by noting how much more sensitive the lower classes are to social changes: Prosperity brings an abnormal increase in births while adversity produces an abnormal decrease in numbers (2007:30). Of further interest, Du Bois remarks upon the "excess" number of females reflected in his data (5174 vs. 4501) suggesting that the differential is "easy to explain" as the "industrial opportunities of Negro women in northern cities" have been far greater than for Negro men (2007:41–42, 34–35). Among the opportunities for women was the extensive availability of work in Negro Domestic Service. These factors affected other realms of life: a shortage of marriageable men, a large degree of cohabitation, a larger percentage of illegitimate births, and an "unhealthy tone" in much of the social intercourse Du Bois attributed to the middle-class Negro population (2007:35, 45). Du Bois' comments on the manner in which interrelated social conditions produce consequent effects on the matter of lifestyle sound alarmingly contemporary:

> The economic difficulties arise continually among young waiters and servant girls, away from home and oppressed by the peculiar lonesomeness of a great city, they form chance acquaintances here and there, thoughtlessly marry and soon find that the husband's income cannot support a family; then comes a struggle which generally results in the wife's turning laundress, but often results in desertion or voluntary separation.

> The great number of widows is noticeable. The conditions of life for men are much harder than for women and they have consequently a much higher death rate. Unacknowledged desertion and separation also increases this total. Then, too, a large number of these widows are simply unmarried mothers. (2007:46)

Later, in his chapter wholly dedicated to a summary of his findings on the Negro family, Du Bois reiterates his estimation that the driving factor in conjugal relations (for both men and women) is simply the difficulty in earning enough income to afford to marry (2007:119). Likewise, "the determining factor" for family life and household composition is "economic opportunity" (2007:120).

Throughout the work, Du Bois is careful to delineate the different styles of life that pervade the Seventh Ward. In a passage that could have been taken from Ulf Hannerz's *Soulside* (1969) or Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged* (2012), originally published in 1987, with only minor adjustment, Du Bois (2007:123) wrote:

> The whole division into "poor," "comfortable," and "well-to-do" depends primarily on the standard of living among a people. Let us, therefore, note something of the income and expenditure of certain families in different grades. [footnote deleted] The very poor and semi-criminal class are congregated in the slums at Seventh and Lombard Streets, Seventeenth and Lombard, and Eighteenth and Naudain, together with other small back streets scattered over the ward. They live in one- and two-room tenements scantily furnished and poorly lighted and heated; they get casual labor, and the women do washing. The children go to school irregularly or loaf on the streets. This class does not frequent the large Negro churches, but part of them fill the small noisy missions. The vicious and criminal portion do not usually go to church. Those of this class who are poor but decent are next-door neighbors usually to pronounced criminals and prostitutes.

Du Bois is equally perceptive in assessing a number of the existing structural conditions that constrained the city's Negro population regardless of strata. With respect to housing, for example, Du Bois (2007:135) notes that even leaving the slum areas aside two great hindrances affect "the great mass of the Negro population [who make] undoubted effort … to establish homes." These are the low wages available to Negro men and high rents asked for decent housing. In this context, Du Bois noted that 38 % of the homes in the Seventh Ward had "unknown strangers" living in them as lodgers who paid subrent to occupy an extra bedroom (2007:135, 208–09). The social consequence in his view was that the privacy and intimacy of home life was destroyed and "elements of danger and demoralization admitted"; the home then often became just a place for a "hurried meal" and overnight lodging (2007:135–36). Indeed, Du Bois observed a tendency for home life among family members to be neglected generally in favor of economic forces, outside amusement, communal church involvement, and purely social activities; thus, he noted that while Negro women deplored the lodger system and outside paid work that kept them away from the home for many hours a day, the conditions of economic life persuaded many to pursue these adaptations anyway (2007:127, 135–36).

At the same time, Du Bois was highly critical of Seventh Ward residents generally who he contended had a "central problem of expenditure." He wrote in summary, overgeneralized fashion with clear cultural, class, and even racial disdain:

> Probably few poor nations waste more money by thoughtless and unreasonable expenditure than the American Negro, and especially those living in large cities like Philadelphia. First, they waste much money in poor food and unhealthful methods of cooking. The meat bill of the average Negro family would surprise a French or German peasant and even an Englishman. The crowds that line Lombard Street on Sundays are dressed far beyond their means; much money is wasted in extravagantly furnished parlors, dining-rooms, guest chambers and other visible part of the homes. Thousands of dollars are annually wasted in excessive rents, in doubtful "societies" of all kinds, and in miscellaneous ornaments and geegaws…The Negro has much to learn of the Jew and Italian, as to living within his means and saving every penny from excessive and wasteful expenditures. (2007:127–28)

On the other hand, Du Bois recognized "how lucrative a business the exploitation of the Negro…has become" citing many of the examples of "excessive and wasteful expenditures" he earlier identified—"ornaments, clothes, entertainments, books and investment schemes"—as simply profit-making pursuits intended to take advantage of what he considered to be known weaknesses among those at whom they were directed (2007:134).

While it is not possible to summarize every cogent, or careless, observation Du Bois packed into his examination of Negro society, several more are worth noting. While impressed with the ability of Negro churches to attract worshippers and sustain themselves, Du Bois considered them "too often [consisting of] intrigue, extravagance and show" and riddled with "business inefficiency and internal dissension" (2007:161). Still, Du Bois foresaw various forms of social organization as key in "the ultimate rise of the Negro" and important means by which to counteract "the vast influence of the environment" in producing problems of poverty, alcoholism, and crime among Philadelphia's Negro population (2007:161, 202–04). Interestingly, Du Bois contended that color prejudice and discrimination in Philadelphia was neither "the chief cause of [the Negro's] present condition" nor a negligible factor in the Negro's life chances (2007:229). His detailed recitation of the actual conditions the Negro community faced, however, suggests that the color barrier

was a far more powerful factor than Du Bois' bland, dismissive gener-
alization would lead one to believe. Thus, Du Bois conceded that "no
matter how well trained" there exist clear limits on Negro employment
beyond menial positions; in his view, the Negro undeniably suffers from
competition in employment and faces a low estimation of his skills and
abilities regardless of the truth of the matter; and Du Bois acknowledges
that injustices and insults to his person are a regular, if not frequent,
occurrence for the Negro in social life generally (2007:229–31). One
consequence according to Du Bois was that as many as two-thirds of
the Negro graduates of principally Negro schools ended up leaving the
city due to the reduced, or nonexistent, economic opportunities avail-
able to them in Philadelphia (2007:243–44). A second obvious social
fact flowing from prejudice and discrimination Du Bois noted was the
maintenance of laws and customs that forbade granting legitimacy to
intermarriage (2007:246–52) even though its existence in the city was
an undeniable fact.

Du Bois' work deserves credit for his early effort to map the basic
contours of social life in a dense urban environment at the turn of the
century. Looking back from the twenty-first century it is clear that Du Bois'
method exhibited some weaknesses. First, he failed to ask his respondents
what likely appears to us now to be a series of obvious questions. Generally,
those questions all have to do with what his interview subjects think about
their own lives and what they are seeking. Du Bois is likely on safe ground
when he assumes that all his respondents are seeking to maintain, if not
rise, in the economic sphere, but he is on less solid ground when he dis-
cusses living arrangements and social relations. Thus, Du Bois postulates
that residents of the Seventh Ward were (or at least should be) seeking to
establish conventional, bourgeois, middle-class, heterosexual households.
He is notably incurious about other possibilities. Second, Du Bois is ham-
pered by the invocation of standards of deportment generally that isolate
him in the role of judgmental moralist rather than eagerly curious investi-
gator. Thus, his itemization of the many ways in which he believes mem-
bers of Philadelphia's Negro community engage in frivolous, extravagant,
and wasteful expenditures fails to credit the life choices others make and
the basis on which they make them. Du Bois, for example, does not seem
to be able to conceive of the satisfaction that his respondents might find
in dressing well and appearing well turned out. Likewise, his dismissive
characterization of street-front churches as led by wandering preachers and
filled with "noise and excitement" (2007:154) misses the benefit offered

those who might be shunned by the larger, conventional denominations and underestimates the value of communal expressive behavior as a form of religious experience. In sum, while Du Bois' research into the living conditions within the Seventh Ward was groundbreaking, his work was not as productive in discovering the occupational, educational, religious, marital and family, and social aspirations of the community as it might have been. Thus, Du Bois' perception that the lack of suitable employment for Negro males created a possible barrier to conventional marital relations could have been a starting point for questions regarding whether men's and women's aspirations and assessment of this factor frustrated their life goals. Du Bois simply sort of assumes this is true, and produces marginally deviant forms, like cohabitation, but hearing respondents speak for themselves regarding their dreams would have improved his sociological understanding and the utility of his research for grasping the Negro community's American Dreams. As we shall see, this continues to be an occasional shortcoming in community studies directed at examining the American Dream.

A second source of detailed observations about American society and descriptions of the manner in which some Americans lived at the turn of the nineteenth century is Jane Addams' *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1945), originally published in 1910. Hull House sprung from Addams' imagination. It was established in what became the dense, urban heart of south Chicago with the assistance and involvement of her friend, Ellen Starr, in 1889. Addams' account, however, was not the result of a social survey like Du Bois' Philadelphia study. Rather, Addams' observations were culled informally from living in a poor neighborhood in a group settlement house. Her book arose from witnessing the lives her house residents and neighbors lived and listening to their hopes and plans for the future.

Addams' book recounts her early years with special attention to her growing dissatisfaction with living in what she felt was a "shadowy intellectual…aesthetic reflection" of the real world and a correspondingly strong desire "to live in a really living world" (1945:64). Addams' journey to Hull House began with her graduation from a woman's seminary/college. Determined to be of service, Addams matriculated for a year at the Woman's Medical College in Philadelphia but left to work on health issues. She chose not to return because of her vague dissatisfaction with the path which professional medicine offered her. She then traveled to Europe in the manner of young women of her era to "acquire culture." Her experiences there tended to confirm her intellectual disillusionment and impel her toward a life of engagement with

the downtrodden. In particular, an experience on her first trip to Europe in East London—where she witnessed a late night auction of decaying fruits and vegetables to the ragged, desperate, urban poor—stayed in her mind (1945:66–71).

As Addams tells the story of Hull House's conception,

> It is hard to tell just when the very simple plan which afterward developed into the Settlement began to form itself in my mind….I gradually became convinced that it would be a good thing to rent a house in a part of the city where many primitive and actual needs are found, in which young women who had been given over too exclusively to study, might restore a balance of activity along traditional lines and learn of life from life itself; where they might try out some of the things they had been taught and put truth to "the ultimate test of the conduct it dictates or inspires." (1945:85)

She revealed her plan to Ms. Starr, her school friend who was traveling with her in Spain, and a year later, after searching the poor quarters of Chicago, they came upon an old house on the south side built in 1856. They sublet the second floor and a large drawing room on the first floor. The following year they were given free leasehold of the entire house through the beneficence of the owner. Ultimately, their benefactor gave them land on which 13 buildings were erected or converted for their settlement house over two decades (1945:92–95).

Addams' opportunity to witness and record social life in Chicago at the turn of the nineteenth century arose from these particular circumstances. Her observations were necessarily limited to the lives of those in settlement and the neighborhood in which it was located. As she notes, the original house stood "near the junction of Blue Island Avenue, Halsted Street and Harrison Street" (1945:92–93) in an area at first dominated by "the more prosperous Irish and Germans" (1945:97). Over the years, the original inhabitants were replaced by a gradual substitution of Russian Jews, Italians, and Greeks (1945:97). As Addams, like the Chicago School sociologists who later investigated these same neighborhoods, noted "[T]he older and richer inhabitants [of the neighborhood] seem anxious to move away as rapidly as they can afford it. They make room for newly arrived immigrants." (1945:98). Like the Seventh Ward in Philadelphia, a single dwelling often sheltered a number of unrelated residents or families (1945:99). The consequence was that Addams and Starr experienced the lives of the immigrant urban poor at very close remove. As Addams recalls:

a little Italian bride of fifteen sought shelter with us…to escape her husband who had beaten her every night for a week when he returned home from work, because she had lost her wedding ring;…[and we observed] the curious isolation of many of the immigrants; an Italian woman once expressed her pleasure in the red roses that she saw at one of our receptions…[but] would not believe for an instant they had been grown in America …she had lived in Chicago for six years…but she had never dreamed of faring forth… Her conception of America had been the untidy street in which she lived. (1945:110–111)

Addams' observations are not wholly limited to the life of the poor around her, however, as she also reports contacts with the better off and public officials:

two men from the county agent's office were attempting to remove [an old German woman] to the County Infirmary. The poor old creature had thrown herself bodily upon a small and battered chest of drawers…clutching it…[We] stood aghast at this realization of the black dread which always clouds the lives of the very poor when work is slack, but which constantly grows more imminent and threatening as old age approaches. [We] hastened to make all sorts of promises as to the support of the old woman and the country officials, only too glad to be rid of their unhappy duty, left her to our ministrations….The poor creature…was really clinging to the last remnant of normal living [before the poorhouse]. (1945:155–56)

In places, Addams comments on the organization of public efforts to relieve the conditions of the poor, observing that "the relief societies, although conscientiously administered, were inadequate in extent and antiquated in method." One senses that she attributes these organizational failures to the fact that "social reformers gave themselves over to discussion of general principles" while the poor themselves simply blamed their own poverty (1945:158). As she later observes, "This piteous dependence of the poor upon the good will of public officials was made clear to us in an early experience…We early found ourselves spending many hours in efforts to secure support for deserted women, insurance for bewildered widows, damages for injured operators,…[constantly interceding] between the various institutions of the city and the people for whose benefit these institutions were erected" (1945:167).

Many of Addams' reports involve experiences with one or the other of the immigrant communities in Chicago, both first and second generation. In a number of instances, she tells of immigrant craftsmen who can no

longer practice their craft in the USA. A goldsmith, whose wife exhibited a ring he made her which demonstrated his exquisite workmanship, had for 20 years shoveled coal in a furnace room of a large manufacturing plant. Her husband's unhappiness with his reduction to common laborer expressed itself in periodic bouts of drunken depression which had not existed before. As another wood craftsman from Italy observed, when Americans traveled to Italy they wished to look at his carvings and appreciated them; here, in America, "they only made money out of you" (1945:246–47).

Among the contributions Hull House offered to its guests, residents, and the neighborhood were educational programs and public lectures. In doing so, there was no effort to reproduce the college culture or the college classroom; rather, Addams described the effort as one intended to "connect [the student] to all sorts of people by his ability to understand them" (1945:436). One form of instruction offered was to teach English language skills to the hundreds of immigrants who attended classes there. In this context, Addams mentions that over the years she has listened to "dozens of them" try to express in their newly acquired partial mastery of English "some of those hopes and longings which had so much to do with their emigration" (1945:436).

These stories generally recall the struggles of immigrants and their children to adjust to American culture but just as many address universal experiences of the gap between desire and fulfillment. Thus, Addams describes one young Jewish woman's effort to describe the experience of her father, a Russian Talmudic scholar, whose vivid inner life of intense study of the great spiritual questions was in perpetual conflict with the busy, overworked, secular concerns of his American neighbors, who considered him rudely self-absorbed and slothful for not working. His daughter's plea, probably unheard, was for other Americans to develop an understanding of her father's tradition (1945:437). Addams similarly recounts the fates of young men who study hard in their attempt to rise in life but whose educational and social ascent causes them to experience being shut off from their uneducated [immigrant] families and set at a distance from former friends, who seemingly can no longer understand them. Here, the acquisition of education beyond that of family and group becomes a burden, carried through life without any of the delight that Addams knows can accompany learning (1945:437). Other young people Addams encounters find their interest in "learning something mechanical" or acquiring knowledge about electricity frustrated

by a public school system that does not provide learning opportunities beyond the traditional classroom curriculum (1945:440–41). Yet, unlike Du Bois, who seemed unable to grasp that some of the Seventh Ward residents often only sought simple pleasures that would enhance their day-to-day lives, Addams recognizes the appeal of recreational opportunities at Hull House, such as bowling, billiards, and organized sports tournaments. Thus, while Addams was especially dedicated to progressive, human improvement as a life mission, she did not disregard, nor undervalue, simple enjoyment.

This may be one of the differences between Du Bois and Addams that warrants further comment. Addams, unlike Du Bois, does not hesitate to note the different life goals and assessments that those she encounters offer her. Thus, Hull House established a public kitchen where neighborhood residents, who "so sadly needed more nutritious food," could come and learn to prepare it under the direction of one of the residents who had schooled herself in preparing inexpensive but healthful meals (1945:130). A public kitchen for the use of neighborhood residents was a prominent initiative undertaken at some expense early in Hull House's evolution. Yet, Addams is not reluctant to acknowledge that the idea was not universally popular. She recalls that the neighborhood estimate of the venture was best summed up by a woman who frankly stated that while the food they learned to prepare in the kitchen was certainly nutritious, she didn't like to eat what was nutritious. She said she liked to eat "what she'd ruther" (1945:131).

A visitor to a coffee house the residents established at Hull House also expressed a preference for something different than what was offered. The coffee house was primarily created for young people and, along with dances in the gymnasium in the same building, acquired some popularity. Only soft drinks of various kinds were served; although many different ones were tried, none became especially popular. A neighborhood man visiting the coffee house looked about the attractive, cozy room and commented to Addams, "This would be a nice place to sit in all day if one could only have beer" (1945:132). Addams, unlike Du Bois, is not tempted to moralize in response to a differing opinion although she did have concerns about the number of saloons nearby (many) and the relative paucity of places for young people to gather, socialize, and recreate (few). Still, Addams seems to understand that neighborhood residents have different cultural backgrounds, different assessments of how to live, and often seek different ends than she and the residents of Hull House.

Some of Addams' own analytical shortcomings are also illuminating when examined in light of efforts to understand how the American way of life has evolved over the last 100-plus years. Addams laments, for example, the failure of American education in her day to be more directly connected to enabling young people to prepare themselves for entry into the workforce (1945:438–40). Addams' view is somewhat surprising given her own esoteric, liberal education, and yet it is not an uncommon critique of educational institutions—one that persists to this day. It is part and parcel of the equality of opportunity and meritocratic ideologies that persist with respect to the American Dream. It seems American students, parents, and others often complain about studying subjects that will not directly prepare young people for jobs without any appreciable comprehension that the task is simply impossible under any circumstances. Students who proceed through their education with this sort of simple goal in mind are typically disenchanted when the educational system does not conform to their misunderstanding of its purpose. Yet students and parents would be equally disenchanted if they were told that a certain course of study was intended to prepare students for entry-level jobs in a field and then come to find that there were no jobs (or fewer jobs than needed) within the field upon graduation. This failed understanding of the nature of American society and its institutions, and their lack of congruence with individualized aspirations for success that are typically part of the romanticized American Dream, is a recurrent theme in American society.

A decade after Addams' observations about the lives of Chicago's poor in her Hull House neighborhood, Thomas and Znaniecki's five volumes of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–20) were published (Thomas, Znaniecki, and Zaretsky 1984). Later, an abridged and condensed version was edited by Eli Zaretsky, relied on here. At the time of the book's conception and development, Thomas was teaching at the University of Chicago and recruited the Polish sociologist to assist when he met Znaniecki in his capacity as director of the Emigrant's Protective Association. *The Polish Peasant* was innovative and influential in many respects. First, the authors addressed a practical social problem—immigration—with both a sophisticated (for its time) theory and sought to justify that theory with real-world data. Second, the primary source of the evidence they relied on was unique: letters to and from family members, whether from those family members who immigrated to the USA or those family members who remained in Poland. This method permitted all of their subjects to speak for themselves with reference to their life

circumstances in a spontaneous, nondirected manner. This form of data approaches in quality data from extensive unstructured interviews. It provides us with a rich source of commentary on issues relating to ways of life and the impetus for those leaving Poland and immigrating to the USA.

Thomas and Znaniecki state that all the peasant letters they read constituted merely a variation on a single type which they call the "bowing letter" (1984:98). This form of letter is written by or to a family member who is absent; its function is to state the continuing vitality of the family connection in spite of the separation between members. Since this is a letter that was commonly written when a family member emigrated, there is a definite pattern of composition invariably followed. There is, for example, a common greeting and response followed by a ritualized statement that one is enjoying good health and success and wishes the same for the recipient(s). Individual members of the family are then named and greeted. The purpose achieved by each of these steps, individually and all collectively, is to reaffirm family solidarity (1984:98–99). The letters conveyed, of course, a wealth of detail but Thomas and Znaniecki were interested largely in two themes: the dominant situation which the family group or member is experiencing, and their response to it, and what they saw as "the progressive disintegration of the family group" recurring throughout the range of letters (1984:100).

A number of minor patterns that pertain to our investigation of the American Dream clearly emerge as well. For example, although Thomas and Znaniecki quote at substantial length from letters among a number of families who are part of what they characterize as the "peasant nobility," there are meaningful differences in the letters for our purpose. The Wroblewskis, for example, lived in a relatively poor province in the same village since the fifteenth century. The letters between family members revealed they were consumed with the issue of family succession as the patriarch was declining to retire gracefully and pass on the inheritance to his sons. The Markiewicz, also among the peasant nobility, live in a more intellectually robust environment near Warsaw, but the two sons of two brothers of the older generation immigrated to the USA. The letters between the generations among this family address ways of life that are radically different, aspirations that have diverged as circumstances have changed for the sons.

In their introductory comments about the Markiewicz family, Thomas and Znaniecki characterize the family generally as "climbers" interested in achieving social and economic mobility. The letters reveal the family differences, according to the authors, across generational lines particularly,

where the older generation arises from Polish peasant society's fixed classes of families tied to villages and the land; the younger generation is representative of a new society composed of "fluid classes of individuals" (1984:123). Thomas and Znaniecki find the Markiewicz family representative of tendencies found among families of the middle and lower classes of Polish society generally but note that the Markiewicz are entering the phase where the aspiration to rise *within* their class transforms into a desire to rise *above* their class. The brothers Josef and Jans each want their respective families to occupy the highest possible status within their class of Polish society, but their aspirations are wholly enclosed within the social world of the Polish peasant village. Their sons, Waclaw and Maksy, have emigrated and now live in the USA. The sons have developed other spheres of influence and alternative social aims. The fathers do not understand at first how their sons can have any other aspiration than to try and save as much money as possible, come back to the village, buy good farms, and marry local girls who will be a "good match" (1984:123–24).

The letters reveal a growing distance between the generational pairs' conflicting dreams and exhibit features that typify the sort of strains that any quest for vertical mobility entails. Waclaw, for example, has written of his disinclination to return to Poland and take up his father's plan for him. His father writes, "but for another cause you make us sad, for you don't intend to come back to our country. At this moment the paper trembled in my hand…How did you dare to pronounce such wretched [mean] words?" (184:125). Later, Waclaw's mother writes and laments that he has not written the family for over a year. Since he has not written, his mother must rely on rumors—including the report that he has become "some sort of boss" and that he earns $400, a princely sum for the Polish peasantry. Letters from his cousin, Maksy, present more explicitly the nature of the concerns that both share in America, all of which involve the nature of jobs they are working and the amount of money they are paid. Maksy writes of his employment in a glass factory at $12.50–$14.00 a week until the factory closed whereupon he moved to Chicago and took up work with carpenters at 35 cents an hour. Later, after Waclaw answers, he commiserates with him over the paltry pay he is receiving ($1.50 per day) for work in a glass factory and recommends that Waclaw take his carpenter skills to a "carshop" for the steady work they offer.

Thomas and Znaniecki, commenting on these exchanges, note that paid work for others holds substantial interest for the sons in the USA but means little in the Polish village since the pay there is so low. In the village,

there is no hope of advancement through such paid work and all hopes for improvement of one's condition are centered on acquiring more land which can support more crops and animals. It becomes apparent, moreover, that when work is discussed in the sons' letters the interest focuses almost exclusively on the wages with no expression of interest in the work itself. Expenses, too, become a subject of interest that is foreign to life in the Polish village. Maksy notes in another letter that he has moved to be closer to his work and thereby saves 15 cents a day he would otherwise need to pay for a railway commute (1984:130). Later, Maksy writes encouraging Waclaw to come work for his "old boss" as he has an offer of work as a carpenter, an improvement over Waclaw's current job (1984:133). Thus, the preoccupation with wage work predominates to the exclusion of almost all other concerns. Its effect, in part, is to separate the younger generation's goals for advancement from those of the family. Such goals for vertical mobility have implications for the American Dream more generally. Many commentators, including Hochschild (1995), have argued that the goal of intergenerational mobility is central to the American Dream: parents almost universally want their children to do better than they themselves did. Here, though, it is not enough that Waclaw and Maksy are doing better than their respective parents; they are doing so but not within the local class of peasant nobility and this undercuts the older generation's dream where the entire family rises in status locally through the younger generation's efforts.

The Markiewicz family's letters illustrate what Thomas and Znaniecki identify as a general tendency of emigration—to isolate the individual from family and from the organization of life in the Old Country. Correspondingly, the weakened controls of the primary group permit increased individuation on the émigré's part (1984:141). Other families' letters discussed by Thomas and Znaniecki show similar processes at work.

Adam Raczkowski emigrated and adapted readily to life in the USA. He secured a position that raised him materially far above village life. At the same time, it divorced him from his family's life in Poland. Old claims emanating from the organization of classes in Polish village life become tenuous, and the individual responds less urgently to their pull. Adam's economic success lifts his estimate of his personal importance and lessens his conception of himself as merely a member of a family. Thomas and Znaniecki found this phenomenon universal among Polish immigrants whose relocation to the USA permitted the younger generation to avoid the stricture that traditional social classes impose. The new class

organization they report seems to be based mainly on economic progress. Since the immigrant's Polish ancestry is of peasant stock, even a modest success can create a nearly boundless rise. The individual can then feel almost unimaginably superior to the family origins he has left behind, furthering the disintegrative effects of physical distance with an increasing social distance. Adam Raczkowski states the common outcome:

> [My brother and I are working in the same factories as before.] And as to our country, brother says he will not return, because there is nothing to return for. He has no property there and it is better for him in America, because in our country he could not even earn enough for a loaf of bread. And I also do not know whether I shall return or not. If I can return then perhaps I shall return some day or other, and if not I don't mind, because I do ten times better in America than in our country. (1984:146)

In sum, Adam's concerns have become individualized concerns separate from those of his distant Polish family.

These representative letters of departing Polish village life, immigrating to the USA, and concentrating on economic success in the new country tell a common story. The Polish peasants Thomas and Znaniecki profile almost universally leave their homes and farms for what they perceive to be greater opportunities in the USA. Given the limited and depressed economic circumstances in Polish rural and small-town life at the turn of the nineteenth century, those who do emigrate often find the relative success they seek. This common formulation of the immigrant's American Dream has been told many times since. Thomas and Znaniecki's contribution is, in part, to have done so first and, second, to flesh out the story of economic success in America with details regarding the isolating and distancing effects that success produces with regard to the individual's connectedness with his family and with society generally. Urban, industrial, capitalist America offered most immigrants work that held little inherent interest in circumstances devoid of direct social connection to family or community. Under these circumstances, neither the work itself nor the benefit it produced for others could function as pro-social motivations. Rather, money became the sole justification for undertaking work, and questions regarding work satisfaction beyond the level of wages went unasked by workers themselves.

There are instances in which the social separations experienced by the Markiewicz and Adam Raczkowski are even more severe in their

consequences. Thomas and Znaniecki discuss this phenomenon in their analysis of the personal disorganization that some Polish immigrants experience when they remove themselves from the traditional influence of village, community, and family to the uncharted social landscape in life in the USA. Village life, while restrictive and short on economic opportunity, was at the same time stabilizing. The open-ended opportunities for economic success and co-ordinate rise in social status that life in America offered were, to the contrary, destabilizing for those whose ability to adapt to the newly fluid environment is not fully successful.

As Thomas and Znaniecki explain, the immigrant who loses touch with the people, concerns, standards, and life goals of his Polish community while experiencing economic success in the USA may, initially, find the absence of institutional support outside the economic arena unproblematic. Some immigrants, however, may soon find that this new milieu fails to provide "stimuli sufficiently continuous, varied, and coercive for socially normal action" within the different cultural and social arena presented by American society (1984:258). Having lost engagement with the complex normative and social world of the Polish peasant village, the superficial social controls exercised by business contacts and mere acquaintances throw the immigrant back on his or her own inner resources almost exclusively. As many of the Polish peasants who immigrated lacked the sophisticated, educated, and cosmopolitan orientations that might help them adapt to a rapidly changing environment, some became demoralized. This demoralization might arise from a lack of success in the economic arena or it might arise from the insufficiency of the economic arena to sustain individuals whose intensive concentration on economic success was unanchored by any larger, meaningful purpose. The demoralization effect that Thomas and Znaniecki observed among Polish immigrants is of interest because of the elevated standing some have accorded to the role of pecuniary success in definitions of the American Dream. Here, too, later commentators on the American Dream have noted the role of economic success in disconnecting and isolating individuals from the social order and the consequent social and individual pathologies that can arise. Thomas and Znaniecki's accounts of the life disorganization that some Polish immigrants experienced in their pursuit of American economic success foreshadows Merton's (1938) middle-range theory of social anomie and Messner and Rosenfeld's (2013) reanalysis of Merton's theory on the manner in which crime is driven by the American Dream.

W.I. Thomas was also the originator of a quasi-theory that is of interest for a study of the American Dream. While *The Polish Peasant* primarily focused on the responses of individuals and families to external conditions that either arose from or related to their immigrant status, the peasant letters also offered innumerable instances in which Thomas and Znaniecki could examine the inner motivations of the writers. Thomas had a long history of interest in the intersection of social structure and individuals and the manner in which people navigate the social world. He was aware of John Watson's work identifying fear, rage, and love as elementary girds for action in children but believed these concepts needed to be further refined if we were to understand the behavior of adults (Colyer 2015:258–59). Initially he laid out some socially idealized portraits of humans inspired by different motivational schemas in a public lecture he gave in 1917. He identified "philistines" as persons who suppress their desire for new experience and conform to the prevailing order but do so at substantial damage to the self by overvaluing security compared to learning. By way of contrast, Thomas defined "bohemians" as individuals who flee from conformity always seeking new experience but in the course of doing so undercut their need for security and sociability. By seeking equilibrium, the "creative man" attempts to balance the desire for new experience with the goal of security. The "creative man" acts by injecting change; his (her) actions will likely destabilize existing arrangements although perhaps offering novel solutions to existing problems as well (2015:259). Later, he revised these initial conceptions into four fundamental "wishes."

Thomas' four wishes are an attempt to explain behavior as arising from human responses to the conditions individuals must confront in living. The four "wishes" are, in effect, motivations that impel humans to act. Thomas identified these four wishes as the wish for new experience, the wish for security, the wish for response, and the wish for recognition (2015:260–62). While Thomas did not include the four wishes theory in *The Polish Peasant*, their influence is there in the focus on Polish immigrants' reasons for leaving and reasons for not returning. Most importantly, Thomas' focus on the four wishes has the potential to help us understand the evolution of the American Dream.

Thomas considered the wish for new experience the most fundamental but, here, as elsewhere in his theory work Thomas does not provide empirical evidence to support his conclusion. It is undeniable that humans hunt out new experiences based on human curiosity but it is not clear at all that this desire outruns all other desires. Moreover, individuals who do

place new experience first in their priorities will naturally disturb tradition, ritual, and social order. The individual seeking new experience will disregard prevailing community standards, place his/her individual interests before group interests, and generally introduce instability into social relations. Thomas believed that it was this desire for new experience, when frustrated, that inspired delinquent and criminal behavior (2015:260).

The wish for security is nearly the direct opposite. If the desire for new experience is the willingness to forge a path into the unknown, those seeking security are recoiling in fear from what that unknown might offer. While those seeking new experience will brave social censure, those seeking security will exhibit timidity, avoid and evade social exposure, and maintain a guarded wariness. Thomas identified the miser as well as his portrait of the philistine as examples. The miser does not pursue goods to enrich his life but rather simply tries to accumulate as an end in itself. The philistine's materialism is equally misguided but the accumulation is a buffer pursued for protective purposes; as such, it is a wholly conservative impulse (2015:261).

The wish for response is evident in a human being's desire to be connected to others. It can be manifested in the giving and receiving that constitutes an exchange of love and is found in child-rearing, courtship, conviviality, and friendship. Thomas asserted that when the wish for response is out of proportion with the other wishes, it has the propensity to create interpersonal problems that interfere with the overall organization of life (2015:262). Of course, like his contention that the wish for new experience is the most "fundamental" of the four wishes, Thomas offers no empirical support for his claim.

Finally, Thomas defines the wish for recognition as the desire for status. He noted that professionals in all fields seek recognition for their accomplishments. In addition to legitimate honors awarded for such achievements, Thomas believed it also drove boasting, bullying, tyranny, and the will to dominate in business or other arenas. When one does not receive the recognition that one believes should rightfully be forthcoming, Thomas believed the impulse could lead to desperate acts including criminal conduct (2015:262).

The details of Thomas' four wishes are less interesting than the fact that he recognizes the importance of developing a theory of motivation that connects the inner life of the individual to activity in the social world. Each of these wishes can be identified in the stories told and the aspirations expressed in *The Polish Peasant* letters. The four wishes also help

us grasp that at its most fundamental level the American Dream is, in part, both a description of—and a design for—a motivation scheme of its own. In its most reductive form, it provides a single phrase that can encapsulate all four of Thomas' wishes and perhaps many more besides. Does one wish to travel the world? Ride across the USA on a motorcycle? These are both examples of the wish for new experience and, arguably, part of some person's American Dream. Likewise, many Americans pursue education as a way to achieve recognition and thereby attain a rise in status. This element is common in many Americans' aspirational frameworks. Thomas' four wishes lend themselves intuitively to grasping the important role that Americans' hopes and dreams play in our cultural life. The phrase "American Dream" should sensitize us to this obvious connection but—as we shall see—the elements of hope and goal choice are sometimes minimized in studies of the American Dream.

Conclusion

As many scholars have documented, and as my first chapter (Chap. 1) recounts, the USA has long been a country of immigrants. One commonly accepted outline for voluntary immigration divides it into four waves (Eitzen and Zinn 2004). The third wave lasted from roughly 1880 to the start of World War I in 1914, and brought over 20 million immigrants to our shores (2004:206). Most who immigrated during this period were from Southern and Eastern Europe, and the majority of Poles whose letters Thomas and Znaniecki read arrived during this wave. Although many of these immigrants were from rural or small-town backgrounds in their native country, they overwhelmingly flocked to major cities and often found wage labor work in factories and industrial settings. Wage work broke their connection to work done with and for their families on small farms and changed the nature of the immigrants' social goals.

The fourth immigration wave is often identified as beginning in 1965 and, as one well-known text points out, "continues" (2004:206). Versions of the immigrant stories heard by Addams, Thomas, and Znaniecki continue as well. Many, if not most, immigrants come to the USA to seek a better life, often defined primarily in economic terms. A recent book on the US motel industry (Dhingra 2012:4) estimates that about 60 % of all lower- and middle-budget motels in the USA are now owned by Asian Indian Americans. Dhingra characterizes these immigrant owners as "the American dream incarnate—self-employed,

self-sufficient, boot-strapping immigrants who have become successful without government intervention" (2012:1).

The story of Indian American motel owners in the USA is not precisely the same immigrant story as that of the Poles and other earlier immigrant groups. Indian Americans, for example, often faced "double discrimination"—they were not merely new and seeking employment but faced more intense competition during periods of economic downturn than earlier waves of European Americans, many of whom came to the USA during years of explosive industrial growth in the early twentieth century. Notably, too, the racial discrimination many Asian Indians faced was also more virulent. While European immigrants were treated differently depending on their country of origin, with a bias in favor of northern European stock, Asian Indians typically faced the problem of the color line in American society. It was, however, the conjunction of these forces that produced a "solution" in the form of family-based entrepreneurship within the motel industry.

The unstable, fluctuating, and discriminatory US labor market impelled Indian Americans to pursue and seek other alternatives to standard forms of employment in corporations, public agencies, and the professions. Moreover, many Indian Americans who came to the USA over the last half century experienced a reduction in status. A number left practicing a profession simply because of the barriers they faced in establishing a professional practice in the USA (2012:72–75). Self-employment, which the low-budget motel industry offered, was the answer to a shared dilemma, one in which family solidarity is increased by the reliance on shared capital, shared work across generations, and shared futures. These forces ultimately were responsible for their profusion in the industry. Many were compelled to relinquish the status and autonomy that a professional preparation and career had offered them in India in return for an increase in economic well-being, through their involvement in the motel industry. After leaving and joining the motel industry, many reported working fewer hours and making more money (2012:82–83).

Thus, the goal of Asian Indians to "make it" in the USA in the late twentieth, and now twenty-first, century differs little from those of most immigrant groups. There are some respects in which the Asian Indian American immigrant experience differs, however, from earlier immigrant experiences. Typically, in Indian American families it is an older generation that has pioneered the resettlement and made its way into the motel industry. Their dispersion became national, very quickly, within a generation.

While some earlier immigrant groups sometimes became identified with particular industries, the infusion was typically localized. Thus, anthracite coal miners in northeastern Pennsylvania might be predominantly Irish, but immigrant copper miners in Michigan's Upper Peninsula would more likely be Finnish or Norwegian. The younger generation of Asian Indians, often born in the USA, then followed in the established family footsteps. Unlike Polish parents who often felt abandoned by their sons and daughters, Indian American parents have been able to pass on their source of livelihood and unite their own destiny with their children in the USA. One question that remains to be answered for Asian Indians' American Dreams is whether the intergenerational comity inspired by the group's success within the motel industry can last. There are hints in Dhingra's book that it won't last.

It is not uncommon for immigrants' stories to change between first and second generations. The challenges that first-generation immigrants experience—learning a new language and new culture, establishing themselves economically—have typically been surmounted by the second generation at a young age. Dhingra observes to a second-generation Asian Indian motel owner that first-generation immigrants view motel ownership as a livelihood to protect and nurture, whereas the second generation sees motels often as businesses to buy and sell. His interviewee replies:

> Bingo. When you think of something as an investment, you think of it from a revenue perspective. The first generation think of it from a cost perspective: if I live on the premises I save money; if I fire my front desk person I save 7 dollars an hour. (2012:174)

Dhingra also noted divisions among Asian Indian motel owners of different quality properties. High- and medium-budget property owners often criticized low-budget Asian Indian owners for both their cost-cutting approach and their management practices. Disputes over management style also polarized generations who often shared ownership of one or more properties when parents invested in acquisitions to help their children (2012:175–76). A first-generation Asian Indian motel owner reflected on the situation by noting the changes he foresaw: "But the kids these days, they don't want to do this business" (2012:176).

More important than divisions among Asian Indian migrants, or the successes they have achieved within the American motel industry, is the lingering recognition that they have not, yet, achieved what may well

be the ultimate aim of immigrant groups—belonging. The group's efforts to achieve belonging within their new country are tinged with a poignant sadness. Some, for example, attempt to fulfill the "model minority" role but even when successful at doing so their acceptance by Americans is muted and partial (2012:164–67). Others aimed at a lower standard of acceptance—they were merely grateful to be accepted as residents of their communities and not to be mistreated as foreigners (2012:67). A number adopted a "glass half full" attitude with respect to the acceptance of, and support for, their cultural traditions within the USA. For example, many Indian Americans are vegetarians but commonly find few exclusively vegetarian restaurants in their communities; still, many voice the accommodations they must make as few although this is not literally true. Similarly, the majority of Indian Americans are Hindus surrounded by an ocean of official Christianity; to negotiate this divide, Dhingra reports that Indian Americans engage in "creative cognitive work" by accentuating the fit of their traditional values and heritage within the broader umbrella of American multiculturalism. Still, as Dhingra comments, the effort is only rewarded by their own acceptance of the reality of their outsider status: "Their efforts made them feel part of their town, even if locals were unaware of it" (2012:169).

Dhingra's investigation of Asian Indian Americans in the motel industry has the benefit of a century of immigrant Americans' experiences beyond Thomas and Znaniecki's study of Polish peasants emigrating from rural Poland to the USA. He also has the benefit of Adams' origination of the now widely adopted idea of the "American Dream." This historical interlude and the research efforts on the immigrant experience that pervade it enhance Dhingra's acuity of observation and analysis. As Dhingra concludes:

> The American dream rhetoric of abundant opportunity and equality is rarely realized. Yet cases such as those described in *Life Behind the Lobby* suggest that the dream occurs frequently. It is insincere to dismiss the American dream by downplaying Indian Americans' successes, for evidence of their accomplishment is ample. Instead it is more appropriate to evaluate what the American dream truly is. Because it is inherently tied to the inequalities that [Asian Indian motel] owners must navigate. It is not a stable outcome. Instead, personal struggles, embedded hierarchies, and economic insecurity…that never go away but can seem tamed for stretches of time represent the reality of most American dreams more accurately than does a rags to riches scenario. (2012:204–05)

For Dhingra, the American Dream experience for Asian Indian American motel owners is a fight, or struggle, to navigate institutionalized realms of American life and handle interpersonal interactions with the dominant culture. He believes it is a struggle that the group has successfully waged, but that success is a partial one that in a certain sense must be fought anew by each generation in a new way. In that regard, the Asian Indian American motel owners' experiences may typify the American Dream's fragile elusiveness, a chimera that shimmers above a distant—even an imaginary—horizon.

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Sociological Studies of American Life in the 1920s

The end of World War I ushered in a period of relative prosperity for the USA. Alternately called the Jazz Age or the Roaring Twenties, actions taken by Congress to limit immigration were among many social and legal trends that refocused American society. An upsurge in nativism redirected sociologists' efforts away from investigations of the immigrant poor to other sectors of American society. Studies conducted during this period influenced American sociology's direction for the next several decades.

In 1927, Pitirim Sorokin (1959) broadened the nature of sociological studies when he published *Social Mobility*. Although Sorokin may not have been the first sociologist to use the term "social stratification," Sorokin's investigations of the ranked "levels" within American society changed the manner in which many researchers would approach this subject there-inafter. Sorokin starts from the observation that there are a number of words and phrases that mark relative social position among persons and groups that are a part of normal conversation in the USA: upper and lower classes, social position, social distance, a "climber," and so forth (1959:3). Words like these, among others, alert us to the fact that society consists of persons and groups who are considered higher or lower on some social scale and that individual persons or families can rise or fall in society. The study of social stratification is a formal recognition that American society is composed of hierarchical classes that are characterized by an unequal distribution of "rights and privileges, duties and responsibilities, social values and privations, social power and influences" among society's members (1959:3, 11). Sorokin identifies the phenomenon of individuals

shifting from one social level to another as (upward or downward) social mobility. As Sorokin notes, the whole matter is complicated by the fact that there is not a single ranking system within society but a number of crosscutting systems in which hierarchical ranking exists. These include family status, nationality, religion, occupation, political party affiliation, economic standing, race, and ethnicity, among others. Thus, a person may rank high within a particular sphere—that is, his or her church—and yet rank low according to criteria applied in some other social realm or setting. Cumulatively, according to Sorokin, a person's relation to other persons across the various groups and dimensions he or she occupies will define his or her social space (1959:4–5).

Although Sorokin acknowledges the complexity of multiple social dimensions upon which hierarchical ranking may arise, he argues that these may generally be reduced to three principal dimensions: economic, political, and occupational (1959:12). Moreover, Sorokin observes that these forms of ranking are often closely "intercorrelated" to one another. By this, he means that those who occupy the upper economic layer within society are likely to also be found in the upper political sphere and among the upper occupational groups. Correspondingly, he points out that the poor will more likely find themselves politically disenfranchised and relegated to a lower occupational group (1959:12). For Sorokin, the task for the sociologist is to recognize the complexity of social stratification while still attempting to simplify the picture of society by developing measures of its "most fundamental traits" that do not introduce any appreciable distortion or inaccuracy. Sorokin contends that all societies are stratified and that a society with any real measure of equality among its members is simply a myth (1959:12–13). This observation, of course, has considerable import for our study of the American Dream since many of the forms it takes include the belief that one may "rise" within society.

Sorokin's investigation of stratification processes in the 1920s suggests to him that there are two kinds of economic fluctuation: the economic rise or decline of a group as a whole or an increase (or decrease) in economic well-being for a family or individual (1959:23). Like the fact of stratification generally, Sorokin notes that fluctuations in family or individual income are normal phenomena: in his view, all groups, families, and individuals experience economic "ups" and "downs" across various eras and periods. The corollary to this observation is the recognition that economic history shows that there is no group, family, or individual whose economic status has been constantly and permanently rising (1959:26–27).

If fluctuation in economic status over time is the rule, what can we conclude about stratification across the political and occupational spheres? Sorokin's analysis suggests that there exists no perpetual, discernible trend with respect to economic stratification from monarchy to republic or rule by an aristocracy to rule by a democratic people. Indeed, Sorokin contends that fluctuation in the political realm is more common than in the economic realm which he finds "less flexible" (1959:94). With respect to occupational stratification, Sorokin likewise finds few compelling trends other than at the most superficial level. Thus, he notes that intellectual occupations, taken as a group, have generally been more highly regarded than manual work although exceptions can be readily discerned in nearly any society (1959:124–25; but see Torlina 2011:83–96). Beyond this, Sorokin finds few consistent patterns with respect to occupational stratification, although he does note that occupational groups that are able to position themselves advantageously vis-à-vis existing social organizations that exercise various forms of social control garner higher status. Individuals within those organizations who can demonstrate their organizational competence will, in turn, achieve higher status for themselves and accrue more privileges and organizational rewards (1959:100–01). White-collar occupations generally have used their positions within organizations to maintain status and, thus, garner prestige not accorded to those in manual, blue-collar occupations (Torlina 2011:97–112).

The study of social mobility becomes, in essence, the study of various organizational spheres within society and the mechanisms available within and between those spheres that permit the ascension, or authorize the demotion, of individuals between layers. Sorokin notes that such channels of "vertical circulation" are commonly found within the army, church, educational, political, economic, and professional realms (1959:164). Among these realms, the opportunity for social mobility will be increased within an organization when that sphere grows in importance, or perceived importance, to society as a whole and decreases during periods of contraction. Thus, upward social mobility via the army will be increased during periods of war and upward social mobility via the church will be increased when religion—or a specific church—is held in high esteem and favored with, or can secure, a surplus of resources. Since there are at any given time more individuals who wish to ascend within society than wish to fall, it is essential according to Sorokin that each channel of vertical mobility has means by which individuals can be tested for selection. Sorokin characterizes these mechanisms generally as a kind of "sieve" which is used

to "sift" individuals for placement in the various social positions available (1959:182). Interestingly for our purposes, Sorokin identifies the family as historically the first source of evaluation for prospective social placement. Thus, a person's general suitability for enhanced social status was often determined on the basis of family background—a standard one can argue remains in effect today. Various studies have suggested, for example, that criteria that establish a family's social status—such as parents' occupation and level of educational attainment—are likely to influence substantially (if not wholly determine) a child's "life career" and eventual social position. Still, as Sorokin comments, even in highly stratified societies with low rates of upward mobility, there exist secondary channels for testing and valuation that rank individuals for suitability beyond their family origin. In our society, Sorokin notes that educational institutions have assumed the role for testing, selecting, and distributing individuals across social positions in modern societies whether within educational institutions or across other realms (1959:188).

Still, the degree to which educational institutions will influence placement beyond the educational sphere is dependent on many factors and remains an open question. This question of the "meritocratic effect"—or, alternatively, the "meritocracy myth"—within American society is a critical one for understanding the potentiality of the American Dream. Sorokin provides an interesting early formulation of how this might actually work when he labels this process of selection through the educational sphere as "elimination work" (1959:189). Most often, we conceive of the American Dream as a process through which, by dint of hard work, a person "achieves" upward mobility. Sorokin reconceptualizes the process, however, as one in which individuals either avoid elimination or succumb to elimination. This approach is similar in gross outline to Merton's (1938) description of how the American Dream works by sorting people according to their response to the success ethic in the context of an openly competitive society. In effect, those left standing after the competitive melee will be deemed to have "achieved" elevation to a higher social plane. Sorokin observes, "the elimination work of the school becomes much greater and more pitiless [as one ascends the educational ladder]….As a result, out of the many pupils who enter the door of the elementary school only an insignificant minority reach the stage of university graduation. The great majority (parenthetical reference removed) are eliminated" (1959:189). It is true, as Sorokin points out, that a number of those eliminated may go on to later succeed in climbing in society through

another vertical channel, such as the army or the church, although the number must necessarily remain small as the existence of a pyramidal hierarchy depends upon a broad base of persons at the lower echelons and smaller numbers of incumbents at higher levels. In sum, those who rise are simply those who have not been "barred" from rising. The existence of terms in our language—such as the "bar exam" for lawyers—confirms the underlying validity of Sorokin's analysis.

With respect to other vertical ladders in society, Sorokin's comments on the church are instructive. Initially, he observes that in some societies the church has been as active in the winnowing and selection process as the school, although generally on different grounds. Thus, the church (except to the extent the church and the school are part of one and the same) selects along moral and social lines, whereas the school focuses primarily on intellectual achievement. Yet the elimination process can be equally severe. Heretics, pagans, and atheists, for example, were immediately eliminated for further consideration for elevated positions; indeed, in many instances, they were persecuted, imprisoned, disenfranchised, and executed. At the very least, they were forced to the margins of society and the very bottom of the social ladder (1959:193).

These reflections on how social elevation actually occurs within various channels are useful in contemplating the role of the American Dream as it has most often been conceived. Generally, the Dream has been construed to offer the individual who "works hard" the chance to "get ahead" or "rise" within society. Yet, neither the ladder of the school nor the church seems to be exemplary of this simple formula. The school may well select out those who can demonstrate certain forms of intellectual mastery. Yet, the school does not seem to be able to guarantee the delivery of social success beyond the academic setting regardless of how hard one works or whether one is selected as a successful graduate or eliminated through the competitive process. This means that the elimination function of an evaluative hierarchy like a school may be much more determinative of an individual's social trajectory than its anointment capability. As later chapters will attest, many successful college graduates have experienced difficulty in attaining suitable employment in the USA in recent years. As Sorokin summarizes decades ago:

> [These figures show]…a very rapid increase of college graduates in the United States. This means an increase of competition among them and difficulty in finding a position proper to the degree. A greater and greater

number of these people must satisfy themselves with a comparatively modest position, poorly paid, and not very attractive. Being convinced that their degree entitles them to a better place, and seeing around them the luxury and the prosperity of other people often without any degree, they cannot help thinking that this country is a bad country, that it treats them with injustice, and that this is the result of capitalist exploitation. (1959:201)

Sorokin, writing originally in the 1920s, describes presciently the dilemma of college graduates today.

Sorokin's observations about various institutions as constituting a social elimination agency during particular historical periods undercut severely the "equal opportunity" model of the American Dream. Institutions with this function often apply clear markers upon those subject to evaluation that serve as immediate disqualifiers for elevated status.

One trend within modernity may be for societies to shift the selection process from control agencies like the church which apply strict disqualifying standards to institutions which apply graduated, incremental standards over a number of dimensions. Educational institutions, for example, now commonly offer multiple competing disciplines with various levels and forms of mastery required so that no single qualifying standard can govern the elimination process. One can argue that this shift has supported the idea of the American Dream by enlarging the number of ways in which persons can be deemed successful. However, to the extent society does not offer any further appreciable reward for the increased number of "successful" individuals, the symbolic acknowledgment awarded is not dissimilar from the situation where every member of the team is awarded the same blue ribbon for "participation." The process may even lead to a social phenomenon Ehrenreich (2009) has labeled "bait and switch" after the deceptive advertising practice pursued by some American businesses, where college and university students are lulled into complacency by academic success in a discipline that offers no realistic pathway to employment while besotted with the notion that a college degree will lead to a better (i.e., higher-paying) job.

Although the early rounds of elimination are important ones, the maintenance of achieved social positions only starts there. Since individuals hold positions within organizations that form part of institutions such as the schools, the church, and the army, Sorokin states that "every day and every hour of his [or her] work is a permanent test of his general, as well as his specific ability" (1959:204). Individuals who are able to maintain

continuing "successful performances" compatible with their position will be considered for further elevation. Those who cannot continue to exhibit the qualities the organization values can be stalled in their careers, degraded in their status and responsibilities, or simply discharged. Yet, these observations, while true, tend to obscure the fact that an alteration in the organization's own prospects can just as directly lead to the same outcomes. Thus, it is quite clear that American businesses facing adverse competitive conditions often reassign employees, thus stalling careers, or discharge employees to shed the extra cost of employing them. Sorokin, who was quite astute regarding the fact that mobility is a constructed social process that controls any individual's positional placement, seems to have revised his estimate of the role that individual performance plays in maintaining and achieving position within an occupation or organization. This will recur as an important issue as we delve further into our American Dream.

Sorokin's work has a number of other implications for our discussion of the American Dream. In addition to vertical mobility, Sorokin considers the various forms that horizontal mobility may take in the USA. More important than the range of forms, however, are the influences and impact that horizontal mobility exacts on Americans. First, Sorokin begins his discussion of horizontal mobility by arguing that even at the time he wrote there was an intense and obvious territorial circulation of society's members. He noted, for example, that Americans (and others) have become less and less attached to where they are born and that increasing residential mobility has been the primary story for contemporary Western societies (1959:382–87). Attachment to a definite place becomes in Sorokin's terms "shorter and less substantial" and the population becomes, in effect, migratory (1959:388–89).

Second, increased circulation of social things and values—what anthropologists have long called social or cultural diffusion—has become the norm according to Sorokin (1959:389–993). This is the everyday experience when a fad, fashion, practice, or ideology accepted within one strata or territory within society is transported—that is, migrates—to another sector or strata and becomes commonplace there. As many researchers have documented since Sorokin, the world has in a sense become "smaller" as communication and travel across societies and the globe has become more common, more available, more accessible, and faster. These technological processes have thereby spurred diffusion. As some more recent critics of American society have contended, Sorokin notes the increased number

and accelerated pace of technological innovation generally, although he does not go so far as to say that the USA has become "technologically driven" as a society (1959:393).

Third, Sorokin notes the increasing tendency for individuals to shift from one job or one occupation to another (1959:394–97). This process, too, suggests less attachment to place—in this case, a place of employment or a specific occupation—which mirrors the general willingness of members of Western societies to become territorially mobile. Many of the subsequent studies of the American way of life we will examine confirm the near ubiquity of attitudes supportive of residential mobility over the balance of the twentieth century and beyond.

Fourth, Sorokin discusses relational mobility—which he denominates "interfamily horizontal circulation." By this rather cumbersome phrase, he means divorce, separation, remarriage, or other adjustment in one's core social relations. Like the other forms of horizontal mobility, Sorokin presents statistical evidence to show that this form of social change has become increasingly common. This circulation, too, shows a weakening of attachments—in this case to individuals with whom one has personal relations. However, Sorokin takes pains to emphasize that the shifting and reconfiguration of family and social bonds is merely one of a series of processes of horizontal mobility and argues that it is the cumulative effect of the forms generally that has changed the character of American society (1959:399).

Finally, Sorokin addresses circulation of members between different societies (emigration and immigration), the shifting allegiances and membership in religious organizations, and the ascendance and subsidence of membership in political parties. These fluctuations Sorokin also finds to be increasing, leading him to conclude that the USA (and Western nations generally) have become highly mobile horizontally across many dimensions (1959:409).

Sorokin's detailed account of the many ways in which American society (and contemporary Western societies generally) became increasingly mobile raises questions regarding the impact of mobility on the self and society. Sorokin argues that mobility has the effect of making behavior more plastic and versatile. He writes:

> Since [members of a mobile society] pass from occupation to occupation, from one economic and political status to another, the establishment of very rigid habits is hindered…A change of status requires a corresponding accommodation of body, mind and reactions…a man who passes from one

occupation to another (say, from agricultural laborer to minister or teacher) who cannot correspondingly modify his responses and actions and adapt himself to the new position is likely to be discharged. (1959:508)

As we shall see, the question of identity and the construction of the "self" in modern societies is a complex one. There is, for example, the question of whether there are limits on the plasticity of the human personality. While the answer is undoubtedly "yes," the precise nature and degree of those limits are difficult to specify. One consequence of high social mobility that is frequently remarked upon is the tendency for constant adaptation to create mental strain in the form of stress. Sorokin notes that a society that forces one to experience nearly constant change in one or more dimensions of life compels unceasing adaptation for any failure to adapt will result in a performance failure recognizable to others in the new setting (1959:510). Sorokin goes so far as to contend that mental strain arising from the increased versatility of behavior demanded by high mobility societies can be disabling to some people. Sorokin notes that the burden can become so great that individuals will "crumble" under the strain (1959:515). A related consequence may be the superficiality that Sorokin observes in highly mobile societies: One cannot readily adapt to the new if one is too deeply immersed in the details of circumstances that no longer have any bearing on the present. This, in turn, leads to what Sorokin identifies as a protective "insensitiveness" to the environment: the "self"—recognizing that it is being asked to adapt at every turn—essentially shuts down and disregards some of the external demands for responsiveness constantly flung at it by external forces. Meanwhile, the messages directed at the self must be increased in intensity in an effort to pierce the protective indifference that has been erected around it. As Sorokin observes, "Maybe this is good, maybe this is bad, but one thing is certain: it is a matter of necessity in our shifting, noisy, and 'booming' society" (1959:518–19). In the end, Sorokin notes that the cumulative effect of the various concomitants of high mobility is an increase in the potential for isolation, loneliness, and the reduction of community and intimacy in society (1959:522). Qualities of life such as these within highly mobile societies have implications for our ability to conceive, pursue, and attain something we might identify as "the American Dream."

As the 1920s came to a close, Robert and Helen Lynd published their seminal study of a "typical" American community in *Middletown* (1929). Their study of Muncie, Indiana—conducted in 1924–25—was among

the earliest community studies that would constitute an influential form of sociological inquiry during the succeeding five decades. Muncie was chosen, as the Lynds make clear, in an effort to study a city that would be as representative as possible of then contemporary American life but that was "compact and homogeneous enough" to present a manageable subject of study given the comprehensive nature of the investigation that the Lynds envisioned (Lynd and Lynd 1929:7). The Lynds' study was originally inspired by a foundation request for an examination of the role of religion in American life. Believing that it was not possible to study religion satisfactorily without examining the broader context of American life and culture generally, the Lynds focused their investigations on six realms of community life: making a living, making a home, training the young, using leisure time, religious practices, and participating in community activities (1929:4). As the authors' brief methodological note recites, they relied on a combination of participation in the local life of the community, reviews of documentary material often in the form of official records, the acquisition of statistical data often compiled by others, casual interviews supplemented by structured interviews of 124 working class families and 40 business class families, and questionnaires directed at various organizations within the city, including the city's high schools. The resulting report thus had the benefit of quantifiable data about the city and more qualitative data obtained directly from individuals and families speaking about their way of life in the community.

The Lynds found that "getting a living" dominated the lives of Middletown residents. As the Lynds reported, "as the study progressed it became more and more apparent that the money medium of exchange and the cluster of activities associated with its acquisition drastically condition the other activities of the people" (1929:21). The Lynds equate the absorption of the energies of Middletown householders by the money economy with the way of life of the Toda people whose lives are devoted to, and dominated, by their dependence on the buffalo. Acknowledging that there are perhaps as many as 400 forms of employment that Middletown residents pursue to make their living, the Lynds believed that Middletown occupations could be usefully divided into just two categories: Working Class jobs (where workers manipulate things) and Business Class positions (where incumbents address their efforts toward people) (1929:22). The Lynds conclude that this cleavage between different ways of making a living determines, for the most part, how people live their lives in Middletown. Thus, the Lynds introduced the centrality of class association

as a variable in understanding how Americans' lives are organized. The balance of the Lynds' observations either explicitly or implicitly describe how the manner in which one makes a living colors every other aspect of Muncie society.

In 1929, the Lynds found that men, whether married or unmarried, constituted four out of every five residents who were engaged in making a living full time (1929:25). They observed that a healthy adult male would "lose caste sharply" if he were not engaged in the "traditional male activity" of making a living. Women, on the other hand, were not expected to make a living and—indeed—were often discouraged and disparaged for being employed (particularly in certain occupations). Thus, gender roles were intimately tied to one's employment and the nature of that employment. Moreover, the Lynds reported that married women who were engaged in paid employment found themselves less readily accepted than unmarried ones and that the overwhelming majority of women who were employed could be found among the working class respondents (1929:26). Significantly, the Lynds reported a clear pattern with respect to the ages of workers in each group as well: members of the working class tended to become employed at a younger age and leave paid employment at a younger age than members of the business class, whose engagement with the world of work started and ended four to five years later (1929:30–31). This meant that members of the business class experienced stable or increasing earning power and social prestige for a longer period at advanced ages with a corresponding effect on their way of life.

The fact that making a living dominates the lives of Middletowners leads the Lynds to consider at some length the nature of the division of labor as well as the changes that have been introduced into the division of labor in Muncie. In 1929, many workers, particularly among the working class, were born and raised on farms surrounding the city. Thus, their transition from the work associated with farm life to manual labor associated with industrial America of the 1920s was still fresh in their experience. Still, the Lynds found that many changes within the division of labor were ongoing. As one example, although only a small percentage of workers were engaged in the "food, sex, and shelter needs of human beings," in 1929, the Lynds found that the gap between things people do to get a living and what they characterized as the "actual needs of living" was widening (1929:39). This is an important observation because later sociological investigators will find that engagement with the American way of life is often thwarted by the distance that modern American life interposes

between the artificial, socially constructed forms of middle class existence and the bedrock foundation of what it means to be a human being. The Lynds emphasize the difference in degree experienced by each group along this dimension: while the working class finds that its daily occupations no longer make the material necessities of life, the work of members of the business class is even more remote from securing the essentials for its existence. As this is a change process that has only been extended further in subsequent decades, the Lynds' recognition of its importance to the lives of Middletown residents is significant for our examination of the American Dream.

The specific nature of the changes the business class was experiencing in the 1920s is also very instructive for our further analysis of the American Dream. As the Lynds recount, while white-collar positions within industry were undergoing increasing specialization, the further division of jobs was simply an extension of trends already inherent in manufacturing processes 35 years earlier. Similarly, while retail sales—and other forms of exchanging, or arranging for the exchange, of necessary goods and services through banks, stores, and offices—was not much changed over several decades, the introduction of, and proliferation in the common use of, credit was a notable change that increasingly influenced Americans' way of life (1929:44–45). As the Lynds recite, "[w]hen the fathers of the present generation wanted to buy a piece of land they were likely to save up the money and 'pay cash' for it,…[whereas] [T]oday Middletown lives by a credit economy" (1929:46). The Lynds went on to note that credit was available to most members of the community in some form or degree or another. Moreover, it was (too often in the Lynds' view) extended to persons whose ability, and even intention, to pay was not sufficiently known. Perhaps more important was the change in attitude that accompanied the transition from a cash economy to a credit economy. The Lynds quoted a local building and loan official to the effect that customers typically borrowed sums now that they would never have thought of borrowing previously, and they did so calmly and optimistically (1929:47). This change from spending only cash in hand to living on credit, which the Lynds observed as far back as 1929, has had profound effects on the American Dream, as we shall see.

A minor observation the Lynds make regarding occupational choice is still quite a significant one for our examination of the American Dream. The Lynds report that Middletown boys between the ages of 14 and 18 they surveyed indicated interest in a relatively wide range of occupational

choices including running a museum and being an astronomer (1929:50). In reality, however, the Lynds state that the likelihood, based on their preliminary work, is that the boys will simply "go to work" making a rather casual choice among the jobs readily available—and not pursue something of inherent interest to them. In the Lynds' phrasing, "the boys naturally gravitate towards the stock occupations understood and recognized by the community," and "eighty-five out of each hundred…[will] work for others and are closely directed by them" (1929:51–52). This choice between pursuing things of inherent interest and subordinating one's choice to those common positions readily available has an important effect on the boys' lives as adults. As the Lynds observe about the boys' choices:

> This whole complex of doing day after day fortuitously assigned things, chiefly at the behest of other people, has in the main to be strained through a pecuniary sieve before it assumes vital meaning. This helps to account for the importance of money in Middletown, and, as an outcome of this dislocation of energy expenditure from so many of the dynamic aspects of living, we are likely to find some compensatory adjustments in other regions of the city's life. (1929:52)

In essence, the Lynds perceive that by choosing from only the stock occupations readily available money is substituted for, and replaces, a choice based on personal, intrinsic interest in the occupation itself. This means that the boys have permitted the marketplace to make the choice rather than assertively demanding that their own interests prevail. The "compensatory adjustments" the Lynds anticipate flowing from this manner of choosing one's life work may well explain the "American Dreams" the boys end up living—as well as those American Dreams that can no longer be envisioned or pursued.

The Lynds persuasively depict the impact of prior life choices on subsequent life choices in a chapter entitled "The Long Arm of the Job." While some of the specific observations they make may no longer hold, the influence of one's occupational choice on other aspects of one's life has little diminished in the succeeding decades. The Lynds note, for example, that members of the working class typically must be on the job around 7 a.m. at the time of their research. The Middletown business class, having a less defined time to start their working day, more often arises later and—on the average—must only be at their place of employment by 8:30 a.m. Many other features of one's initial occupational choice also create dif-

ferential career concerns leading to corresponding life adjustments. A number of the working class jobs in Middletown, for example, routinely were subject to "layoffs" and unemployment was an issue for members of the working class in a way that it was not for many members of the business class. Typically, the only "solution" that members of the working class envision with respect to this situation is to look for another job. This approach may or may not guarantee that it, too, is not subject to layoffs since it most often involves working for others to the same degree that the job they are leaving does (1929:59–61). Thus, once an occupation is selected, future employment prospects are governed by that choice to a substantial degree as are the working conditions associated with the job. Perhaps most important for our study of the American Dream, one's horizons are circumscribed: rather than choose a new occupation—a path that quickly recedes as Middletown's boys grow into adulthood with their initial job—members of the working class can only go about "finding a new job" which may not differ in too many respects from the old job. As the Lynds summarize, the harsh reality for those with working class jobs may be that "Failing to find another chance to get a living, the whole family settles down to the siege" (1929:61).

The Lynds' Middletown is representative of many studies of the American way of life in that while there is no explicit mention of the American Dream there is clear reference to its broad outlines. Thus, the Lynds comment:

> Meanwhile, in season and out, regardless of such vicissitudes as unemployment, everybody who gets a living in Middletown is theoretically in the process of "getting there"; the traditional social philosophy assumes that each person has a large degree of freedom to climb the ladder to ever wider responsibility, independence and money income. (footnote deleted) (1929:65)

The Lynds continue by noting, "As a matter of fact, in six Middletown plants employing an average of 4,240 workers during the first six months of 1923, there were ten vacancies for foremen…This means…there was a chance for one man in 424 to be promoted" (1929:65–66). Still, in response to the statement "It is entirely the fault of a man himself if he does not succeed," 34 % of Middletown high school boys agreed as did 45 % of high school girls (1929:65, footnote 28). One way of reading this response is that hopes and dreams for upward mobility are more willingly

believed than reality. This feature of the American Dream phenomenon is an important social psychological principle that will merit our continuing attention. The reality is that members of Middletown's working class "live in a world in which neither present nor future appears to hold as much prospect of dominance on the job or of breaking through to further expansion of personal powers" (1929:80). The Lynds conclude that frustrations inherent in job limitations lead Middletowners to seek compensations elsewhere. They remark that "For both working and business class no other accompaniment of getting a living approaches in importance the money received for the work" (1929:80). Yet, as the Lynds further observe, the possession of more money often leads to "new urgent occasions for spending money in every sector of living" that never existed before (1929:83). The upshot according to the Lynds was that "both the business men and the working men seem to be running for dear life in this business of making the money they earn keep pace with the even more rapid growth of their subjective wants" (1929:87). This observation, too, will resurface in later analyses of our way of life.

The Lynds' investigation of home life and marriage is instructive in many regards for our examination of the American Dream. The Lynds report that residents of Middletown in the 1920s generally lived in heterosexual family units with children in single-family homes (1929:110). Formation of these units in the USA is ideally founded on romantic love. In reality, the Lynds report that as adolescence recedes, increasing attention is paid to whether friendships are developing with the "right" people who belong, perhaps, to the "right clubs." The Lynds note that this preoccupation is most prominent among the business class and stronger in the women and mothers than the men and boys (1929:117–18). Women and girls evaluate potential mates primarily according to whether or not the male has the prospect of being a good provider. What we now conceive of as traditional gender stereotypes prevailed among the men and women of Middletown and sex segregated social activities (golf for the business class men and bridge for the business class women) were common, although men and women did play cards together with other couples (1929:119). The Lynds' chapter on marriage is especially informative regarding the quality of emotional engagement and interaction between spouses. Indeed, the chapter is dominated by discussion of the increasing number of divorces, the basis on which those divorces are sought and granted, and the reasons for marital separation. With respect to the reasons spouses sought divorce, a principal theme was that both men and women seek

more from a marriage considered tolerable than in the past (1929:128). In summing up the marital relations of the working class, the Lynds observe that wives often thought of husbands as a focus of problems and fears—anxiety about possible job loss, disappointment about failure in achieving promotion, fear of conception—while husbands thought of wives with weariness and resignation as associated with too many children and often burdened with other people's washing (1929:129).

The Lynds report at length on the rearing of children but a few observations will convey the essential features that bear upon an investigation of the American Dream. Education, which had become legally required by the 1920s, was a focal point for both business and working class parents. As the Lynds characterize it, a Middletown child's formal, "systematic, high-pressure orientation to life" begins in school at age 6 (1929:181). For many, in the 1920s, it extended through high school, with the business class almost uniformly expecting their children to go to college and working class parents expressing the "hope" that one or more of their children would go beyond high school. The Lynds report that for many in the working class, education is embraced with "the fervor of a religion, and a means of salvation" (1929:187). Thus, education was viewed as a means of escape from the working class way of life and a path to possible upward mobility.

Middletown documents further, in a way that had not been previously studied, the intensive engagement of adults and adolescents in the consumption of leisure time. It is beyond the purview of this book to detail the many forms of leisure pursued by Middletowners, whether associated with the schools, workplaces, churches, or home life. Still, it is worth noting the appearance—and indeed, predominance—of this realm of urban and town life as it emerged in the 1920s for it has a significant bearing on our examination of the contours of the American Dream over the remainder of the twentieth century. The source of later social trends—such as companionate marriage—can be found here as can the roots of consumerist culture generally.

The Middletown study is also significant for our investigation of the American Dream because it has been replicated in a manner that most community studies, however valuable, have not been. A decade after their first research, the Lynds returned to Muncie for an intensive restudy of the community during 1935 (Lynd and Lynd 1937:xi). Since their replication was conducted in the midst of the Great Depression, their studies, taken together, offer us an opportunity to examine the American way of life in

a single setting during succeeding decades—one characterized predominantly by prosperity, the other pervaded by financial depression.

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The American Dream in the Great Depression

The effects of the Great Depression on the American way of life were, of course, profound. Still, unlike the vivid, dramatic impact sometimes depicted, the stock market crash of September 1929 did not produce a frantic response instantaneously across the breadth of the nation. After the initial shock, many assumed that the previous decade's productiveness and prosperity would reassert itself shortly. Indeed, it took nearly a year for the gravity of the situation to make itself widely felt and acknowledged (Pells 1998:43). This may explain, in part, why James Truslow Adams' *The Epic of America*, released in 1931, had only one entry in its index for economics (laissez-faire on page 141) and none for recession, depression, finance, stock market, or boom and bust. It may also explain, however, his paean to the American Dream that dominates the book's *Epilogue*.

Adams' concluding commentary on the story of America he has spent more than 300 pages recounting is effervescent in its celebration of American exceptionalism. Its tone is undeniably optimistic regardless of the fact that by early 1930 10,000 jobless men were rioting outside a Ford Motor Company plant in Dearborn, MI, and the Depression had descended with spectacular force and effect on the nation (Klein 2001:265). Yet, Adams can say little bad about the country, although he conceded that a vulgar materialism has, at times, dominated her spirit. Still, it is the nation's idealistic vision to which Adams returns, time and again. He writes:

> While thus occupied with material conquest and upbuilding, we did not wholly lose the vision of something nobler. If we hastened after the pot of gold, we also saw the rainbow itself, and felt that it promised, as of old, a hope for mankind. (Adams 1933:316)

After quickly itemizing the USA's contributions to the world in science, medicine, humanitarian aims, justice, literature, and drama, Adams identifies a still nobler form of contribution:

> But, after all, many of these things are not new, and if they were all the contribution which America had had to make, she would have meant only a place for more people, a spawning ground for more millions of the human species….

> If, as I have said, the things already listed were all we had had to contribute America would have made no distinctive and unique gift to mankind. But there has also been the American *dream*, 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…It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of 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, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (1933:317)

Besotted with the stirring eloquence of his own enthusiastic praise for the USA's imagined idealism, Adams can't resist nearly repeating himself less than a page later:

> No, the American dream that has lured tens of millions of all nations to our shores in the past century has not been a dream of merely material plenty, though that has doubtless counted heavily. It has been much more than that. It has been a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which had slowly been erected in older civilizations, unimpressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human being of any and every class. And that dream has been realized more fully in actual life here than anywhere else, though very imperfectly even among ourselves. (1933:318)

As Adams recognizes, the student of history must always consider the potential for his object of study, commenting: "It has been a great epic and a great dream. What, now, of the future?" (1933:318). Adams' answer is illustrative of one of the more underrated qualities of the American Dream—the seductive nature of its underlying optimism for

Americans. Adams begins by exhibiting that optimism with respect to the economic depression by noting, "From the material standpoint, it is probable that the extreme depression will pass in a year or two, barring social and political overturn in some countries, which might delay recovery" (1933:318). Although there was political turmoil in a number of countries over the ensuing decade, there is no widespread agreement among economists that it was political circumstances that prolonged the Great Depression. Rather, Adams was simply modeling the American Dream's inherent optimism: this, too, shall pass—and pass quickly—and the American Dream can then reassert itself with bounty and equal opportunity for all.

Having expressed his confidence that the economic depression would be overcome in a relatively short time, Adams next proceeds to outline what he believes is the fundamental question for the American Dream: "the chief factor in how we shall meet either [a furious economic recovery or a marked economic slowdown] is that of the American mind….Can we hold to the good and escape from the bad? Are the dream and the idealism of the frontier and the New Land inextricably involved with the ugly scars which have also been left on us by our three centuries of exploitation and conquest of the continent?" (1933:318). Adams frames the dilemma facing Americans more fully when he writes:

> We have already tried to show how some of the scars were obtained; how it was that we came to insist upon business and money-making and material improvement as good in themselves; how they took on the aspects of moral virtues; how we came to consider an unthinking optimism essential; how we refused to look on the seamy and sordid realities of any situation in which we found ourselves; how we regarded criticism as obstructive and dangerous for our new communities; how we came to think manners undemocratic, and a cultivated mind a hindrance to success, a sign of inefficient effeminacy; how size and statistics of material development came to be more important in our eyes than quality and spiritual values; how in the ever-shifting advance of the frontier we came to lose sight of the past in hopes for the future; how we forgot to *live*, in the struggle to "make a living"; how our education tended to become utilitarian and aimless; and how other unfortunate traits only too notable today were developed. (1933:318–19)

For Adams, then, the American Dream has become a question of national values and the Great Depression not simply an economic crisis but rather a moral one. Adams states this explicitly when he writes,

"Once the frontier stage is passed, – the acquisition of a bare living, and the setting up of a fair economic base, – the American dream itself opens all sorts of questions as to values. It is easy to achieve a better and richer and fuller life for all men, but what is better and what is richer?" (1933:320). In answering his own question, Adams is dismissive of the idea that either businessmen or politicians will be able to successfully guide us through the dense forest of values he believes we must enter (1933:320, 326). And while Adams harbors some skepticism that a mere "nation of employees" rather than the rugged individualists of yesteryear can muster enough intellectual and moral energy to develop a path for the nation, he ultimately places his faith in "the people." In doing so, moreover, he turns to an issue that strikes us as utterly contemporary rather than a relic of another bygone age:

> If the American dream is to come true and to abide with us, it will, at bottom, depend on the people themselves. If we are to achieve a richer and fuller life for all, they have got to know what such an achievement implies. In a modern industrial State, an economic base is essential for us all. We point with pride to our "national income," but the nation is only an aggregate of individual men and women, and when we turn from the single figure of total income to the income of individuals, we find a very marked injustice in its distribution. There is no reason why wealth, which is a social product, should not be more equitably controlled and distributed in the interests of society. But, unless we settle on the values of life, we are likely to attack in a wrong direction and burn the barn to find our penny in the hay. (1933:322)

Thus, the question for Adams becomes whether the "income gap" or "wealth gap" can be justified and sustained in light of what he deems to be the American Dream. What, then, does he mean by the "richer and fuller and better" life the American Dream should offer us?

For all Adams' talk regarding the value of American individualism that drove our nation forward since its inception, Adams clearly conceives of the American Dream as a collective vision: he writes about it as a shared dream that would have no value were it not shared. In his own words:

> If we are to make the dream come true we must all work together, no longer to build bigger, but to build better. There is a time for quantity and a time for quality. There is a time when quantity may become a menace and the law of diminishing returns begins to operate, but not so with quality. By working together I do not mean another organization, of which the land is as full as

was Kansas of grasshoppers. I mean a genuine individual search and striving for the abiding values of life. In a country as big as America it is as impossible to prophesy as it is to generalize, without being tripped up, but it seems to me that there is room for hope as well as mistrust. The epic loses all its glory without the dream. The statistics of size, population, and wealth would mean nothing to me unless I could still believe in the dream. (1933:326)

A few pages later, he tied his own dream of the American people reclaiming their original vision to the dreams of the many immigrants who brought their own elemental yearning for a better life to our shores:

[The American Dream] was not the product of a solitary thinker. It evolved from the hearts and hardened souls of many millions, who have come to us from all nations…and [we] may hearken (sic) to the words of one of them, Mary Antin, …"Mine is the whole majestic past, and mine is the shining future." (1933:327)

Acknowledging that the situation the nation was then experiencing was discouraging, Adams was still able to find hope—consistent with the implicit command of the American Dream and Mary Antin's own hopes for her life—for a better future:

There are not a few signs of promise now in the sky, signs that the people themselves are beginning once again to crave something more than is vouchsafed to them in the toils and toys of the mass production age. They are beginning to realize that, because a man is born with a particular knack for gathering in vast aggregates of money and power for himself, he may not on that account be the wisest leader to follow nor the best fitted to propound a sane philosophy of life. (1933:326)

Conceding there is still a long and arduous path to follow if the nation is to realize its American Dream, Adams reminds us that there really is no alternative but for Americans to rise to their full stature and progress together. Indeed, returning to his initial identification of the prospects for the USA with the theme of American exceptionalism, Adams concludes that Americans must survive and thrive because the "failure of all that the American dream has held of hope and promise of mankind" hangs in the balance (1933:327). In the end, Adams offered us not only a definition of the American Dream but also a ringing endorsement of its hopeful potential during one of the deepest crises in our nation's history. In

summing up his "epic" portrait of American history, Adams felt justified in using the phrase "American Dream" over 30 times (Cullen 2003:4).

Although James Truslow Adams was the first writer whose use of the phrase "the American Dream" in print inspired him to dedicate his analysis to its prospects, the Depression was motivating many intellectuals to reconsider the traditional American way of life. As Richard Pells observed, the collapse of the economy and the breakdown of the USA's industrial might appeared to many commentators as simply symptomatic of some deeper spiritual or moral unease, the precise source of which was difficult to identify (1998:98). Most of these writers were less optimistic than Adams about the USA's potential to revive its economy and reorient American society. The pervasive attitude that dominated the period seemed to suggest that American ideals had become corrupted by capitalism and business interests generally. Competition and acquisitiveness were condemned as distorting the American way of life, denying common human aspirations, and wearing away the essential foundation for community. Defining the era in this manner produced calls for change that went well beyond restoring the viability of the economy. Rather than develop planned programs for reviving failed economic institutions, like the banking system and the stock market, intellectuals sought broader solutions that would address the return of the public's confidence in the American Dream (1998:99). Precisely which policies such solutions might entail were often nebulous and subject to only vague prescription. Often, it was easier for writers to catalogue society's contemporary ills than propose creative and workable alternatives (1998:101).

In this milieu, many commentators focused on what they perceived as the debilitating strain the chaos of the early Great Depression exacted on the self. Battered about by forces beyond one's control, Lionel Trilling (1930) despaired that Americans were losing a sense of self and being reduced to something less than full and complete human beings. In such an atmosphere, it would be insufficient to simply repair a damaged social system because that would not address the disjunction between the external demands of the social order and the inner dimension of frustrated aspirations, emotional yearning, and unsatisfying human relationships. Reconstituting the diminished self thus became central to any discussion of the failed economic system and its revival for many. Indeed, analyses of the American Dream would henceforth often entail examinations of the impact of American life on the nature of the self and creation of a social identity within the peculiar cultural contexts that writers from many eras have found to be distinctively American.

In response to the fragmented economic, political, cultural, and intellectual atmosphere of the Depression, some students of American society emerged with research agendas that promised to find the answer to society's manifold problems by studying the everyday affairs of Americans at close range. Robert Lynd (1939), for example, who had already investigated American life in a typical, small, Midwestern city and was in the process of doing so again as he made notes for this book, proposed that the intersection of organized institutions and the lives of individual people offered a unique setting in which to develop an understanding of the essential contradictions within American society. Sensitive to the demand that society needed to be restructured in a manner that would support enduring human values of freedom, innovation, meaning, and personal growth, Lynd believed that research on the American way of life could help bridge, and equalize, the gap between individual and collectivity that the nation's economic collapse had exposed so vividly. Lynd's replication of his earlier community study, with his wife Helen Merrell Lynd (Lynd and Lynd 1937), was clearly the sort of cultural and social investigation that he had in mind.

In *Middletown* (1929), as we have seen, the Lynds investigated the social structure of a midsize community during the middle of the decade immediately preceding the onset of the Great Depression. Ten years later, in 1935, during the depths of the country's continuing economic woes, the Lynds returned to restudy Muncie. The decade in-between the two studies saw, first, an inordinate and unexpected increase in prosperity followed, almost immediately, by an unexpected financial depression. This juxtaposition of these two divergent, but equally extreme, circumstances permitted the Lynds to examine the community in the throes of economically induced social changes that might not otherwise have occurred.

The Lynds follow the same general organization for their report in *Middletown in Transition* (1937) as they did for *Middletown* (1929). Consequently, it is easy to make comparisons to the earlier research. As the authors remarked in *Middletown*, they found in 1935 that "One's job is the watershed down which the rest of one's life tends to flow" in Muncie (1937:7). Due to the importance Middletowners placed on jobs, the economic depression delivered a substantial shock to the community as business dried up and many enterprises contracted or went dead. As the Lynds report, however, "One of the most illuminating aspects of this early period of the depression was the reluctance of Middletown's habits of thought to accept the fact of 'hard times'" (1937:15). Even more revealing for our examination of the American Dream is the divide the Lynds report

regarding class attitudes toward the economic downturn during 1930–32 in Middletown: until 1932, members of the business class appeared to treat the Depression (with some justification in Muncie) as something one read about in the newspapers; members of the working class—25 % of whom had already lost their job by 1930—experienced the Depression in full swing from almost the moment it began. The Lynds' comment that this divergence offered "an interesting commentary on the class basis of many judgments by Middletown people" (1937:16) alerts us to a factor that must remain prominent in our investigation of the American Dream. In a class society like the USA, there is little question but that the different classes may well conceive of the Dream differently. Later researchers have rather regularly confirmed this divergence in class perspectives (Torlina 2011:6–8). In this context, the Lynds use for the first time the phrase "American dream" in reporting their research. They go on to define the working class symbol for having achieved a "large share of it" in 1935 Muncie as "car ownership" (1937:26). The Lynds note that under a rising standard of living—which the 1920s offered—members of the working class in Middletown readily accepted life on the installment plan and only wanted to be a part of the community's collective dream. The automobile was the "great symbol of advancement" that told the members of the working class that they belonged in the community (1937:26).

The subtitle for the Lynds' 1935 replication study was "A Study in Cultural Conflicts." One of the more interesting features of the American Dream is the degree to which belief in it is widely shared by Americans—although, for the most part, only when its details go unexamined. This superficial consensus about the importance of pursuing the "good life" in the USA has the effect of submerging conflict. The Lynds' restudy pierced this veil and exposed considerable conflict in Muncie.

One prominent source of that conflict was over the organization of working class labor into unions. Muncie in 1929 was an "open shop" town with only 900 union members out of about 13,000 working class residents employed in its factories (1937:27). The advent of the New Deal inspired union-organizing efforts. These were initially successful but ultimately failed. The business class and the newspapers—owned, of course, by businessmen—were opposed to unionization. The Lynds observe that there was little shortage of fear, resentment, insecurity, and disillusionment among Middletown's working class so that it would at first appear that union organizing might take hold. At the same time, the Lynds noted that workers bore their unhappiness with their jobs and their

employment situation in general as an *individual* experience. Muncie workers did not generally develop recognition of themselves and their coworkers as members of a *class* that shared life circumstances that could be altered by effective organizing (1937:41; emphasis in original). This is significant because a prominent feature of the American Dream identified by most commentators is *individualism*. The lack of self-identification as a member of the working class in Middletown is comparable in many respects to the lack of any collective or communal vision evident in most Americans' conception of the American Dream.

The Lynds reached a second pair of related critical observations regarding the working lives of Middletowners in their restudy. First, the belief that an enterprising man with an idea and access to a shoestring of capital could start his own company and prosper suffered a serious setback in the Depression. Second, in every major field of work in Middletown, the Lynds found that the share of workers employed by others was increasing while the share of those self-employed or employing others shrank (1937:69–71). The result of these converging trends was that the ladder of opportunity that previously existed beginning at the shop floor and stretching upwards into management—and even ownership—was lengthened. There was, according to the Lynds, diminished opportunity to "get ahead," "go up in the world," "improve oneself," or "arrive." Rather than a single ladder (if there ever was one), it was apparent to the Lynds that there were two ladders. The ladder for the working class did not extend as far as it once did and "[lead] nowhere in particular" (1937:72). A second ladder for the business and technical class began "half way up"—skipping the shop floor—and "going up" beyond the place where the working class members could reach (1937:72). The Lynds also reported that the American Dream of being one's own boss was becoming less likely due to the fact that small, owner-operated enterprises were among the most likely businesses to fail in the 1930s (1937:70). The fact that those who were most willing to take the initiative to "get ahead" were among those most likely to fail was another discouraging effect that impacted the American Dream's native optimism. The Lynds observed that one consequence was to deter entrepreneurial efforts that extended beyond the established business channels. Thus, the American Dream, conceived as a spur to achievement, produced instead a tendency during the Depression for men to seek cover from the economic downturn. Americans responded to the times by embracing any secure manifestation of confidence, decisiveness, or success they could find and declined to venture further for fear of deeper engulfment by the economic crisis (1937:97).

A particularly important finding the Lynds offered in *Middletown in Transition* was an emerging equivocal attitude on the part of some parents and students regarding the value of higher education. They note, initially, that pursuit of further education is "one of the emotional supports of 'progress' and 'the American dream'" (1937:210). The fact that some of their interview subjects were now expressing skepticism regarding education's benefits suggested to them that belief in the Dream was increasingly tenuous. Among the many "disillusioned" college graduates and parents the Lynds spoke to in summer, 1935, one remarked: "I think we've been kidding ourselves in breaking our backs to send our children to college. There just aren't enough good jobs to take care of all the college graduates" (1937:210). The Lynds worried that the effect would be to convince many—especially those in the working class—that the "American success formula" was nothing more than an illusory mirage for them (1937:210).

The Lynds believed that the implications of these trends for American society were substantial. They argued that the USA had based its conception of itself as a "classless society" on two pillars: universal suffrage and the possibility of "vertical mobility up the pecuniary ladder" (1937:72). The Lynds believed that if "symbol" (belief in the ability to rise in society) and "reality" (ability to do so) diverged sufficiently it would create the climate for development of a clear class consciousness and precipitate conflict. Still, the Lynds recognized the somewhat inexplicable staying power of the American Dream which we have encountered previously. As they phrased it, "But dreams, when they express urgent hopes and are heavily supported by the agencies of public opinion, have a habit of living on in long diminuendo into an era bristling with palpably contradictory realities" (1937:72). The Lynds believed that the inherent hopefulness that infects the American Dream was apparent in the attitudes of workers. In their view, the Middletown working class tended to be "oblivious of the apparently fundamental alterations in the American ladder of opportunity" and viewed their circumstances as merely the result of temporary conditions that would someday improve (1937:72). At the same time, the Lynds noted many disquieting comments from their working class interview subjects that suggested there was substantial loss of faith in the traditional formula one man called "work, save, success." The Lynds reported conversations that suggested to them that "[many] …pull[ed] in their personal future to the point where it has little existence beyond the drab struggle just to keep alive.…the future is resisted as a

threat rather than fondled as a hope" A local minister summed it all up for the Lynds: "I think the American dream has been dimmed considerably for a lot of our people by the depression" (1937:475–76).

Another significant finding in 1935 that clearly has implications for the American Dream was the discovery of a sizable population of the unemployed. The homeless, unemployed, and otherwise needy people that could now be found in substantial numbers had not existed in Middletown in 1925. In 1925, the existence of poor people who needed relief was a chronic, but very minor, aspect of Middletown life that was addressed largely by charitable giving. The Great Depression challenged the city's conception of itself as a magnanimous source of charitable benevolence. Municipal leaders became instead the reluctant overseers of a seemingly permanent government relief effort that consumed three times what the charitable Community Fund had devoted to its voluntary efforts in prior years. This, too, has obvious implications for the continued vitality of the American Dream. Here, for the first time, was the emergence of what we now acknowledge—when forced to do so—is a permanent underclass in the USA. Talk of "vertical mobility" or "making it" has had little resonance for members of this sector of our population for nearly a century now. Examining this population more carefully might reveal that the American Dream has always been a middle class dream.

While the observations above have been illuminating, the Lynds' penultimate chapter "The Middletown Spirit" offers us even more grist for analysis of the meaning of the American Dream. The Lynds begin by noting that while reporting on many individual differences they have been able to describe Middletown's culture and way of life only because of the presence of significant elements of repetition and coherence. As the Lynds' characterize it, "[One hears, over and over] points of view so familiar and so commonly taken for granted that they represent the intellectual and emotional shorthands of understanding and agreement among a large share of the people…Individual differences at these points have become rubbed away, and thought and sentiment pass from person to person like smooth familiar coins which everyone accepts and no one examines with fresh eyes" (1937:402). The Lynds go on to observe that these "accepted regularities" form a design of "rough continuity" that informs Middletown culture year in and year out. The authors state explicitly, however, that the existence of this coherent set of patterned articulable responses does not mean—and the Lynds did not apparently find—that Middletowners necessarily always act in accord with their

beliefs. Rather, the Lynds are attempting to state the idealized set of values in the name of which members of the community act—that is, the symbols "which can be counted upon to secure emotional response, the banners under which it marches" (1937:403). Thus, they are reconstructing Middletown's accepted "public culture" regardless of whether or not the public culture reflects actual behavior in private or not.

The Lynds' thoroughness in itemizing the public culture of Middletown is reflected in more than a dozen pages of very specific propositions that they identify as part of the affirmative cultural universe that circulated in Muncie in the mid-1930s (1937:403–17). Even on a first reading, it is apparent that many of those propositions are pillars of rhetorical support for the American Dream. Thus, the Lynds report that "by and large" Middletowners believe in "being successful"; that there is regular and continual "progress" in society; that optimism is warranted because it helps the "orderly forces" make progress; that in the end it is those members of society who follow the "middle course" who will be proven wisest; that the individual must fend for himself in the social struggle and each will in the long run get what he or she deserves; that one should be enterprising and try to "get ahead"; that "hard work is the key to success"; and that America will always be the land of opportunity. The persistence, and strength, of this public culture is a factor worth exploring further as we traverse the balance of the twentieth century in search of the American Dream.

The elegance of the Lynds' simple analysis of Middletown's public culture is their recognition that the public culture is *opposed* to those propositions it does not affirm. Thus, the Lynds point out that it is opposed to "any strikingly divergent type of personality," adding "especially the non-optimist" (1937:17) and "anything that curtails money-making" (1937:18). Scanning their list of values, the Lynds observe that the propositions are tilted in favor of the "tried and true" and the safe and secure rather than the new or adventurous. Finally, the Lynds identify American exceptionalism as a strongly held value that Middletowners accept, without reflection or debate. Few Middletowners question that the USA and its institutions are superior to those in the rest of the world (1937:428). Thus, American ethnocentrism becomes especially important for our examination of the American Dream. For if the USA is the greatest country in the world, and its institutions and way of life the finest, then clearly those beliefs underlying the American Dream are sound and our collective aspiration to achieve the American Dream—whatever that

might be—is right and proper as well. In sum, middle class Middletown culture is the perfect incubator for the American Dream, a veritable petri dish of coagulant agar that will make the fragmentary and episodic shards of the American way of life cohere and grow.

At roughly the same time as the Lynds were investigating Muncie, Indiana, W. Lloyd Warner (1963) and his colleagues were exploring the nature of social class in Newburyport, Massachusetts. They reported their research in the *Yankee City* series of books, later abridged in a single volume. At the time of their fieldwork in 1930–35, Newburyport was a small city of 17,000 people. About one-quarter of its employable population worked in the shoe industry with smaller numbers in silver manufacturing, the building trades, transport, and electrical shops, with a mere 1 % remaining in a sea-related trade, clamming. Semiskilled workers in these industries constituted by far the largest group of those employed at 46 %; professional, proprietary, and managerial occupations and clerks, along with kindred retail workers, accounted for just less than 15 % of the existing work force each (1963:2–3). Like the Lynds, Warner and his collaborators conducted interviews, examined publicly available information on Yankee City and the public and private entities found there, and distributed various surveys.

As Warner candidly describes, when the research project began, "the director wrote a description of what he believed was fundamental in our social system" to guide the research and avoid "unconscious biases" (1963:35). He went on:

> Most of the several hypotheses so stated were subsumed under a general economic interpretation of human behavior in our society. It was believed that the fundamental structure of our society, that which ultimately controls and dominates the thinking and actions of our people, is economic, and that the most vital and far-reaching value systems which motivate Americans are to be ultimately traced to the economic order. (1963:35)

Warner goes on to assert that the research team's first interviews sustained this view. He notes that many interviewees commented on "the big people with money" or, alternatively, to "the little people who are poor." His subjects also assigned people to either high status or low status by the nature of their occupation or means (professional and managerial, large property owners, and those well compensated in comparison to manual laborers and those otherwise found in low-paying jobs).

Warner's assumptions, while understandable, reflect a good deal about the limitations of interview and survey data and the invisible influence of deciding at the outset to investigate the social structure of publically correct, normatively legitimized behavior rather than, for one example, the organization of a taboo subject in the form of a deviant behavior. Generally, studies of the "American way of life" and the American Dream suffer from this weakness disproportionately. Thus, if one is only willing to study, and question respondents about, an era's publically articulable dreams and social observations, one is likely to dutifully receive responses in return that address economics and other nontaboo issues. Responses to the question—if it were asked in this context—"what do you want out of life" would, with little doubt, self-referentially hark back to aspirations formulated within the narrow confines of the socially acceptable and conventional that had already been established by the nature of the interview. Only the brave (or perhaps reckless) respondent would venture a personal aspiration at substantial variance from the situational normative protocol already established by the researchers. This obvious failure to recognize the power and social imbalance created by the researchers' agenda neither starts nor ends with Warner and his colleagues. Yet, those questions asked—and not asked—pervade studies of the American Dream to its detriment.

The Yankee City research delves further into the minutia of social class than the Lynds' dichotomy of working class and business class permitted. By social class, Warner and his colleagues simply meant orders of people who are believed to be, and are accordingly, ranked together by other members of the community, either above or below another grouping of people (1963:36). In a class society, class status distributes rights and privileges, duties and obligations, unequally and does so according to the assignment of inferior or superior rankings. Yet, there is the potential for movement in a class society, unlike a caste society, and this permits people to rise—or fall—either up or down the so-called "social ladder." One of the principal contributions of the Yankee City research were statements from community members that suggested that while possession of money and wealth often correlated with higher social class status, a person also needed to behave in a manner befitting his or her "station in life" to be accorded that higher status; money alone, in this view, was not enough. A second principal contribution was to find that by asking for increasing clarification regarding the specific nature of classes in Newburyport and their composition, respondents were perfectly willing to offer increasingly

refined and precisely delineated breakdowns of who belonged in which ranked grouping and why. Ultimately, this led Warner and his colleagues to conclude that six (6) clearly demarcated ranked classes existed in Yankee City (1963:37–43).

The Yankee City studies also produced data regarding the factors that support, or undercut, social standing. Their analysis of the factors that maintain social position (marriage between persons who are status equivalents) or threaten social position (marrying "beneath oneself") is also instructive for an understanding of both the stability of classes and the factors that can lead to their eventual reconstitution (1963:46–47). More generally, their elaborate investigation of membership in voluntary associations in Newburyport demonstrates the broader principle that one's social status is perhaps principally defined by whom one associates with most regularly, and in what capacity. Thus, the members of an upper-class group associating among themselves recognize the exclusiveness this entails and perpetuates (1963:174). Members of a group like this one are aware of the superior position they inhabit but maintain generally friendly relations with members of other groups—until, perhaps, there are those who attempt to break class boundaries without invitation of those above them (1963:175). Formally and publically, the ideal of equality is voiced but in one of their more incisive observations the authors report that in private pejorative ethnic and social slurs are used to refer to those deigned to be social inferiors. Moreover, as they solemnly report "[T]he clique and associational behavior in churches and schools clearly expresses class attitudes" (1963:180).

In sum, the Yankee City research is a repository of what we already knew—or suspected—about social class along with substantial data on class-related behaviors that had never before been investigated. We knew—but the authors document—that upper-upper-class people cluster "overwhelmingly" in professional and proprietary positions (with over 83 % of those so employed) but also possess "the highest percentage of employable individuals who have never worked" (since they can live comfortably off their wealth) (1963:242–43). Likewise, we suspected—and will later have the matter confirmed by Baltzell (1964) and Graham (2000)—that men and women of the upper-upper-classes "have a significantly higher membership in what are ordinarily called social clubs" (1963:245), maintain different religious affiliations than other classes (overwhelmingly Unitarian and Episcopal), and give their children different formal (private vs. public) and informal (trained in the etiquette and social norms of being

upper class) educational experiences. We also learn what we should have known: that members of the upper-upper-class rank last in their interest in reading books where the emphasis or narrative arc involves social climbing (1963:248). After all, where else is there to climb for the upper-upper-class—and isn't it awful that other people need to be concerned about something that is, really, so petty?

The *Yankee City* books—somewhat like the *Middletown* series—offer a vignette of what American life was like at a unique time in American history. By doing so, they provide a starting point for noting, and even measuring to a degree, the extent to which American society and culture has changed in the last 75 years. For example, upper-upper-class homes set the material standard to which others might aspire in Yankee City in the 1930s: They contained anywhere "from eight to twenty or more rooms," all of which had a definite purpose within the lives their inhabitants led and possessed fixtures and furnishings that "served as symbols of unity" for the family (1963:62). *Yankee City* marks a baseline against which Riesman, Glazer and Denney (1961), Slater (1990), and others can compare the degree of acquisitive materialism evident in earlier eras of American society. Moreover, their report can be used to measure the degree to which Americans evolved beyond pure materialism toward, for example, a consumerist orientation to collecting new experiences rather than simple acquisition of more, and fancier, objects. In this later view, Americans remain materialistic—simply the manner in which Americans express their materialist orientation has changed from acquisitiveness to *experiential consumerism.*

The Depression years also spawned Robert Merton's elegant essay on the American Dream, "Social Structure and Anomie" (1938). Merton's classic theoretical rumination has often been dismissively characterized as a mere "middle range" theory, but its influence has been remarkably durable. Moreover, for our inquiry into the nature of the American Dream, it is a fundamental source since it is the first sociological work that explicitly committed itself to explaining the prevalence and important of what is most often identified as the essential core of the Dream—the American success ethic.

Merton's discussion begins by addressing what he believed was a common tendency in sociological explanations for nonconforming behavior at the time he wrote: attributing it solely to the social system's failure to successfully manage biological drives (1938:672). Merton countered by pointing out that some elements of social structure *exert a definite pressure* (his emphasis) on certain individuals within society to engage

in deviant, nonconforming behavior rather than normatively approved behavior. Merton's explanation of how and why this occurs rests on his perception that the intersection of social structure and culture involves two interrelated, but analytically separate, features. First, culture defines goals, purposes, and interests that members can pursue. These are formulated in the nature of cultural aspirations that individuals may then enact within the social structure. Second, Merton notes that every culture defines, regulates, and controls the manner in which individuals are expected to pursue these cultural aspirations. The means available to individuals within a society to pursue these end purposes are not in every instance the most efficient; the social structure—as a matrix of complex processes intended to facilitate group living—may (and indeed will)—restrict any particular individual from achieving a culturally desirable purpose in the exact time, place, and manner that might be most expedient for him/her (1938:672–73). Thus, in Merton's view, there is an irreducible tension (or strain) between cultural goals and approved means for pursuing goals that individuals in society face. Nonconforming conduct arises when, for example, the pressure exerted by a cultural aspiration on a particular individual causes him or her to deviate from the accepted means. It may also arise when instrumental processes that were created to facilitate achieving cultural goals are treated as though they were ends in and of themselves (1938:673–74).

Merton dedicates the balance of his analysis to the first instance in which there exists a disproportionate emphasis on cultural goals. It is not entirely clear why he does so. It may be that he believed that this form of social malintegration produced the more serious forms of deviant behavior. He notes, for example, that when the emphasis on achieving a cultural end becomes so disproportionately extreme that the consideration of means is reduced to the point of pure expediency, the ultimate consequence will be anomie—a deterioration in social bonds that disorients the individual and makes the society dysfunctional. As Merton's own comments about ritualistic behavior demonstrate, however, ritualism is also a highly dysfunctional condition so that elevating *process* over and above cultural *goals* would seem to be equally damaging to both the individual and society.

In any event, Merton focuses primarily on the first instance. With respect to American culture, Merton observes that the "extreme emphasis on accumulation of wealth" in the USA is a goal that has been disproportionately elevated. The degree to which it is emphasized in American culture has the effect of overwhelming the cultural obligation to pursue

certain approved means for becoming wealthy and produces, according to Merton, "[F]raud, corruption, vice, and crime" (1938:1975). The balance of Merton's analysis is often overlooked. He proposes that the effect of overemphasis on the cultural goal of monetary success in the USA can produce any of five adaptive responses: conformity (which he contends is empirically most common), innovation (which would include all forms of substituting illegitimate means to gain monetary success), ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion (1938:676).

Ritualism involves a relinquishment of interest in socially approved goals and an immersion in the instrumental processes that have become virtually disconnected from any ultimate purpose. A dedication to bureaucratic formalism would be an example where adherence to a detailed set of petty rules obscures the purpose the rules were created for in the first instance. Retreatism—where a person relinquishes any interest in or concern with both the cultural goal of monetary success *and* the approved means of pursuing it (i.e., regular and conventional employment)—is least common empirically according to Merton, although he provides no data to support this contention. Merton notes that these individuals become society's psychotics, drug addicts, and the homeless, among others. Both ritualism and retreatism are modes of adjustment in the form of escape. The individual seeks to relieve the tension created by the universal cultural imperative to be successful monetarily. Those who do not have the ability to compete within our society to achieve that highly valued cultural goal can simply try and escape its reach (1938:677–78). Rebellion—a rejection of existing cultural goals and means with the intention of creating a new set of social goals and means—elicits little further comment from Merton.

While Merton focuses much of his attention on monetary success, he makes clear that his schema is applicable to understanding the cultural goal of success within any domain. Thus, early in his essay, he discusses the related success goal of winning in sporting contests. The desire to win in amateur athletics (to the extent these still exist in the USA) could be so extreme—just like the desire to become wealthy—that the same adaptations are pursued to vitiate the competitive tensions between need to win and opportunity (or likelihood) to win. For this reason, Merton's theory is highly relevant to our inquiry regarding the American Dream. If, for example, the American Dream is conceived of as economic success and upward mobility, the tension Merton perceives would exert tremendous pressure on many in our society who find themselves incapable of attaining these ends. However, if the American Dream is defined in

some other manner, successfully achieving the Dream may likewise be unattainable. This is illustrated by the theme in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (2004): Jay Gatsby wishes to obtain Daisy's love and relive the past, but his American Dream is thwarted when he loses the competition for Daisy's love to another, Tom Buchanan. Here, just as in the case of monetary success, opportunity is limited as Daisy cannot be possessed by both. The upshot for our present inquiry is that under any number of scenarios, then, the American Dream may be unobtainable if there is an irreconcilable tension between how the American Dream is defined and the realistic chances of attaining it. Merton's theory will be a recurrent source of reference in our inquiry.

CONCLUSION

The Depression years of the 1930s stand out against the rest of the twentieth century in the extremity of deprivation that many Americans experienced, the desperate nature of the economic collapse, and the isolating conditions—though widely shared—that pervaded American life. While some sociological studies of the period barely mention the dire economic circumstances many were experiencing, the historical record is replete with reminiscences written and recorded by journalists, historians, and everyday Americans who endured those lean years. These accounts, although anecdotal, are a rich source of material regarding how the American Dream fared in the face of economic cataclysm even though the American Dream is seldom explicitly mentioned. These sources remind us that although the American Dream is frequently addressed as though it was primarily about financial security, belief in the Dream rather remarkably persists even in periods during which no financial security is to be had.

The stories told of the Depression years offer a subtle but broad range of responses to the national disaster that was descending around Americans from every class background. The storyteller's first-person words extend clues we may examine regarding the Dreams some saw disappearing, those some were reformulating, and—finally—those Dreams some were still looking for, or even finding, in the broken shards of the nation's tattered economy. Studs Terkel (1970) was among those who collected accounts of what the Depression meant—both for those who experienced it and for those who later heard stories told to them about it.

The stories of those who went through the Depression are remarkable, in part, because of the divide between those for whom it was a calamity,

those who weathered it largely undaunted, and those who made a fortune during it. A man named Louis Banks told Terkel (1970:44–45):

> 1929 was pretty hard. I hoboed, I bummed, I begged for a nickel to get somethin' to eat. Go get a job,… They didn't hire me because I didn't belong to the right kind of race….

> Black and white, it didn't make any difference who you were, 'cause everybody was poor [riding the rails]. All friendly, sleep in the jungle. We used to take a big pot and cook food, cabbage, meat and beans, all together. We all set together, made a tent. Twenty-five or thirty would be out on the side of the rail,… They didn't have no mothers or sisters, they didn't have no home, they were dirty, they had overalls on, they didn't have no food, they didn't have anything.

At one point, Terkel (1970:47–48) asks Banks whether he found any kindness in the Depression. Banks told him:

> No kindness. Except for Callahan, the hobo—only reason I'm alive is 'cause Callahan helped me on that train. And the hobo jungle. Everybody else was evil to each other. There were no friendships. Everybody was worried and sad looking. It was pitiful.

> When the war came, I was so glad when I got in the army….In the army, I wasn't gettin' killed on a train. I wasn't gonna starve.

Another man, Ed Paulsen, told Terkel (1970:32) about looking for jobs at the docks during the Depression:

> I'd get up at five in the morning and head for the waterfront. Outside the Spreckles Sugar Refinery, outside the gates, there would be a thousand men. You know dang well there's only three or four jobs. The guy would come out with two little Pinkerton cops: "I need two guys for the bull gang. Two guys to go into the hole." A thousand men would fight like a pack of Alaskan dogs to get through there. Only four of us would get through.

Paulsen told of hearing Upton Sinclair speak in Los Angeles:

> He pointed out the great piles of oranges, the piles of lumber laying there idle….They'd put up a rick of oranges and apples, put gasoline over it and set fire to them. Vegetables were being destroyed and everything….To keep the price up. (1970:34)

Even in these circumstances, however, Paulsen found a way out. In his case, it was through President Roosevelt's "New Deal" National Youth Administration: "The NYA was my salvation. I could just as easily have been in Sing Sing…Everybody was a criminal. You stole, you cheated through….Stole clothes off lines, stole milk off back porches, you stole bread."

Other subjects told a different story, of a seemingly different reality. A psychiatrist with upper-middle-class patients told Terkel in response to a question about what was happening to those he encountered, including his patients:

Nothing much [bad happened to them]. You wouldn't know a Depression was going on. Except that people were complaining they didn't have any jobs. You could get the most wonderful kind of help for a pittance. People would work for next to nothing.

[Your patients weren't really affected then?] Not very much. They paid fairly reasonable fees….Then in 1934, 1935, 1936 [patients] began coming in droves, when things began to ease up. (1970:89)

Edward Burgess, a printer who held a steady job throughout the 1930s, told Terkel (1970:401–02) he bought a Studebaker for cash:

The foreman down at [the print shop], he said: "You sure did your bit for the Depression." He bought one, he bought a new Ford. I said, "If everybody would spend ten cents more a day than they ordinarily spent, we'd sneak out of this in a hurry."…we were makin' money. We never got laid off….

I really didn't pay no attention to it….

It didn't change [my standard of living]. I never did spend money foolishly…Never hurt me any.

Others not only lived comfortably, as before, during the Depression; they thrived and profited from it. William Benton, who was later a US senator, assistant secretary of state, and vice president of the University of Chicago, told Terkel (1970:67–69):

We didn't know the Depression was going on. Except that our [advertising] clients' products were plummeting,….They wouldn't have let [our small new firm] in the door if times had been good. So the Depression benefited me. My income doubled every year. When I left Benton and Bowles

[in 1935], it must have been close to half a million dollars. That was the kind of money great motion picture stars weren't earning.

Arthur Robertson, a successful industrialist and entrepreneur, described his recollections and experience of the Depression in similar terms to Terkel (1970:72–76):

I thought seriously of retiring in 1928 when I was thirty [because I was already wealthy and successful].

In 1929 it was strictly a gambling casino with loaded dice. The few sharks taking advantage of the multitude of suckers….I saw shoeshine boys buying $ 50,000 worth of stock with $ 500 down. Everything was bought on hope.

In the early Thirties, I was known as a scavenger. I used to buy broken down businesses that banks took over. That was one of my best eras of prosperity….

….

Banks use to get eighteen percent for call money—money with which to buy stock that paid perhaps one or two-percent dividends. They figured the price would continue to rise. Everybody was banking on it…

Jessie [Livermore, who went bankrupt three times] was one of the most brilliant minds in the trading world. He knew the crops of every area where grain grew. He was a great student, but always overoptimistic.

Robertson, like Benton, prospered while many suffered. His observations regarding the business activity of the era differ in his repeated emphasis on unrealistic hopes and overoptimism. Here, the potential negative effects of the pecuniary American Dream become starkly evident.

Hope, as it turns out, played a significant part in many accounts of the Depression and not only in the manner described by Robertson. Mary Knackstedt Dyck, a farm wife with a fifth-grade education from southwest Kansas, kept a diary from 1936 onward. Excerpts from 1936 to 1941 describe life during the prairie dust bowl years. Although accustomed to hard living, hope—however modest in its expectation—made regular and important appearances in the pages of her diary. On Thursday, February 27, 1938, she wrote (Riney-Kehrberg 1999:119):

Northeast cold breeze today. Its clowdy to day but it isn't dark as it was yesterday. You can see a long distance. It snowed very lightly in the

fore-noon snow is deep so it covers the ground some places. some places its mostly 1 inch deep a little yesterday a little Tuesday night. Ice is still covered over all trees roads fences also in the Wind mill…Well one feels like singing this song now for several days. What the farmers are getting now is a farm relief since dust has not blowed for 4 days and clowdy snowy & Icey weather. It looks very cheerful one can rejoice. One has a new lease on life.

Riney-Kehrbert (1999), acknowledging the prominent role that "hope" played in Dyck's diaries, titled two of her chapters "A Little Snow, A Little Rain, and Hope" (Chap. 4: 1938) and "Dust and Hope Deferred" (Chap. 5: 1939). While one obvious hope during these years was for the cessation of the blowing dust, the further hope (the hope for many during the Depression) was for a return to prosperity—farm bounty and good prices. Eventually, with the advent of 1940–41, the dust blew less often, rain became more plentiful, and the harvest and the farm market revived. Hopes were fulfilled and "hope"—in general—was restored, as Dyck's diary periodically records.

Those who lived through the Depression tell other narratives that offer remarkable insight into the manner in which the American Dream is communicated. Often, these stories are told between the generations, parents to children. Reed, a 19-year-old upper-middle-class college student, told Terkel (1970:525–27):

[When we talked about the raft trip I intended to make…] He started saying he had dreams when he was young, wanted to do the same sort of things. He was young during the Depression. To put himself through school at Amherst—and all the time very emotional about it—he'd gone with no money and little to eat. That he and my mother had to scrimp during the early years of their marriage. I had an opportunity he never had.

What struck me as rather strange was his saying: if I saved some money this year, maybe next summer I could go to Europe. Which is something, he said, he'd always wanted to do. While he was talking about the Depression he was almost on the verge of crying.

….

It wasn't as if it was a memory, but an open wound. He talked about the Depression as if it had just happened yesterday. We touched a nerve.

As we shall see in future chapters, a number of commentators have argued that one of the American Dream's features that must form a part

of any definition is the emphasis on the link between generations. Reed's conversation with his father touches on this connection. There are two variations on this emphasis. First, there is a sometimes explicit, but almost always implicit, desire of the older generation to share the Dream with the younger generation. Second, there is often a desire on the part of the older generation that the younger generation achieve more (that is, "do better") than its members were able to achieve.

Other accounts Terkel recorded remind us in a different way that Americans' dreams vary across a number of dimensions. Clifford Burke, a pensioner living in Chicago's West Side black ghetto, told Terkel (1970:92–93):

> The Negro was born in depression. It didn't mean too much to him, The Great American Depression, as you call it. There was no such thing. The best he could be is a janitor or a porter or shoeshine boy. It only became official when it hit the white man....
>
> You take a fella had a job paying him $ 60, and here I am making $ 25. If I go home taking beans to my wife, we'll eat it....The white man that's making big money, he's taking beans home his wife'll say: Get out.
>
> Why did these big wheels kill themselves? They weren't able to live up to the standards they were accustomed to,...It was a rarity to hear a Negro killing himself over a financial situation....
>
> I made out during that...*Great* Depression. Worked as a teamster for a lumber yard. Forty cents an hour.

Here, too, the subjects of Terkel's interviews fasten upon critical features of the pecuniary version of the American Dream. In this case, the gap between financial expectations and the reality of the economy and job marketplace produce notable differences in the experiences of those from different races and different classes. Ultimately, we will find that the "expectation gap" is not limited to economics but has the potential to affect virtually any dimension of the American Dream envisioned.

A final example of the impact of the Depression made on those who went through it demonstrates the narrative versatility, and resonance, of the American Dream myth and the different attitudes storytellers and listeners bring to any experience. Like Reed, Diane—a 27-year-old journalist when Terkel spoke with her—did not go through the Depression but rather heard about it from the older generation. The way in which she heard about it had a profound effect on her. As she characterized it:

> Every time I've encountered the Depression, it has been used as a barrier and
> a club. It's been counter-communication. Older people use it to explain to me
> that I can't understand *anything*: I didn't live through the Depression. They
> never say to me: We can't understand you because we didn't live through
> the leisure society. All attempts at communication are totally blocked. All of
> a sudden there's a generation gap. It's a frightening thing.
>
> What they're saying is: For twenty years I've starved and I've worked hard.
> You must fight. It's very Calvinistic. Work, suffer, have twenty lashes a day,
> and you can have a bowl of bean soup.
>
> I've never understood a society of want. We don't have a society of want [in
> 1970]—not on a general level. We have a society of total surplus: unwanted
> goods and unwanted people.
>
> The society I was raised in…you got in to a car and you were driven to a
> high school, where you didn't do a lot of work and you got A's. (1970:25)

For Diane, it is evident the Depression—the era of want, shortages, depri-
vation, and misery—is of another time and its lessons, whatever they were, are
inapplicable to her immersion in what Galbraith (1976) called "the affluent
society" of the post-World War II years. Her account of how she experienced
the Depression when the older generation recounts its impact is a reminder
that dreams are not born of a virgin birth. Rather, social dreams are condi-
tioned by the experiences one has had as well as the futures one can imagine.
Nancy, age 21 when Terkel spoke to her in 1970, expresses the same observa-
tion in a different way: the focal concerns—or dreams—of one generation do
not translate directly into the consciousness of succeeding generations:

> Money is one of my father's big values. He wishes he was a millionaire. I
> don't think of money in that way. I think of it as a sideline, as something you
> have to have. But I don't think day and night about it. (1970:27)

Reading Diane's and Nancy's statements in light of our purpose suggests
that the conception of the American Dream as achieving financial success
arises from a specific social location in terms of age, class, and experience. In
its most narrowly defined form, the pecuniary success version of the American
Dream envisions no limits; there is no marker for when Americans can ask, as
Brueggemann (2012:91) does, "when is enough too much?". For some who
endured the Depression, the psychological answer is perhaps "Never" lend-
ing another ground for our tendency to define the American Dream purely in
economic terms: Financial security is just too important to many Americans

psychologically. This tentative observation has the potential to explain a number of the functions that the American Dream myth plays within American society as we consider the writings of more recent researchers.

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The American Way of Life
in the Post–World War II Era

The end of World War II ushered in an extended era of economic prosperity on the heels of more than 15 years of lean economic times. Social science, sprung from the same trap most Americans found themselves in for a decade and a half, became expansive and theoretically daring. Sociologists began to conceptualize, and investigate, the study of American society in new ways. We start our discussion of this period, however, by looking back to a quiet revolution that is often neglected in discussions of American social history and, when it is discussed, typically not accorded the significance it is due.

In the intervening years between the Jazz Age of the 1920s and the immediate postwar years of the late 1940s, a major innovation shook the former foundation of American society. It was not the development and testing of the atomic bomb. Rather, it was the widespread dispersion of installment buying among the American public. To the extent one defines the American Dream in predominantly economic terms, and accepts upward economic mobility and the search for increased social status as core features of this economic conception, there is no practice, nor social process, more influential in shaping the twentieth-century American Dream than installment credit.

The story of American installment credit can be easily told in capsule form because excellent histories, replete with references to the specific details of changing practices, exist for us to rely on. Lending and borrowing money are, of course, age-old practices. Jesus railed against the moneylenders who set up shop near the Jewish temples, driving them out,

described in Matthew, 21:12. In *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene 3, Shakespeare famously has Polonius advise his son Laertes to neither a "borrower nor a lender be." Although usury laws—that is, laws against charging inordinate rates of interest—were in place in most states in nineteenth-century USA, there was a considerable demand for small loans (Calder 1999:116–17). The effect, at first, was to induce many to circumvent the usury laws by quietly charging slightly higher rates of interest than allowed. Over time, lenders fought to change those laws and establish small-loan lending as a legitimate form of business. This change in status was achieved in large part by arguing that small loans saved the average working man from the clutches of loan sharks on the one hand and bankruptcy on the other. There was also a second form of credit available in the late nineteenth century—installment credit—which first came into widespread use when agriculture moved from hand harvesting to the machine age since most families could not otherwise afford a McCormick reaper or other mechanical implements (1999:159–60). Buy now, pay later was the only means by which the small farmer could acquire the benefits of farm machines. Both forms of lending remained limited, and the sums sought and lent small, however, until the end of World War I.

Beginning in the 1920s, installment credit expanded rapidly beyond its rural farm origins. The automobile, once sold for cash and reserved for the wealthy who could afford to pay cash, underwent a social transformation when, beginning in 1908, Henry Ford first started producing the Model T (1999:186). An early commentator on consumer credit contended that it was the automobile that initially expanded installment credit to a wider American audience (Clark 1930:20), whereupon department stores and other purveyors of major purchases for the home quickly followed suit. The impetus for wider dispersion was the same source as for the development of installment buying within agriculture: Poor and middle-class buyers could not afford even the hundreds of dollars required to purchase an automobile so that "buying on time" became the ready solution. By the time of the Great Depression, both installment credit and small-loan lending were fully established practices. Indeed, as Americans struggled to stay ahead of the bill collector during the 1930s, small loans were increasingly used to pay off installment contracts so that buyers would not lose their car, stove, or refrigerator (1999:266–67).

As Calder (1999) perceptively reminds us, money for many Americans was not merely a medium of exchange. Its symbolic importance was a substantial part of the lure of easy credit. As Tocqueville observed, money for

Americans was "at the bottom or everything" (1961:(II)228–29) because in a democratic society without fixed ranks money purchased not only things but also status. Where geographic mobility was high and impersonal economic exchange was replacing personal ties, barter, and family industry, social mobility became increasingly dependent on, and tethered by, the possession of money (1999:79–80). Installment credit—easy money to buy the things one couldn't yet afford—became popular because it enabled the poor and middle classes to acquire a newer car, replace an ice box with a refrigerator, and—increasingly—purchase a home. Moreover, unlike farm machinery, few of the "big ticket" items Americans wanted to buy in the 1920s–1930s were necessary in the way farm implements had been. Americans now used installment credit to just buy whatever they wanted—which was the newest, the biggest, the best available.

All of this culminated in a post-WWII binge; at the heart of that binge were a growth economy and the practice of buying on credit. As Hyman (2012:96–97) summarizes:

> The postwar dream of suburban living was made possible through debt. Living in mortgaged homes, driving in financed cars, postwar Americans relaxed at new shopping centers—where they purchased televisions on credit….By 1955, two-thirds of households had a nice black-and-white. Americans borrowed so much that department stores,…, had more money tied up in consumer charge accounts than in their inventory….Half of all new construction was federally financed [through VA, FHA and Fannie Mae] after World War II….For suburban buyers, mortgages were easy to come by.

The expanded middle class, released from the privations of the Depression and World War II, borrowed the most (2012:116). The quiet American credit revolution began as early as the 1920s but it had by the 1950s become the cornerstone of the American Dream. As Calder (1999:291) summed up, "The significance of consumer credit is now measured by the fact that for middle-class people it has become virtually impossible to live the American Dream *without* access to credit payment methods,…The story of consumer credit since 1940 can be summed up in a single word: *more.*" While I will not be continually reminding readers that behind the sweep of the next 75 years—behind *The Lonely Crowd, The Pursuit of Loneliness, The Black Bourgeoisie, The Levittowners, The Truly Disadvantaged,* and *Our Kids*—lurks billions of dollars in accumulated debt. The easy credit story behind the American Dream will simply not

go away. Beginning with our discussion of the new American millennium, it will quickly assume priority as the American Dream of home ownership returns to dominate the story.

In the midst of this heady time of economic growth and postwar social rejuvenation, David Riesman, with the assistance of Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, began their study of American character that would eventually yield *The Lonely Crowd* (1961). Originally published in 1950, the authors examined the emergence of industrial society and the effects of its several periods of development on the manner in which individuals developed social character. The authors took a special interest in what was termed "the new middle class" of salaried professionals and managers (1961:xv–xvi). What Riesman and his colleagues attempted to discern were the effects of long-term social change on how individuals formed a "self" or "identity." In general terms, the authors wished to trace the manner in which one type of character within the upper-middle-classes which arguably dominated the nineteenth-century landscape—denominated "inner directed"—was gradually replaced by a "self" formed and oriented in a quite different way (1961:3).

Social character, as Riesman and his colleagues use the term, is a shared sense of self across a group or class that is formed by experience as a way to organize an individual's drives and satisfactions compatible with other members of society. It is thus a configuration of attitudes that permits— and motivates—members of a society to act in a manner they must act for the society to function. Democratic societies, in particular, depend on individuals to regulate their behavior by inner compulsion rather than applications of outer force. Neither family life nor community life can be managed and motivated by external agents of control. Rather, both must be engaged in voluntarily, even enthusiastically. It is this organized construction of the self that Riesman calls "character"—and that constitutes the "inner man" (or woman) that is putatively in control (1961:4–6).

The changes in social character that Riesman and his colleagues perceived were the result, in their view, of two revolutions: the release of the individual from family and clan-dominated ways of life through the constellation of epochs we might collectively refer to as modernism and the more recent transition from an age of industrial production to an age of consumption (1961:6). Reviewing the effects of these historical transitions over the last few centuries, Riesman and his collaborators proposed that in societies which have labored with a slow growth population for centuries, and therefore have been relatively unchanging, individuals

conform to the dictates of their society through an acceptance of tradition. Where the population begins to rise and social change starts to occur under modernizing influences—say, in the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—the typical member acquires early in life an internalized set of goals that offer "inner direction" regardless of the social circles the person later travels within. Finally, where population again stabilizes, or begins an incipient decline, members learn to conform to the needs of society through becoming sensitized to the expectations and preferences of others. They are, in effect, "other directed" (1961:8). In the authors' view, inner-directed character types were more common during the American nineteenth century and gradually gave way to the point where "other directed" Americans predominate.

The differences in these matters of character formation are relevant because of the different ways individuals from the three character types will seek life satisfaction (i.e., will form, seek out, and live their "American Dream"). American society of the nineteenth century produced a continuing increase in personal mobility (both geographic and social), enhanced by a rapid accumulation of capital distributed more widely, and characterized by a constant expansion—in the production of goods and people and in exploration, colonization, imperialism, and the subjugation of nature. The American character formed in this period needed to exercise many more choices than the tradition-bound individual of earlier eras and do so without strict channels in which to operate. According to Riesman and his co-authors, a person possessed of "inner directed" character acquires a generalized sense of direction (an inner gyroscope) early in life developed within the smaller nuclear family. Once formed, the inner-directed character may then be deployed to confront the continuously novel problems that more frequent social change presents. In this model, the inner-directed person can receive, and utilize in later adulthood, a range of signals from others, but his or her essential character has already been formed and stays, within limits, unchanged. The development of the inner-directed person, responding to an era in which the productive capacity of the USA experienced exponential growth, often corresponded with a scarcity psychology and an emphasis on production (1961:14–18).

In contrast, Riesman and his colleagues perceived a new kind of social character emerging during the era in which they wrote. Rather than attending to an inner directional signal, these outer-directed character types are looking to their contemporaries and peers as a source of direction. In this character configuration, the goals for which people strive

in society shift with the accumulated guidance they receive in their social environment. Here, the process of paying close attention to signals one receives becomes paramount, and it is this attentiveness to social cues, attitudes, and values that remains fixed through life, not the specific content of any internalized set of values (1961:19–23). The tendency to be highly sensitive to the actions and wishes of others makes the outer-directed individual susceptible to a relatively higher need for approval from others as well. The other-directed person, although often effective in group life, does not possess the inner-directed person's ability to go it alone. The other-directed person is, on the other hand, comfortable everywhere and nowhere: extremely adaptable socially but there is little of the self that can be activated without others to respond to and absorb. The authors describe this shift as one from direction via an inner gyroscope to guidance by a radar system (1961:25).

Riesman, Glazer, and Denney's theory of the shifts in character formation has been criticized on a number of grounds (Lipset and Lowenthal 1961), but in terms of its potential contribution to the study of the American Dream it offers a bracing extension beyond many of those works regarding the American way of life that preceded it. It does so not by dismissing the American Dream's emphasis on materialism and economic success but by providing a cultural analysis that places that emphasis contextually within the historical development of productive forces. By focusing on the transition of our society well beyond the scarcity psychology that was the province of mankind for centuries, the authors connect character formation with the consumer society of the late twentieth century. What Riesman, Glazer, and Denney offer for understanding the American Dream is simply a partial framework for interpreting the source of conflicting values that began to erupt by the 1960s in our society. Glibly summed up by introductory sociology texts as consensus versus conflict, *The Lonely Crowd* demonstrates the complexity of human motivation within the matrix of American cultural values that vie for ascendancy in society. A more penetrating examination of the implications they draw from the three predominant modes of character development illustrates the expansive nature of adding cultural analysis to an exploration of the American Dream.

One of the critical observations that Riesman, Glazer, and Denney make is to remind us of the importance of expectations in human affairs. For centuries, as the authors correctly note, mankind did not expect anything other than that life would be, as Thomas Hobbes pithily summed it up

in *Leviathan* (first published in 1651), "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." It does not take any appreciable assembly of evidence to suggest this is not now true nor has it been for decades in the USA. Riesman and his colleagues use the transition from societies dominated by scarcity to societies dominated by affluence to chart the manner in which Americans of different character types respond to these changed circumstances. Their argument, in part, is that the inner directed—raised in a manner that still focused on production and meeting the demands of external reality—will pursue different goals *and pursue them in a different way* than the newer other-directed person. The upshot for studying the American Dream is for us to realize the importance of culture's influence on what we, as Americans, perceive as valuable, and the normative expectations that are operative in how one should go about one's life in achieving life satisfactions.

A corollary principle that holds import for understanding life satisfaction within the American Dream is the recognition that the impetus for change in society—from revolutionary fervor to simple repressed dissatisfaction—does not arise when people are trundling along with their heads down, unaware of, or not searching for, any other possibility in life. Rather, the demand for change arises when expectations have risen first. Prior to the Renaissance, for example, there was no appreciable hope things could get any better without inherited wealth. Yet, as the Middle Ages waned, incomes rose and life did get marginally better. The incremental improvement, no matter how small, is critical; it is the glimmer of hope on the horizon where little existed before that changes people's minds and inspires them, individually and sometimes collectively, to demand more. The weakness in applying this principle prior to *The Lonely Crowd* was its limitation solely to the realm of economics: rising income would inspire a demand for further increases in material well-being. However, as these authors demonstrated rising expectations in material well-being actually lead to experientially different sorts of demand at a certain point. Based on the social equivalent of marginal utility, Americans no longer simply sought "more" financial security; rather, they sought what some termed "ego expansion" or others characterized as simple narcissism. The crux of the matter is not what people will seek; the principle describes the point in time people will seek it—when rising expectations have led them to believe that there is something better they can achieve, some better way to live, something different to desire.

Several examples of the cultural trends that Riesman and his colleagues found illustrate their methods. Differences among the character types in relation to materialism and financial security constitute one noteworthy change. The tradition directed individual pursues what has always been sought in this regard through conventional channels long established. The inner-directed individual, driven to produce, may seek acquisition of material goods for conspicuous consumption and status. The other-directed individual more likely seeks material goods merely as one way of consuming experience. Here, the contrast is between an acquisitiveness mode and an experiential mode. Material wealth, once the source of competition, has given way to competition for status which itself has given way to competition for meaning, experience, and emotional response in life (1961:147).

This general trend can be described in a number of spheres. Friendship, for example, like almost everything else in contemporary society, can be readily treated as a unique form of experience that can then be consumed. It is, in its most elementary form, a competition in taste. It is formed based on what one likes or dislikes, nothing more. When one finds another person who likes the same things, it is a basis for association and a friendship is formed. Of course, one can have more than one friend and this, too, can become the basis for a competition—even if it is only a competition in the form of a conversation with oneself over who one likes best. The inner-directed person, driven to achieve, may not feel compelled to turn competition for tangible results into a competition for peer approval. The other-directed person, on the other hand, often excels at knowing and utilizing those attitudes and behaviors that elicit responsiveness in others: he or she is a person who can attract friends and, to the extent this is the competition, win (1961:81–82). The inner-directed individual, motivated by an internal gyroscope that is marking his or her progress toward goals established early, does not depend on the peer group as the other-directed individual does for a continuous affirmation of self.

The postwar period is perhaps most notable for inspiring a spate of studies, like Riesman's, focused on one or another stratum within America's middle class. C. Wright Mills, in *White Collar* (1971), first published in 1951, examined the broad swath of middle and lower-middle echelon Americans mired in the indistinguishable tiers of corporations and offices. Mills viewed the group as a new cast of social actors whose mass presence made understanding them crucial for any commentator interested in grasping the "main drift" of twentieth-century society (1971:ix).

Like Riesman, Glazer and Denney whose analysis was directed at the upper-middle-classes, Mills is interested in depicting both the unique social location of his subjects and the psychological tensions that their position in society generates. For Mills, the principal psychological state of his subjects is anxiety.

Middle-class anxiety, according to Mills, arises from multiple sources but is tied most intimately to the anomalous social position that the new white collar, middle class inhabits: employed within large bureaucracies these denizens of the office complex lack independence; embalmed in a comfortable mediocrity they share a middle-class status but are otherwise split, fragmented, and generally powerless—at the whim of larger social forces. They have little but the job each clings to—under the illusion that they have something to lose in a society that places a definite and ascertainable dollar value on each person's social location. Mills, arguing for the centrality of the middle class in the USA in the middle twentieth century, suggests that by studying them (i.e., studying ourselves) "it is possible to learn something about what is becoming more typically American than the frontier character probably ever was" (1971:xv). Since the middle class was expanding dramatically at the time Mills wrote, it is difficult to dispute his emphasis in this regard.

In Mills' view, the material hardship and oppression of nineteenth-century industrial workers has been converted into material well-being but psychological alienation of the white-collar "Little Man" of last century. Released from the moral and social certainties of the nineteenth century, Mills finds the American middle classes adrift: with no plan, not knowing where he or she is going but frantic to get there in a hurry, Mills perceives a deep-rooted malaise in the quietly comfortable uneasiness of the salaried American white-collar worker. Forced to sell not only his or her time and energy on the labor market, the job demands the middle class sell their personality as well. In doing so, the unanchored, rootless individual striving among the masses must attach himself or herself somewhere but finds no mooring that is thoroughly and irrefutably his or hers alone. Rather, the position is merely a manufactured niche for "someone of his (or her) type," an interchangeable part in a machine-like system beyond one's control (1971:xvi–xvii). As Mills sees it, the middle class of the middle twentieth century could not even formulate an American Dream: they were too isolated to conceive of themselves as members of a new strata and thus could not envision what is possible for someone in their place (1971:xix).

Mills, like Riesman and his colleagues, saw the new white-collar middle manager arising from an older middle class—one built on the disintegrating outlines of the small businessman, the family farm and the independent professional. The new middle class of white-collar workers more closely resembles the indentured servant than any of these—all live and work at the behest of their employer with little autonomy. Those who remain small and independent in the twentieth-century US economy are often mired in inefficient drudgery or fighting over the remains of a smaller and smaller market share with dwindling prospects for a better future. Thus, Mills sees the choice as selecting either an enslaved, but materially safe, future or a bitter fight for economic survival that will unlikely end well. The fading style of the old middle class salvaged a political victory during the Depression when many opted for a "kept individualism" bolstered by agricultural price supports, small business loans, and other fixes on capitalism (1971:34–37). It was, however, a limited victory that only slowed the forces opposing the older independence.

Mills, unlike most of those American sociologists whose work preceded his, speaks directly to the centrality of the American success ethic. In this sense, his sociological analysis of the middle classes directly addresses the nature of our present quest—the meaning of the American Dream. Mills, while acknowledging that success in material terms in the USA has been widespread, concludes that it has become less widespread for the middle class at the time he wrote and more ambiguous for the inner life of the individual. Mills believes success is primarily perceived as a backhanded escape from the increased chances for failure present in an American society smothered by a competitive mass of indistinguishable individuals. Driven to compete but without much desire, little beyond the mundane to hope for, and within a cloistered realm controlled by others, Mills sees the American middle classes as reduced to measuring their lives by money success solely because values that once had independent meaning have been subsumed by the mass homogenization of mid-twentieth century American life.

In Mills' telling, money has always been the clear target of American success, but the nature, means, and prospects of success have changed over time. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Mills conceives of the channels men pursued for success as clearly marked out so that the paths men trod were easily visible to themselves, and others. The result was a stable society with middle class striving surely and comfortably embedded in it (1971:259–60).

In contrast, Mills finds that for the new white-collar employee, the path to success is less visible since it is hidden inside structures such as corporate offices or government agencies. In the modern era, energy and effort are not invested directly in one's own enterprise with clear ties to success but one's striving for success must be subsumed within the plans of others. Tangible success becomes only measurable by the internal occupational climb up a series of positions. Grand visions of one's own must be replaced by small calculations of how to navigate an abstract bureaucratic environment without any clear standards to mark progress (1971:262–63). In this milieu, money becomes not an economic object only but a substitute for the life satisfactions that have been otherwise lost (independence, true agency, and control). The personality under these circumstances must be remade purely for pecuniary ends without the attendant virtues of autonomy that formerly characterized life in the old middle class. Money success, always assumed to be good, in this setting becomes the only object worth any effort, and all instrumental action becomes subservient to the goal of acquiring it, although few can say why.

Other facets of American life in the twentieth century have been altered correspondingly. Education—long perceived to be a ladder to a different status—becomes more explicitly vocational (in rhetoric if not always strictly in reality) even though the connection between educational preparation for an occupation and actual employment (or success) within that occupation remains tenuous in many instances. More importantly, beyond the initial step, success by "promotion within" the modern employment setting based on one's preparation or education is increasingly dubious. Where the structure of opportunity is no longer expanding but turnover, layoffs, outsourcing, and reductions generally are the norm, the hope for financial security and upward mobility takes on an even more nebulous, anxiety producing form for the middle-class aspirant. The popular culture literature regarding the poor boy who works hard and makes good is then replaced by a literature of resignation. The new middle-class boy accepts minimum financial well-being for foregoing competition, never asking much of himself, and passively accepting his lot in life among the mass of others in the consumer society. Mills' conception in this regard is akin to the ritualized response to the American success ethic recognized by Merton (1938): the middle-class manager, stymied in his or her ascent through the finely graded levels of a modern organization, focuses on controlling his or her goals by lowering the level of ambition and finding small, internal rewards

rather than achieving the dream of monetary success which now appears infinitely remote (1971:282).

Another response noted by Mills is that some American popular literature and entertainment in the twentieth century thrives on making monetary success appear unattractive. This approach takes a highly valued cultural goal and subverts it by tarnishing its allure. It does not do so primarily by making greediness an unattractive personal characteristic but rather by showing that the successful are not truly happy and, indeed, the successful often end up broken by their success. This can be easily portrayed by a range of negative outcomes—the person can be monetarily successful but shown to have lost his or her integrity, lost his or her friends and family, or—in the extreme—been driven insane by a fanatical obsession with the bitch goddess of money success (1971:284). *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), the story of an aging screen actress who cannot relinquish her now faded glory and the unsuccessful screenwriter who believes he can ride her last echoes of celebrity to a wider success, is one such story. The film ends with the kept writer telling the screen star that her career will never be revived. As he leaves, she shoots him and, in the process, loses her fragile grip on reality, believing that the police and reporters have gathered in response to her next major role.

Mills' analysis of the impact modern forms of organization within occupations have had on the traditional success ethic is novel and prescient in many respects. The increasingly abstract and hidden nature of success and its seeming disconnection from one's own efforts means that success—when it occurs—can appear accidental and irrational, challenging the widely held belief that reward should flow from hard work rather than some other source (1971:284). This outlook produced, in the 1950s and early 1960s, popular alternative explanations of success that appeared plausibly credible: "he's the nephew of the chairman" (nepotism), "she slept her way to the top" (trading sexual favors for promotion), and "he's a 'yes man' who doesn't threaten the boss" (knowing one's place is all it takes). Today, the apparent irrationality of working hard to achieve success might contribute to the popularity of gambling since many throw money mindlessly at casino games with the irrational view (and illusory hope) that they will "get lucky" and win big.

The early postwar period and the following decades also saw a return to community studies like those of Middletown and Yankee City. Seeley, Sim, and Loosley (1974) studied a middle-class Toronto suburb in the early 1950s they dubbed *Crestwood Heights* and published their book-length

report in 1956. Their initial description of the community is of interest because of its explicit reference, and apparently intimate connection in the minds of the authors to the American Dream:

> This book attempts to depict, in part, the life of a community. North Americans may know its external features well, for some community like it is to be seen in and around almost any great city on this continent, from New York to San Francisco, from Halifax to Vancouver. In infinite variety, yet with an eternal sameness, it flashes on the movie screen, in one of those neat comedies about the upper middle class family which Hollywood delights to repeat again and again as nurture for the American Dream. (1974:3)

Indeed, the authors went on to specifically note, "The book attempts to pin down in time and space this thing of dreams for the many, and actual experience for the very few" (1974:3). The authors' reference regarding the "dreams for the many" but the "actual experience for the very few" reminds us directly of the class nature of the American Dream phenomenon. It is apparent that one of the unmentioned features of the American Dream is its long-standing, hidden message that it is not for everyone, regardless of its surface equality of opportunity rhetoric.

The community is built on a choice parcel of land overlooking the metropolitan area—"literally a city built upon a hill" (1974:4), making explicit reference to John Winthrop's famous speech on the deck of the *Arbella*. Its location could not be more apt since the central preoccupation of the community is an obsessive dedication to child-rearing so that the young are prepared to begin their long, solitary climb in the socially competitive environment and reach a better, more prosperous tomorrow. The predominant attitude is one of mastery: the residents are characterized as assuming that little to nothing is beyond their control as they have subordinated nature to create a comfortable life and modified human nature enough to feel moderately optimistic about it (1974:4–5). They have bought privacy, sunlight, spacious homes, gardens, and freedom so that they have a sense of being able to overcome time and space as well. As a result, the residents of Crestwood Heights are oriented to enjoying life in the immediate present while keeping their eyes clearly focused on the near-distant future. Cumulatively, these orientations have encouraged them to unreservedly embrace "the great North American dream, a dream of material heaven in the here and now, to be entered by the successful elect" (1974:6). Conceding that this dream is not unique to North

America, or the twentieth century, Seeley, Sim, and Loosley comment on its particular relevance to the time and place since "[i]t led thousands of men and women from warring Europe to North America." "[S]tarving Irish peasants" and many others over the last two centuries also made the journey. This makes Crestwooders "both innovators and heirs of a long and strong tradition" of dreamers all seeking to overcome material want and experience material plenty (1974:6).

The version of the American dream the authors find in the community is described as possessing a number of discrete features. First, it is not expected to be a utopia but rather a place where hard work and sacrifice pay off with a comfortable material life but one that must be continually earned. Crestwooders expect to work continuously, and if one of them should ever attain a life of leisure the resident's character would have been so formed that he or she could never forego values of thrift, industry, hoarding, frugality, and materialism and simply live the dream (1974:6–7). Second, closely entwined with material abundance is the notion of higher social status and prestige. The dream, therefore, envisions the acquisition and exhibition of material and nonmaterial objects of desire—houses and cars but also membership in exclusive clubs, travel, and enrollment in private schools. Echoing Riesman and his colleagues, the authors find the acquisition, display, and consumption of the most recently fashionable ideas, values, and "experiences" to be sought after as well (1974:7). Crass acquisitiveness and materialism has given way to a more expansive and modulated goal of attaining not only the material means for existence but also the symbolic and experiential acquisitions that are now conceived as "necessary" accoutrements to the good life. Most importantly, though, one distinctive element is that the American Dream held by the community is not a dream pursued only for oneself but for one's children. As with the dream generally, while the authors acknowledge that other cultures have used this same motivation, they find that upward mobility for the young is an especially salient and powerful feature of the North American dream. Crestwood residents believe that the open nature of the social structure holds out some greater promise to them and their children so that they will be able to leverage the opportunities in the nearby city to climb ever onward. Ultimately, everything in their social and physical environment is viewed as there to support this dream (1974:7–11).

Crestwood Heights is important for recognizing the importance (North) Americans place on upward mobility for the succeeding generation as part of the American Dream even though the Americans under consideration are

Canadian. The research also reflects related attitudes that find expression, it seems, wherever the American Dream is ascendant: a basic optimism; the view that for every problem there must be a rational solution; a life whose ends are accepted as given, and rarely examined, and where the focus is primarily on the organization of means toward the achievement of those ends (1974:356–57). As many more recent commentators will observe, the American Dream of those in Crestwood Heights is psychologically enmeshed in taking steps that are intended to foster and effectuate upward hopes while allaying the anxiety attendant on downward fears. Finally, the Crestwood Heights culture is a highly competitive one focused on children who acquire and perform the requisites of upper-middle-class culture well and are successful academically even though the authors found that residents were inclined to "play down" the existence of the "success value-system and the competitive means by which it is realized" (1974:282). Achievement, highly valued, is understood to be a direct relation of hard work and skill but, of course, this makes it hard on children and families who cannot meet the sometimes unrealistic goals set by the community and internalized by most members (1974:220–21). There is an evident strain when children do not achieve. Families both hunt for scapegoats and solutions when any problem appears that might disrupt attaining the American Dream all envision. Concern for the child is often secondary to concern for the child's performance and competitive standing. Parents, devoted to the American Dream of success for their child are often engaged in denial, and it is commonly left up to the school to "cushion the inevitable shock to the parents when many children cannot measure up" (1974:80–81). Thus, an American Dream where a major element is placed on the shoulders of the young to move up is fraught with its own set of special concerns.

Writing at about the same time, E. Franklin Frazier, arguably then America's most prominent African American sociologist, examined what he contended was the twentieth century's production of a new black middle class in *Black Bourgeoisie* (1957). Originally published in French in 1955, Frazier's social history of the black middle class begins with efforts by free Negroes in the North to acquire land and real estate holdings prior to the Civil War (1957:30–31). In Frazier's estimation, however, it was the establishment of the Freedmen's Bank in 1865 that galvanized black Americans' post-Civil War efforts to acquire wealth, even though the Bank ultimately failed (1957:34–38). Although the Bank failed financially, Frazier views it as succeeding in its effort to implant the idea of

wealth acquisition and savings in the minds of the incipient black middle class. In the early twentieth century up to the time of his writing, however, Frazier concludes that the black bourgeoisie is constituted by African Americans whose income principally is derived from positions they hold as white-collar workers (1957:43, 52). By way of contrast, Frazier's research disclosed that the business enterprises owned by black Americans were most often small businesses and ones that typically fell within the "lowest category of small businesses" (1957:53). The vast majority were small retail stores and service establishments (1957:54); in Harlem, for example, Frazier found that the most common black-owned service businesses were local restaurants serving a predominantly black clientele (1957:56–57).

While the principal purpose of the early chapters of *Black Bourgeoisie* is to document the increase in income and consequent wealth that established a sizable black middle class in the USA by mid-century, Frazier quickly becomes critical of the lifestyle he observes among this new black bourgeoisie. In his examination of black higher education, for example, he contends that the faculty members are often primarily concerned at the time of his writing with securing an income to meet middle-class standards and have relinquished their intellectual, academic, and moral purposes (1957:81). Disappointingly in Frazier's view, historically black colleges have limited themselves to primarily educating the sons and daughters of the black bourgeoisie who "ride to school in their automobiles" and "prefer to think of the money which they will earn as professional and business men" (1957:85) instead of their obligations as black leaders to a historically disenfranchised race.

Although he documented solid achievements leading to better incomes and financial circumstances generally, Frazier's assessment of the new black bourgeoisie's lifestyle is that they live in a "make believe world." He founded this view on what he considers to be a widely held, if vacuous, belief in the success of black businesses, which he has shown to be limited to small, local, often struggling enterprises (1957:153–73). Rather, he finds the new black bourgeoisie to be fully engaged in a black society without substance solely to maintain a precarious status atop black America. As Frazier sees it, this is a means of compensating for their continued exclusion by white society (1957:195). Try as they might, Frazier notes that the new black middle class cannot escape identification with all black Americans, most of whom are still working class and lower class at the time he writes. Yet, if the black middle class leaves their protected black bourgeois enclave, Frazier notes they would then be forced to compete

with white Americans. In Frazier's view, the black middle class is simply caught between their own status anxiety and their fear of exposing their inferiority. The result, in Frazier's view, is a black middle-class society that is simply a prop to uphold their fragile status in a world of make believe (1957:213–17, 237). Frazier's cultural analysis is notable for its astringency and the controversy that arose around it.

As we've seen, the phrase "the American dream" was first used in print by James Truslow Adams during the Great Depression. Periods of financial contraction can test the nature of the American Dream for many. If the Dream is defined primarily, if not exclusively, in terms of the economy's ability to support a comfortable way of life that assures a generous supply of material resources and the promise of—or at least the opportunity for—upward mobility, economic recession and depression are potential threats. The question arises, however, whether periods of prosperity universally elicit higher support for the American Dream and how, in particular, commentators and students of the American way of life have evaluated the American Dream during such periods. Few sociologists appear to have examined this set of circumstances with an eye toward understanding the impact on an era of financial strength and well-being on the American Dream. John Kenneth Galbraith did so, however, writing his influential economic analysis of the period of immediate postwar prosperity, *The Affluent Society*, in 1958.

As an economist, Galbraith expended effort to locate his discussion of postwar affluence in the USA within the tradition of economics, often called—with good reason—the dismal science. Galbraith notes that economic ideas began to emerge in their modern form in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries against the backdrop of centuries of economic stagnation and poverty. The fact that some societies were beginning to create sufficient material resources for a limited number of persons to become wealthy (amidst a continuing sea of poverty generally) inspired Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and others to think about economic relations. As Galbraith sums it up:

> In economics [up until that time], misfortune and failure were normal. Success, at least for more than the favored few, was what had to be explained. Enduring success was at odds with all history and could not be expected. (1976:20)

One of the essential points that Galbraith makes is that economic ideas are neither right nor wrong, per se, but rather some economic ideas

become obsolescent because the conditions that gave rise to them have changed. This emphasis on context and circumstances is critical.

According to Galbraith, one of the more recent spurs to economic thought was the pattern of recurring depressions that arose in the American economy from 1870 to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Many of the studies conducted by economists began with the premise that economic depressions did not (or should not) occur. As Galbraith phrases it, "Normal conditions were assumed; normal meant stable prosperity" (1976:37). This view, of course, flew directly in the face of one of the traditional tenets of economics—that privation was the rule and economic success the exception. Depressions, therefore, posed a conundrum: were they normal and, if so, could anything be done about them? Generally, up through the Great Depression most economists concluded that depressions were part of the normal "business cycle" and they would, in time, be self-correcting.

The scarcity assumption, however, did not jibe with conditions developing in the postwar USA where it became increasingly evident that affluence, not scarcity, was the predominant circumstance for many. These changed conditions led in many instances to a diminishing urgency of wants, which was the underlying condition that inspired the theory of marginal utility. Briefly, the urgency of desire is a function of the quantity of goods available to satisfy that desire. The larger the stock of goods available that will fulfill the desire, the less satisfaction an individual will obtain from a further increment in the level of available goods. Correspondingly, as the individual values a further increment less, he or she will become increasingly unwilling to pay for an amount over and above the level that has optimum utility for him (or her) (1976:120–25). Yet, something else was noticed as well: if production creates the wants it seeks to satisfy, the urgency of desires can be maintained indefinitely. This insight, critical to our understanding of the American Dream, would soon be taken up by Jules Henry (1965) and Philip Slater (1990), among others. Where, as in our society, one of the principal goals has become a higher standard of living, the desire to acquire more and better goods takes on a life of its own (1976:127–31). This means that our wants—rather than achieving a level of satiety beyond which diminishing marginal utility will take over—can continue growing; indeed, wants can become insatiable which, in terms relative to the materialistic version of the American Dream, means one can continue to pursue it endlessly. As Jay Gatsby demonstrated in one of

many indelible scenes, one can really never own enough shirts if one is American (Fitzgerald 2004:92). Increased production—which at one time appeared to solve nearly all the social problems of the day—has turned out to be simply a stimulus for more wants to arise and for them to gain in intensity, ad infinitum.

All this would be well and good except for the fact that to continuously purchase additional goods, the consumer—faced with a finite amount of money available each week or month—needed help. That assistance came—as we have earlier seen—in the form of consumer credit. In short, consumer demand—which arguably runs the American economic system even if its wants are artificially created—comes to depend to an ever greater degree on the ability, and willingness, of people to continually incur debt (1976:147). Advertising and emulation work to inspire the motivation to purchase on credit. Purchase what? To a certain extent it does not matter what is purchased. There is a difference, of course, between purchasing a home based on a mortgage loan as compared to purchasing a college education based on a student aid package that contains loans but, in the end, the difference is irrelevant to the economy. In sum, we can see that the process of persuading consumers to want things, and to incur debt opportunities for them to help fulfill their desires, have become as much a part of modern production as the making of goods. Therefore, the mission to achieve a higher material standard of living will necessitate a continuous submergence into ever deeper levels of debt.

There are other implications for the American Dream that can be drawn from Galbraith's analysis. As a number of prior commentators have observed, the American penchant for individualism has had the effect of encouraging Americans to form dreams that are almost always personal and private in nature. Thus, American college students—asked to select from lists of aspirations that embody their own American dream—commonly choose items that relate to them personally (i.e., own a home, have a good career, get married) but far less often choose items about helping others or achieving some public or social good (Hauhart and Birkenstein 2013). Galbraith's analysis of the American economy reveals a corollary theme in the disparity between the support for expenditures on private versus public goods and services. As he observes, our economy is organized in a manner that encourages an opulent supply of goods created for the personal consumer market and a niggardly supply of goods that support publicly rendered services of benefit to all. Galbraith's list of examples is worth quoting:

> In recent years, the papers of any major city—those of New York are an excellent example—tell daily of the shortages and shortcomings in elementary municipal and metropolitan services. The schools are old and overcrowded. The police force is under strength. The parks and playgrounds are insufficient. Streets and empty lots are filthy, and the sanitation staff is underrequipped and in need of men…Internal transportation is overcrowded, unhealthful and dirty. (1976:191)

This disparity between support for private goods and public goods and services in the USA persists more than 60 years after Galbraith wrote. Equally important, the entire subject of imbalance is a matter of serious import for economics. Thus, as Galbraith explains, expansion in one part of the economy must be matched by expansion in other parts that are intimately related to it. Otherwise, bottlenecks in production, shortages, speculative hoarding of scarce supplies, increased costs, and other economic maladies would arise (1976:192–93). However, just as there must be balance in what an economy produces and the production process itself, there must be a balance in what a community consumes. The pressure for social balance in either realm is constant and ubiquitous. When dreams focus on the consumption of personal consumer items almost exclusively, however, the negative effects of those choices cannot simply be wished away or ignored. This is most evident in our nation's commitment to the private automobile which necessitates corresponding public spending for roads, bridges, parking, car ferries, and so forth. When public expenditures on these support systems do not balance with the needs produced by more automobiles, the automobiles themselves become social problems causing backups on highways, excessive commute times, and increased costs generally.

Social imbalance, as it turns out, is perhaps the pre-eminent economic factor to consider as it is the most likely single cause of the Great Depression. Shortcutting some of the elaborate foundation work that Galbraith laid out, the essential problem leading to the Great Depression was a shortage of demand for goods. There were simply more home appliances and automobiles than Americans could buy or wanted to buy. Unsold goods led to decisions to slow down production; slowed production led to layoffs; layoffs led to less money to spend on refrigerators and automobiles. One way of reframing this situation is to blame the American Dream. Americans seeking an increase in material wealth in the form of more and better personal housing, personal consumer goods, and upward mobility generally

leads to an overproduction of private goods that introduces imbalance into the economy. Thus, one could argue that the avid pursuit of the personal form of the American Dream led to the collapse of the economy that supported the American Dream.

As Galbraith expresses early in his analysis, one of the motivating factors that inspired him to write *The Affluent Society* was the tendency for economists to develop economic explanations for a set of conditions and then to repeatedly return to those ideas regardless of changed conditions. In this manner, mainstream economics soon embodied simply a conventional wisdom—a wisdom that was often wrong. Many of the observations Galbraith makes about the conventional wisdom in economics seem applicable to the manner in which the American Dream has become part of the conventional wisdom of our society. As Galbraith points out, ideas often develop a life of their own unrelated to events. Certainly, one can argue that the American Dream has been severed from events in many cases and has become a free-floating rhetorical device that speakers and writers can put to almost any purpose they wish. Moreover, in the competition of ideas in the intellectual marketplace, ideas that are "liked" are the ones that will survive and flourish, regardless of whether or not the idea offers the most accurate estimate of events or is most effective at helping us understand other events. This, too, sounds applicable to the American Dream. For example, invocation of the American Dream elicits wide approval among college students (Hauhart and Birkenstein 2013; Abowitz 2005). Rather than the hard, shocking facts regarding upward mobility and success in the USA, American audiences approve the aspirational goals and deceptive promises smoothly embedded within the American Dream. They do so for the same reason that the conventional wisdom is always accepted: the comfortable and familiar have a strong, enduring appeal. In this regard, affirmation of one's belief in the efficacy of the American Dream is comparable to one's affirmation of the conventional wisdom in any other field or endeavor: it will bond one with others to express an idea that an American audience will widely approve. It is, as Galbraith notes, almost akin to a religious rite: believers are welcome at the ceremony where obeisance is displayed at the altar that is venerated; naysayers regarding the attractiveness, desirability, or attainability of the American Dream are not encouraged to attend. As with religion, if one is already persuaded, then one need not trouble himself or herself with looking into the matter too closely.

The conventional wisdom does have value for society, however, and it is this: accepting the conventional wisdom offers a certain kind of

stability and continuity but it does so at a price—something with which economists are always concerned. The American Dream is like the conventional wisdom in this way, too: it offers a reassuring project for any American to pursue; the downside of easy affirmance of the goals implicit in the American Dream is that change is impeded when, in fact, change may be most needed. Where the march of events has left the conventional wisdom obsolete continuing to invest in believing it may produce results that are inimical to our well-being and happiness rather than the positive outcomes anticipated. As Galbraith observes, once reality has discarded the conventional wisdom enough times one may be able to move beyond it (1976:17). Yet this is typically only after much damage has been done. New ideas have their opportunity to offer an alternative vision only when the audience attuned to the conventional wisdom is ready to reject it and accept change.

All of this explains the staying power of the American Dream whose tenets may be disproved but not yet abandoned. As Galbraith argued in the late 1950s, while scarcity had been overcome—and our new problem was actually affluence—economists were often slow to grasp this fact. The American Dream of home ownership, of good, well-paying jobs with benefits, of upward mobility—has perhaps likewise outlived its utility under changed conditions. The pursuit of happiness through attainment of the American Dream is, as Galbraith acknowledges, an admirable social goal (1976:268). At one time, the American Dream of prosperity seemed like a potentially efficacious formula for the successful pursuit of happiness in the USA. But as Galbraith remarks in another context, it is unhappily the case that neither faith nor urgent need constitutes the basis for assurance that a plan will produce practical benefit or performance in the matter sought (1976:171). This suggests that just as economic theories can become obsolete, social ideas can, too. In short, an economic analysis of the problem of affluence suggests reformulation of the American Dream may be in order.

Ultimately, Galbraith's economic theorizing, for all its acuity, suffers the failing that characterizes all of those studies which base their analyses primarily on economic issues: the researchers fail to speak with Americans about their aspirations. We are left, often, with only the assumption that economics trumps all other factors in the American Dream, and that all our life ambitions revolve around those issues. Moreover, when many researchers do speak with Americans about their hopes, the nature of the questions they ask—often about economic well-being—have the self-fulfilling effect of directing the inquiry right back into the same narrow channel. Either of these approaches—assuming that economic success is the key factor in assessing

the progress of the American Dream and the American way of life (and not bothering to ask Americans) or asking directive questions about "how one is doing" in the current economy—stifle inquiry and produce largely self-fulfilling prophecies. In its most reductionist form, the inquiry tends to reproduce the researchers' assumptions as conclusions: that if a person is doing well economically, they must be happily living the American Dream; to the contrary, if a person is not doing well economically, that person must be failing at his/her American Dream. Reducing the idea of the American Dream in this way disregards its complexity and scope. Ignoring the expressed aspirations held by Americans treats both researchers and respondents dismissively. Neither path will suffice if we are to develop a better grasp on what Americans envision as their contemporary American Dream.

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Postwar Affluence Meets
the Great Society

Having survived the Depression and World War II, the USA entered a period of domestic tranquility, economic growth, and national optimism and seemed well positioned to offer many Americans a better chance at the American Dream. Sociological studies from the 1930s, even those recounting American life during the darkest days of the Depression, reported on a seemingly self-satisfied *Middletown* or a *Yankee City*. If Americans were not entirely happy with their lot in life at the end of the war, at least they appeared to know their place in the scheme of things and accept it. From the mid-1950s onward, however, sociologists and others monitoring the American way of life registered periodic, and then more persistent, tremors in the national mood, imbalances in the social order, and disquiet in the national psyche. While it is true that many other reports did not reflect any serious disturbances in Americans' quest for the American Dream, the emergence of studies suggesting that all was not right in Mudville opened a new ground for analyzing our society: although the bitter hardship of the Depression years for many had been overcome and the privations impelled by World War II relieved, affluence had not reached all sectors of society and even those who could partake of the national largesse often found themselves dissatisfied with American life. Studies from this period revealed the existence of subcultural groups whose members showed little interest or affinity for the traditional definition of the American Dream. Equally important, while the promise of postwar prosperity was real for many Americans, both economic and cultural divides made the goals associated with the classic conception of

the American Dream attainable only by a relative few. This disjunction between the ideology of the American Dream, the reality of economic and social barriers to its attainment, and the alienated disaffiliation that cultural divides engendered in the USA will henceforth dominate our analyses.

Much of this became increasingly evident because studies began to emerge that examined Americans other than from the middle classes. It is true that the Lynds offered interview data from working-class respondents, and that Warner and his colleagues did not wholly disregard the lower orders in Newburyport, but there now emerged reports that were based on work directed at locales and groups who were decidedly not among those more commonly investigated by Riesman, Glazer and Denney (1961), Mills (1971), Seeley, Sim, and Loosley (1974), and others. These studies, too, broadened and deepened the range of inquiries focused on elements of American life that had a bearing on the American Dream.

A study that falls squarely within both of the above is Mirra Komarovsky's *Blue-Collar Marriage* (1967), originally published in hardback in 1962. The book's first sentences spell out its unique difference from prior works:

> Marriages studied by American sociologists have dealt predominantly with white, Protestant, native-born and college educated couples. In order to isolate the influence of social class upon marriage, we decided to limit the inquiry to a group comparable to the previous samples in race, religion, and nativity but differing in occupation, income and education. Our sample was to consist of a homogeneous group sharing a number of characteristics. All were to be white, native born of native parents, Protestant, not over 40 years of age, and parents of at least one child. Only blue collar workers were to be included. The highest level of education would be four years of high school. (1967:9)

Komarovsky's sample was drawn from a community of approximately 50,000 people located less than 5 miles from a city of 500,000. The researchers conducted intensive interviews with the spouses of the 58 married couples selected. Their purpose was to study normal family life among these representatives of a social class not previously the subject of extensive sociological inquiry. Interviews took place within the home and consisted of separate interviews of not less than two hours each with the wife and husband, and no fewer than six hours overall with each couple (1967:10–11). In general, Komarovsky and her research team found much more dissatisfaction with communication and more unhappiness in

marriage than had previously been reported by other studies examining working-class marriages (1967:348).

The researchers were naturally aware of both the advantages and weaknesses of the case study method. They could not, for example, contend that patterns across their several dozen sets of respondents could be compared to relative frequencies reported in responses to standardized surveys with sizable random samples. Arguably, however, the method permitted the researchers to investigate depths of marital experience that other methods did not reach. As Komarovsky noted, "Our detailed and indirect probing may have brought to light unfavorable facts which are not readily admitted in answer to direct questions [used in surveys]" (1967:348). Komarovsky's discussion of the case study method illustrates some of the most critical weaknesses alluded to previously in studies of the American Dream: there has been insufficient attention devoted to Americans' evaluations of the experience of the American way of life and the meaning they attach to the American Dream. As Komarovsky elaborates, couples in her study often offered responses contradicting their earlier, more positive, assessments of marital satisfaction when requestioned later in the interview sequence (1967:384, 196–97). The social psychological principle at work is not unknown: few Americans are anxious to admit failure, problems, or unhappiness in intimate matters—whether to strangers or, perhaps, anyone. Once an atmosphere of comfort and trust develops, however, couples were more willing to express the full range of their feelings about their marriages. There is still the difficulty of interpretation in assessing her subject's responses but there is also the opportunity that open-ended interviews represent to explore an area not otherwise discoverable by other methods. As Komarovsky remarks:

> But the range and the frequency [of direct response to large scale social survey questions] may not be highly associated with completeness of self-disclosure. And some disclosures are not as indicative of intimacy as others. We show that the feeling of closeness.can exist when communication is very selective and specialized. [Our attempt to assess psychological intimacy on the basis of the total data from our interviews]…found a high incidence of withdrawal of interaction. (1967:349)

In essence, regardless of the inability to generalize beyond the bounds of a particular series of interviews, if the quality of data is immeasurably improved, broadened, and deepened the benefit to our understanding of

the nature of the subject of study is enhanced. This is often an approach that is underutilized in studies of the American Dream.

Looking at what Komarovsky's interviews revealed, blue-collar spouses were pretty clearly not living out some paradisal American Dream. The sources of unhappiness were manifold but not without several dominant patterns. By the 1950s, newer forms of spousal relationships added to the traditional functions of marriage. Beginning with the postwar period, contemporary marriages added companionship as a recognized goal for many couples. The ideal of a companionable friendship rests upon a degree of equality between the sexes and will likely not be achieved where authoritarian, patriarchal, or similar attitudes persist. Companionability arises, if it does at all, only where an overlap of shared interests can emerge; therefore, societies where a sharp line is drawn between the expected role activities of men and women will also not foster a mutual sharing and friendship. Komarovsky notes that previous studies of the English working class reported finding considerable psychological distance between husbands and wives (1967:112–13).

In an attempt to examine these changes, Komarovsky and her interviewers read to their interview subjects two very short vignettes about companionship in marriage and marital communication and privacy to elicit their views. Nearly 40 % saw no difficulty in the story where the husband does not talk to the wife on the premise that "she does not like to gab" while the wife in the vignette expressed the view that her husband was not companionable and "has nothing to say to her" (1967:114–15). The second vignette told of a couple who lived near the wife's mother, who spoke together every day. The husband in the story doesn't understand why this level of contact is necessary and why his mother-in-law needs to be told every little thing that goes on in the marriage (i.e., "what we eat for dinner every day"). Here, over 60 % of the interviewees saw no problem although the men expressed some reservations that the amount of talk might distract the wife from other responsibilities or might fuel trouble (1967:117–19). Generally, what Komarovsky characterizes as "middle-class responses" to the stories (recognizing a companionability problem in the first story and a communication problem in the second) were more common among high school graduates and those with mobility aspirations, especially among the men (1967:122). It soon became clear that a certain percentage among the interview couples did not conceive of marriage as offering the potential for friendship. Komarovsky reports that these marriages resembled the English working-class marriages in that

a clear psychological distance was tolerated because nothing more was expected from the marriage even though this distance was occasionally the source of frustration, especially for the wives. One woman from this group, who generally expressed initial satisfaction with her marriage, later admitted feeling depressed periodically but never sharing the fact that she was depressed with her husband. Rather, she talked to her mother; she "couldn't really tell" whether her husband knew about her moods or not (1967:131).

The researchers also explored the nature, extent, and effect of self-disclosure in the marriages. They asked about "emotionally significant events" that may have occurred over the preceding week or two and then asked with whom the event was discussed. Further, when apparent subjects of significance to an interviewee arose unexpectedly, the researchers asked again about who had been told about the event or with whom it had been discussed. Since both husbands and wives were interviewed at length, it was possible to consider the responses of each in relation to one another. Ultimately, the determination as to whether disclosure was "very full" or "meager" or somewhere in between was a judgment based on many pieces of data. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using two judges to independently rate the same 30 cases (1967:134–35). While the range of self-disclosure was interesting, somewhat more interesting was the finding that full disclosure did not, in every instance, make couples happy. Conversely, couples who did not share *and* where disclosure was considered "meager" were almost universally unhappy on both sides (1967:137, 142). Some of the marriages with only moderate disclosure were still generally happy at least in part because of the low expectations for friendship in the marriage. Other interviewees expressed various levels of dissatisfaction because one or the other or both spouses communicate too freely—including many expressions of frankness that are experienced as hostility (1967:138, 142). Komarovsky reports that unhappy men tend to conceal their feelings more and disclose less; unhappy women tend to reveal their unhappiness through a fuller degree of disclosure. Among all the couples interviewed, the researchers found that communication between spouses tends to decrease with the number of years of marriage (1967:143, 145).

Komarovsky sums up her teams' findings by noting that one out of three marriages falls short of the prevailing ideal of companionable marriage and psychological intimacy. One factor in the distance between spouses is that the overlapping of interests is so narrow that neither partner can

serve as a satisfactory audience or listener for the other (1967:148–49). Although husbands and wives necessarily discussed the husband's job at one time or another, this topic headed the list of things husband interviewees said they disclosed least about to their wives. The monotony of the job, the fact that the husband believed home and work should be kept separate, and specific psychological barriers to communication were voiced as reasons (1967:151–55). The researchers found, though, that the men often possessed a "trained incapacity to share" that obtruded into conversations generally and more specifically with a reserve to talk to women on certain topics. Moreover, both spouses tended to exhibit an "impoverishment of life" that narrowed the overlap between partners and stunted personal growth. Both the sophistication necessary to analyze and communicate about the external world was missing as well as the lack of any depth of self-awareness about the internal world that would enable the full expression of hopes, goals, and plans. While many of the couples knew they were supposed to talk to one another, many couples found nothing to say (1967:155–59). Some spouses, or even couples, found sharing so "unrewarding, threatening or downright painful" that there was nearly a complete withdrawal from interaction. In certain cases, a taboo topic existed and it cast a pall over the entire relationship; in other cases, an external event befell the family and the alienation dated from that experience. When such persons encounter conflicts within the marriage, the results may be a tendency to play it safe by withdrawal. One husband withdrew to escape his wife's emotional demands which he feels he cannot satisfy (1967:159–61).

Like so many of the summaries of community studies offered here, this account of Komarovsky's work is necessarily only a succinct synopsis of the most salient of her findings. Other researchers found many of the same tensions in working-class marriages a decade later. Rubin (1976:114–125) also found that changing expectations regarding companionship and intimacy remained a stumbling block and often presented couples with communication problems. Fortunately, however brief, this abstract of Komarovsky's methods and findings is sufficient to highlight another glaring deficiency in the analyses regarding the American Dream: The quantitative aspect of financial security and other external measures of well-being, such as intergenerational moves up and down the social ladder, often eclipses efforts to examine and judge the degree to which Americans may be living, and enjoying, the life they wish to live. Komarovsky's study examines the quality of these couples' lives in light

of their own expectations and in light of the contemporary standard for companionate marriages. She finds one-third of the couples in marriages that offer little happiness and a substantial degree of dissatisfaction, on one or more grounds. Rubin (1976:94), too, found that working-class wives expressed substantial dissatisfaction with the emotional aspects of their marriages. Rubin (1976:103–04) also found the wives in her study often trying to assuage their anger about inequality and constraints in the marriage relationship, hardly a research finding that suggests they are living the American Dream. In short, work like Komarovsky's and Rubin's suggests that studies of the American Dream too seldom investigate whether Americans define the meaning of the Dream to encompass significant personal relationships. Moreover, more recent studies of the American Dream further fail to assess the quality of those relationships even when the importance of them to the research subjects should be well known.

Komarovsky's study is, like so many presented here, dated. It is not offered for the particular findings the researchers documented in the early 1950s. For example, Torlina (2011:33–37) has documented in lengthy open-ended interviews with blue-collar workers more recently that they find their work challenging, rewarding, and important—rather than boring or monotonous. This may have changed the communication dynamic between working-class spouses. It may well be that working-class marriages are now delivering more marital satisfaction as a result. Komarovsky's study, and studies like Rubin's which followed on its heels, are offered instead as counterweights to the predominant emphasis on economic factors in American Dream research. Studies like these are, very simply, a testament to the fact that American Dream studies need to reach beyond economics, financial security, upward mobility, and publically safe topics of general well-being and life satisfaction that have too often obscured—rather than exposed—the assessments, evaluations, and measures that Americans apply to their own lives in seeking, and ascertaining, their own progress toward their personal American Dream.

The period beginning in the late 1950s and extending for the next two decades was a fertile period for what have been called "community studies" in sociology. Herbert Gans was one of the foremost practitioners of this form of sociological investigation. His method often involved extended participant observation. During 1957–58, Gans lived in the West End, an inner-city Boston neighborhood, to study a low-income population of native-born Americans of Italian parentage in what would be called a "slum" by most observers. Shortly after Gans' period

of observation, the area was torn down under the federal government's renewal program on the theory that poor housing was a source of many of the community's problems. Gans concluded that the area was not a slum and that the residents were not frustrated seekers of middle-class housing and values; rather, Gans found a distinct working-class subculture living in an urban village whose nonnative population immigrated from mostly nonurban environments and adapted their traditional way of life to the city (1962:ix–x, 3–4).

The West End was located—physically but symbolically—at the bottom of Beacon Hill; as one descended the hill, the social status of the population decreased as did the quality of the buildings. The area's population was ethnically diverse but predominantly first- and second-generation Italian. For the time period, everyday life in the West End was much like it was in the suburbs: men went to work in the morning and the area was populated largely by women and children during the workday. Most families were tenants but apartments were kept clean and residents resented description of their area as a slum. They found little to complain about in the dense urban environment of crowded apartment buildings because they did not seek the privacy demanded by middle-class families. Within limits, Gans found that everyone recognized or knew everyone else and was comfortable with living in a lively, vibrant urban village. Housing, therefore, was not the same kind of status symbol for West Enders as for the middle class (1962:14–15, 19–21). Those few who wanted privacy, a better address, a single family home, or well-manicured yard had to leave the neighborhood—with the implication that it and the group were not good enough for them. The West Enders wanted the noise of the street life and shunned the isolation and emptiness of newer suburbs. Material possessions, like homes and cars, were only important as places and means of sharing with family and friends. The West Enders liked where they found themselves and, for the most part, did not aspire to live elsewhere (1962:22–23).

The West Enders worked in manual occupations predominantly; with high school graduates in the minority at the time of the study, their incomes were modest to low. Gans found that education was generally not a criterion for judging people; rather, the major criteria for evaluating others included in-group loyalty and conformity to established standards of behavior. Group members were expected to regulate their behavior and act honestly, responsibly, and reliably within the group. Money is a concern to the West Enders only if there is not enough of it to maintain their modest lifestyle or if it is misused: the breadwinner (males at the

time) should take care of his family first, and set a good table for friends and relatives, but must never mistreat a relative or friend for economic gain nor save money for selfish purposes instead of sharing with family and friends (1962:24–27). Thus, Gans found that money is used as a means not an end.

Gans' familiarity with the community gained through participant observation enabled him to identify four common life patterns in the West End. He labeled these routine seekers, action seekers, middle-class mobiles, and the maladapted. Only those Gans describes as the "middle class mobiles" concerned themselves inordinately with money and the perquisites of status, but these goals inevitably detached them from the group; they would need to move out of the West End to live out a middle-class lifestyle. Gans found these were the strivers and constituted only a small percentage of those in the neighborhood. The routine seekers aim to develop a stable way of living in which the economic and emotional security of the individual and family were paramount. This way of life was characterized by regular schedules and routinely recurring activities with an unvarying cast of friends and relatives. The action seekers, conversely, were looking for adventures, excitement, and fun. Life was an episodic quest for thrills and the chance to face and overcome a challenge or just "live it up." The maladapted were those who stopped conforming to society's most evident norms and constituted a category of isolated individuals rather than a cohesive group (1962:28–32). It is the routine seekers and, to a lesser degree, the action seekers whose styles dominated this Italian low-income neighborhood.

There is a wealth of absorbing detail about the manner of life West Enders pursued in *The Urban Villagers*, but for our purposes it is the rejection of middle-class values regarding monetary success and the lack of desire to pursue upward mobility that are worth noting. The West End Italian working-class culture, unlike the middle-class or upper-middle-class cultures, is not limited to the nuclear family and its aspirations to make its way within the larger society (1962:246–50). Rather, the working-class culture strives to stay intact and limit changes to its way of life; there is a reluctance to reshape family life, adopt careers outside the neighborhood, or make further contact with the outside world, for example, through educational institutions. The Italian West Enders did not aspire to become middle class; they wished to retain the priority they place on person-oriented relationships and showed no desire to jettison relationships to "make it" within the outside society (1962:252–54). While Gans is careful

to note that the upwardly mobile in the middle class do not universally sever relationships to gain status as a matter of course, the unwillingness to potentially face the occasional need to do so among the working-class community he observed constituted a distinct difference in emphasis. If the American Dream is typically conceived of as seeking financial security, material well-being, and upward mobility, the Italian working class in the West End possessed a different dream.

A few years later, Gans lived as a participant observer in Levittown, New Jersey, for the first two years of its existence. His book, *The Levittowners* (1967), can usefully be read as revealing a series of contrasts to the values he found in Boston's West End Italian working-class culture. On the one hand, Levittown attracted both working-class and lower-middle-class (primarily young) new residents; yet those who moved to Levittown were distinctive because they were willing to give up ethnic and regional loyalties to explore life in a new suburb. Other features that the community as a whole shared were participation in the national market for consumer goods produced by the big corporations, consumption of the information products offered by the mass media, and attentiveness to the political appeals emanating from Washington via the media (1967:vii).

The Levittowners were like many other contemporary suburbanites: young families looking for a place to raise their children. Most were lower middle class with teachers and social workers the predominant professionals and the working class dominated by the highest skill, highest status manual occupations. Each class brought distinctive styles with them according to Gans. The working-class culture emphasized sex segregation and showed less engagement with the companionship marital form favored by the middle class, consistent with Komarovsky's (1967) findings. The working class stayed close to home in an adult-centered atmosphere, worked to keep their children out of trouble with the police or school authorities, and rarely participated in organized community activities. Those families with socially mobile aspirations for their children try to keep them at home and under their control for a longer period; more commonly, the working-class children seek to get out of the home at an earlier age and, by and large, do so compared to middle-class children. The working class views the family as a haven against a largely hostile outside world (1967:25–27; Rubin 1976). By way of contrast, the lower-middle-class families in Levittown pursue a companionate marriage ideal with some mutual shared interests and a child-focused family setting. The middle-class families valued education for their children, wanted them to

go to college, and clearly sought educational achievement as the means to upward mobility for the younger generation. The nuclear family was the focus; only the working-class members retained some vestigial connection to the clan-like extended families. The few upper-middle-class families Gans found extended some of the emphases of the lower middle class even further. Children among these families were treated as unique, encouraged, and even pressured to do well in school, and trained to eventually perform autonomously in all spheres of life in order, in substantial part, so that they may pursue a rewarding professional career (1967:27–31). All three cultures, however, shared the same predominate motivation for moving to Levittown: to find more spacious housing and specifically to fulfill their desire to own a single family home. A survey Gans distributed revealed that 84 % came primarily because of features related to the house they purchased (1967:32, 34).

Gans' book offers a comprehensive analysis of the process he observed when people moved into a brand-new housing community and began to create the institutions of community life. For our purposes, however, his thumbnail profiles of the groups who chose to move to Levittown underscore their different orientations to the American Dream. The working-class members who moved to Levittown were akin to the "mobiles" who were ready to move from Boston's West End: they were willing to break or strain family and neighborhood ties for the sake of better housing and opportunities. While they did not wish to change their way of life overall they were still willing to risk changes for these other benefits. The lower middle class and the upper middle class in Levittown wanted better housing as well, but they were already positioned to simply move their respective nuclear families to a new setting where other avenues leading toward opportunities for continued upward mobility could be pursued. These findings confirm the picture that has been emerging about the American Dream. When the Dream is conceived as a desire for material prosperity that will enable the individual or family to display its status and use that status to support further upward mobility, the conception is a predominately middle-class or upper-middle-class American Dream. It is not a universal American Dream, as it is sometimes portrayed, because it is not shared among Americans of all other classes.

Questions regarding classes and subcultures in the USA have been thorny ones for social science to disentangle. The idea of the American Dream is a case in point. On the one hand, it is a national symbol for the "good life" that is universally recognized across American culture. At

the same time, it is well established that substantial wealth and income gaps exist between classes and that, as a result, the likelihood of achieving financial security, material well-being, and upward mobility varies according to one's class location. This, of course, is contrary to notions of fairness and equal opportunity that are embedded in our heritage and form part of the American Dream as well. Further, while one may assume that the American Dream is pursued by members of all social classes—indeed, by all Americans—this has largely been an assumption to date. As Gans' two studies suggest, members of the working-class subculture of urban Italian Americans living in Boston's West End were not seeking wealth or upward mobility; rather, unlike the "strivers" who moved to the new Levittown development, the West Enders were satisfied with the urban village style of life they had created. Studies of other class-based subcultures offer us further confirmation that distinctive features of monetary success and upward mobility often associated with the American Dream are not universally sought by all Americans.

Earlier we have seen that the Lynds (1929, 1937) and Warner (1963) and his colleagues documented the existence of recognized social classes in *Middletown* and *Yankee City* respectively. An American Dream that focuses, in part, on the accumulation of wealth and financial security and, in part, on the potential for upward social and economic mobility envisions an open class system in which the sons and daughters of those in lower social ranks can achieve elevation in status through efforts of their own. The question arises whether at any period of history such an open class system more or less exists or whether admission to the upper ranks is maintained by unannounced lines of exclusivity. E. Digby Baltzell (1964), looking back at the formation and evolution of the American Protestant establishment between 1880 and World War II, traces both the shaping, and eventual hardening, of a caste-like aristocracy in the USA. Accepting Baltzell's argument for the sake of analysis, the existence of an impermeable upper class would naturally undercut the potential for substantial upward mobility that many versions of the American Dream exalt.

Baltzell (1964:4–7) begins his discursive social history with the well-known story of Abraham Lincoln's birth to poor, illiterate parents living in a crude log cabin in Hardin County, Kentucky, and his eventual climb to the presidency of the USA. This profile is meant to illustrate the nature of an open class system where an individual born on the lowest rung of the social ladder may ascend to its highest point. As Baltzell realizes, it is an idealized portrait that was created to a degree by the

short, relative distance between the lower and upper echelons of American society in the mid-nineteenth century, and the extraordinary tumult and social disorder caused by the political and economic tensions that eventually led to the Civil War. Conditions like these had changed dramatically by the time Baltzell takes up his investigation with the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

As Baltzell recounts, foreign immigration first became a notable factor and influence on American society during the 1880s. Baltzell (1964:21) identifies immigration from southern and eastern Europe as one of the primary sources of the "sense of caste…within the American upper class" that arose during this period. Heretofore, Baltzell contends that although an aristocratic upper class existed in the USA, it had maintained itself by regularly incorporating capable strivers from the lower classes into its ranks. According to Baltzell, the massive size of the immigrant flood, its origins for many in the lower strata of the so-called darker, swarthy European nations, and the immigrants' explosive pursuit of American prosperity and social and political involvement threatened the ascendant Protestant Establishment. The perceived threat persuaded them to unreflectively close ranks in a manner they had not done previously. They did so by the time-honored customs of withdrawal into sheltered, enclosed enclaves, like Bar Harbor, Maine (1964:117–18); the amalgamation of a phalanx of small, private northeastern colleges into the gatekeeping institutions known as the Ivy League; formation of exclusive (primarily men's) clubs and associations; and the pervasive entrenchment of formerly sporadic and idiosyncratic anti-foreign, anti-Catholic, and anti-Semitic attitudes (1964:32–34, 95–96, 105–08). Indeed, while it may strike those who are not members—which, of course, means the overwhelming, nearly universal complement of living Americans—as modestly questionable, Baltzell contends that it was primarily the private (men's, but later, coed, suburban but ethnically segregated, golf-oriented) clubs that formed the impregnable, caste-like final dividing line between those who aspire to gain upper-class status and those who possess it. In his words, "At the upper-class level in America,…, the club…lies at the very core of the social organization of the accesses to power and authority" (1964:354).

The effect of this system of exclusion on the prospects of mobility for denizens of any of the lower classes into the upper class should be apparent. However, Baltzell's evidence and eloquent descriptions memorably outline its major features. He begins by citing and quoting Osborn

Eilliot's description of social life within the postwar confines of Pittsburgh's Duquesne Club as representative of then-contemporary practices:

> It is when you go upstairs in the Duquesne [Club] that you begin to enter the substratosphere of [corporate] executive power. On the second floor there are no fewer than five dining rooms, including the main one; and in each of these, day after day, the same people sit at the same tables…the Gulf Oil table is across the way; Gulf's chairman David Proctor., surrounded by his senior vice presidents. In the corner over to the right is the Koppers table,…and next to it is the U.S. Steel table,…In another smaller room nearby,…Alcoa's executive committee chairman, Roy Hunt, holds forth… – next to Jack Heinz's table. (1964:363–64)

To sum up, to dine at the club you must gain membership; to gain membership you must be put up for admission by those who are already members; and to sit at the table you must be invited. It is merely one set of practices in a system of caste exclusion that extends through an interlocking set of institutions that encircle the elite in bastions of insularity, privilege, and restricted access.

In Baltzell's view, the difference between a stagnant caste and an open, renewable elite is the question of permeability. A society whose upper echelons become unreachable due to the erection of insurmountable barriers is a social order that loses a traditional basis for developing new leadership and claiming moral authority. Moreover, it is a society that endangers itself by alienating those who it needs—some of those already admitted to the circles of wealth and power and those whose competence and energy among the middle and lower classes enriches the culture. As one disaffected member of the lower rungs of the American cultural elite wondered in 1960:

> What has become of the American idea, the hope of raising a standard to which all just men could repair? Has it really petered out into a "dream," or worse, into a nervously advertised and jealously guarded "way of life"?…
>
> What has become of that enormous invitation, and the faith it was based on?… Once America badly needed cheap labor, and rationalized its need by declaring a limitless capacity for [welcoming foreigners]. The need fulfilled, the United States will now accept only a strictly limited quantity, grading its quotas by an arbitrary assessment of quality – northern and western Europeans are better stuff than southern Europeans, and Orientals almost unusable. [citation deleted] (1964:44–45)

Hence, the danger of a Dream premised on upward mobility in an era, or climate, like our own which routinely denies its attainment through anti-immigrant movements. For many Americans, the lure of monetary success and status striving are self-evident; the pitfalls of a national obsession with them, perhaps less so.

In the late 1960s, a Swedish anthropologist, Ulf Hannerz, investigated a community at the opposite end of the economic and social spectrum from Baltzell's white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs). Hannerz studied life on Winston Street, a narrow, one-way ghetto street one block long in Washington, DC. Like Gans' report on the Italian urban village he found in Boston, Hannerz reported in *Soulside* (1969) that lower-class African American ghetto life in the Winston Street neighborhood could be usefully depicted as falling within four modes, or ideal types. Hannerz called these: mainstreamers, swingers, street families, and streetcorner men (1969:34–58). While the distinctive styles among the four groups are of inherent interest, the contrast between two of the groups will aid us the most in our search for the meaning of the American Dream.

The mainstreamers were either homeowners or held the strong hope of becoming homeowners and were generally the better-off members of the community. There is little unemployment among them, most are married and live in nuclear families with a stable composition, and they generally attempt to maintain a middle-class style of living even though most are working class rather than white collar in occupation. The mainstreamers' primary concerns revolve around having a nice home, a good family, being in a position to take good care of one's family, and the attendant rituals of middle-class family life—a set dinner hour for the family, homework for the children, taking care of things around the house for the men, and spending time with the family (1969:38–42). While Hannerz does not use the term "American Dream," the mainstreamers are those in the African American ghetto to whom it would most appeal.

The streetcorner men constitute a unique group of peers who spend much of their time in public places—like street corners—with each other. They sometimes are associated with, and live with, street families—so called because of their distinctive and conspicuous style of life that also often takes places on the street, the lawns, the sidewalks, and the porches of the neighborhood. In other instances, the streetcorner men live as a boarder, or drift here and there, staying where they can. These unattached men are among those most likely to be unemployed. They have often dropped out of school early and have few skills to offer. Some were recent

migrants from the rural South, now in an urban and industrial environment (1969:54). They are, in many respects, like the marginal residents in Boston's West End who Gans called the maladapted.

The streetcorner men typically focus their social lives around a particular hangout, perhaps a street corner with a convenience store, where they return day after day to see their friends, other streetcorner men. The men gather, talk, drink alcohol, play cards, shoot crap or just do nothing. There is continuous drinking and many of the men are alcoholics, or steadily on the way to becoming so. The liquor is purchased through collections among the men but also through a lot of begging, most of it quite friendly with people they know but occasionally it is rough or threatening. Hannerz reports that many of the men had police records of a greater or lesser kind. While some of the streetcorner men maintain regular sexual relationships with women in street families, others rely on prostitutes. Most days in the life of a streetcorner man are filled with tedium and routine: the faces of the same men, time spent at the same hangout, engaged in the same kind of talk, and looking for the money to get the same food and drink as yesterday and the day before (1969:54–57). Although there can be violence, more often the expressed concerns are with getting "a taste" [of alcohol] and "a piece of pussy" (1969:57). No one among the street-corner men talks of home, family, homework, or keeping up appearances.

Hannerz's portrait of the variations in family life in the ghetto and the lives of streetcorner men confirm the observations of other students of the African American ghetto (Drake and Cayton 1962; Clark 1965; Liebow 1967). As the very brief summaries above depict, the focal concerns of different groups vary dramatically with respect to conceptions of, or aspirations toward, ideas commonly attributed to the American Dream. It is clear, for example, that the streetcorner men are not pursuing a plan for upward mobility, nor would it make any sense for them to do so. Many of the policy prescriptions offered to "save" the American Dream rather embarrassingly disregard the fact that a number of subcultures found in the USA express no interest in the traditional American Dream or, some-what related, various groups within American society have virtually no prospect of achieving it. The latter may be due as much to social and cultural deficiencies (i.e., lack of social and cultural capital) as economic ones. The failure to recognize the pervasiveness of various marginalized subcultural groups in the USA that are outside the reach of the American Dream, both economically and culturally, is another weakness of many contemporary American Dream studies.

Community studies conducted by sociologists in the 1950s and 1960s illuminate the distinctive ways of life pursued by Americans from different strata, the aspirations Americans from different realms of life express, and the prospects for Americans of one class to move upward into another class. The studies in this chapter suggest, rather baldly, that the prospects for a youth growing up in Boston's Italian urban village or Washington, DC's Winston Street neighborhood to gain membership in Pittsburgh's Duquesne Club (or its Boston or Washington, DC equivalent) are virtually nonexistent. This lack of potential upward mobility will increasingly become the major issue facing the traditional conception of the American Dream in succeeding decades.

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The American Dream Critically Examined

The American Dream, as a cultural phenomenon, can be the subject of critique as well as simple description or comparative analysis. So far, we have alternated between examination of the manner in which Americans have lived in different eras, locales, and classes and the (often idealized) notions that are encapsulated within the American Dream. From the beginning, when the first immigrants were English transplants, Americans have regularly exhibited a willingness to change their way of life when they have found circumstances oppressive or unappealing. The earliest American settlers left their former way of life due to some combination of religious persecution, low status, and lack of opportunity to prosper within English society. These dissidents, refugees, dreamers, and opportunists "voted with their feet" through their departure; later, middle-class aspirants would do the same when they moved west to the new frontier or left the urban village for a new suburb. Until the 1960s, however, there were seldom broad-based intellectual movements that critiqued the American Dream in a way that offered a coherent ground for dissatisfaction with the American way of life. While it is true that Bohemians in Greenwich Village in the 1920s adopted a countercultural lifestyle, the inspiration to do so was limited to a very small number of writers and artists whose (largely aesthetic) ideals never achieved any appreciable adoption throughout the country. Likewise, the Beat writers of the early 1950s issued a highly publicized challenge to the dominant American way of life but one that predominately sold a few books, spawned journalistic hand-wringing, and supplied the narrative line for later documentaries; their call did

not develop into a coherent economic or combined cultural critique that ignited any substantial following. Collectively, a series of sociological analyses in the 1960s–1970s offered interpretations of American life that were logical, consistent, and persuasive in explaining the basis for a more widespread disaffection with the American Dream than perhaps heretofore.

Jules Henry's *Culture Against Man* (1965) does not explicitly announce that it is a critique of the American Dream but it is self-consciously a critical analysis of post-World War II American culture. Henry's approach is sufficiently broad that his analysis of American culture embraces, and anticipates, a number of grounds for cultural critique that have been less articulately and coherently subsumed in prior commentaries on the American Dream. Henry states his book is "about contemporary American culture – its economic structure and values, the relation of these to national character, parent-child relations, teenage problems and concerns, the schools, and to emotional breakdown, old age and war" (1965:3). Like Gans' (1962, 1967) work, Henry's book is an ethnography, and like the Riesman, Glazer and Denney (1961) work, Henry is concerned with the effects of our historically "lopsided preoccupation with wealth and raising the standard of living" (1965:3–4). However, unlike a more recent commentator, Putnam (2015), he sees little prospect for inducing major cultural change. Harkening back to Tocqueville, Henry notes a number of parallels that appear to have changed little in the USA: an insatiable demand for material prosperity, a commitment to individualism that left Americans solitary and lonely as people, and a corresponding restlessness that drove Americans to be feverishly on the move even as our frenetic jostling created an evanescence and superficiality to our culture (1965:5–8). Henry's effort is an attempt to explain, and criticize, these historical trends, elements of American character, and cultural beliefs and practices that he and others have observed.

Henry's approach, while rooted in his engaged participant observation of American life, is also broadly comparative. He notes, for example, that primitive cultures do not, as a rule, produce things that are not needed so that objects for survival are made in the quantity, and at the time, when they are required. In this regard, there is a close congruence between what is produced and what is desired and a close complementarity between need, production, availability or distribution, and fulfillment. The effect is a stable culture; the primitive workman creates for a known, limited market and efforts to expand the market are modest. Thus, there is nothing equivalent to salesmanship, advertising, or "up selling." In this sense,

there is also a psychological stability: the primitive workman is not driven to invent new products or persuade his customers they need new, better, or different items than they have long been accustomed to acquiring. The consequence is balance, continuity, and stability (1965:8–9). In contrast, Henry describes the USA and an American culture which we all, to some degree, recognize: rather than fixed wants and a steady market, Americans are known worldwide for their infinite wants, cultural restlessness, and demanding insatiability. Rather than a tacit understanding as to how much property and consumed experiences can be acquired by one person, Americans share no ceiling on their desires—and seldom impose one individually on themselves, regardless of the amount of personal wealth they possess; after all, what is affluence for if not as a means to acquire more of the things one desires? While primitive cultures often busy themselves with redistributing excess wealth to others, Americans simply build more storage facilities or bigger basements, add another room, acquire a backyard shed, or expand their driveways. Henry traces this divergence between most traditional societies and our own to the historical commitment for production to satisfy innate needs that Riesman, Glazer and Denney (1961), among others, described. As a consequence, Henry observes that single-minded dedication to obtaining food and protection in the USA has led Americans to neglect inner needs. True, institutions have arisen to ostensibly address these—organized religion for spirituality, marriage for sexual relations and intimacy, and voluntary associations for social engagement—but Henry's ethnographic observations lead him to conclude that American society, consumed with the demand for more of everything, creates a culture where the *quality* of experience is given short shrift. In the midst of the driven competitiveness that continually absorbs Americans, there is little "quality time" for human values. Buffeted on all sides by American culture's implicit demand to sustain the American way of life, Henry finds Americans buoyed by a material efficiency that has diminished them emotionally (1965:10–12). In this vision of the American Dream, neither more income equality nor full employment nor increased educational opportunities for the poor will make any difference: a solution that simply tries to offer those who do not have what the rest of us have will only extend the barren acquisitiveness and continual status-seeking of American culture to more Americans.

Henry's analysis is grounded in his perception that the bedrock quality of American culture is its drivenness—its unbalanced emphasis on drives related to achievement, competition, profit, mobility, materialism, security,

and an infinitely expanding estimate of the USA's economy, mission, and sense of itself. As Henry notes, drives like hunger, thirst, and even sex can be satiated, at least for a time; drives for upward mobility and status—when not restrained by the culture—cannot. In our culture, human values—like love, kindness, laughter, and contentment—are typically subordinated to the cultural drives. The evidence is apparent in our distribution of rewards and the strength of our institutions. As Henry points out, there is little difficulty in finding highly compensated jobs in our country that foster more competition, require constant achievement, and lead to increases in status through upward mobility. It is, on the other hand, almost impossible to find the same number of good jobs that support sharing, generosity, and compassion. A quick look at the time, attention, and resources devoted to our institutions produces a similar picture: Anything that contributes to growth of the economy is broadly supported; anything that by its nature restricts itself to the intangibles of human relationships is treated as an afterthought. In light of the emphasis on drivenness, the ideal American becomes one who responds to the competitive and achievement ethics of our culture and fulfills our culture's demands by offering back an inexhaustible reservoir of energy devoted to maximizing his or her personality for those things our culture rewards most (1965:13–16). Driven to succeed, there is nothing more un-American than to be judged a loser by our culture, and the culture's imperatives are sensitively allocated to reflect this pervasive American fear. Further, one cannot decline to compete—that would be un-American, too—so that in Henry's analysis while one can be saddened by American culture's voraciousness one person, alone, cannot withstand it. The success ethic is universally shared by every American or, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's (2004:180) apt phrasing, our culture compels us to unceasingly "run faster, stretch our arms further….[until] one fine morning."

Henry's analysis is based on the proposition that a culture is a system of managed drives, values, and sentiments that, by its nature, must order behavior sufficiently so that the social system does not fly apart. Given that Henry finds—as others have—that competitive drives, achievement goals, and the desire for upward mobility dominate American culture, it is not surprising that many social practices *must* support their ascendancy. He also finds, as others have contended, that the economy is accorded priority among our institutions, subordinating all other interests to maintaining the USA's high standard of living. In doing so, institutional practices are adopted that effectuate this end. In Henry's view, our ubiquitous

advertising culture plays the primary role and does so by embedding a pecuniary philosophy designed to sell the American way of consumer life rather than any specific product (1965:45, 57–58).

Henry's examination of advertising starts from his observation that unlike other communicative acts, advertising is not held to any appreciable standard of truth. Rather, it is the purveyor of pecuniary philosophy, a false discipline that parades itself as though it were a source of traditional knowledge. No sane American could be expected to believe, for example, that "everyone is talking about [the newest car model or a particular brand of cigarettes]" (1965:47). Still, we don't readily call these common mass media-purchased messages "lies." Further, no evidence or proof is offered as we would require of any other assertion. Instead, we readily accept these pecuniary pseudo-truths if they sell merchandise; thus, the measure applied is whether it is good for the economy, sustains the high standard of living, and evokes the necessary action on the part of the American consumer. Henry deems it a form of pecuniary logic when circular, shadowy, and questionable assertions are strung together in a way to persuade that does not supply any rational, empirical basis for its claims. For Henry, our culture encourages this kind of thinking: we accept a form of proof that is not proof because if we became critical thinkers the economy would grind to a halt and the standard of living would fall. In essence, we must to a degree become stupid if we are to sustain the American way of life (1965:47–48). In this manner the existence, and relaxed acceptance, of pecuniary logic makes possible an extraordinary amount of selling and buying that would not otherwise take place. As President Clinton was reminded by James Carville, his 1992 campaign strategist, "It's the economy, stupid."

The ramifications of the pecuniary philosophy Henry describes are everywhere evident. Education, for example, although highly touted everywhere in America, is also routinely derided if it cannot be converted into pecuniary terms. American students in every generation complain, loudly and long, about any course of study that does not lead to a good job or, in the least alternative, to some valued outcome that can be deemed and experienced as a "success." (This latter—a form of success that does not produce immediate monetary reward—is typically conceived as increasing the potential to convert the success into a monetary reward later.) Moreover, every phase of the educational process is evaluated by this pecuniary logic: students resist taking courses that do not lead directly, in lockstep fashion, to the accumulation of precisely those

credits they need for a degree (and no more). This is because there is no point in paying good money for things one doesn't need; the latter are commonly understood to include foreign languages; advanced, immersive study within any field that would slow one down; or any activity that potentially asks one to invest more time and effort than one will ever likely be compensated for later. In short, money (or something that is believed capable of being turned into money) becomes the measure of all things. Few who have lived in the USA for any length of time can reasonably challenge the predominance of this cultural atmosphere.

The essence of advertising, then, becomes the process of targeting a particular group (college students, lower-middle-class housewives, affluent executives) with a message refined and calculated to the perfect extent possible that will evoke a positive recognition and response. The goal is to create a positive connection with the product that will induce the target audience to buy. It is, therefore, a matter of using people as a means to an end: sales leading to profit (1965:58–59). We recognize this to a degree with laws attempting to protect the most vulnerable—such as children—from the highly persuasive, if preposterous, claims that advertising makes. We also have truth in advertising laws but these are often respected more in the breach than in the implementation; "puffing" ("Best pancakes in Tennessee") is lawful and therefore ever present. Advertising works, to a degree, because we want to believe our culture is there to protect and nurture us; advertising busily disguises itself as simply one more cultural message brought to us for our benefit. To the extent advertising can make itself sound like information we can be persuaded to accept its message as telling us something we might need to know. Given that American culture imposes few limits on our desires, our inhibitory emotions have grown lax with disuse; impulse, whim, fun, and self-indulgence rule the day—as every advertiser knows. We are, too often, in the mode of passive acquiescence. This is why we find ourselves humming jingles (although it is disconcerting when we hear someone else doing so). All of this leads to the advertising practice of "selling the sizzle not the steak" which permeates our culture: it is no longer necessary to evaluate, debate, or substantiate the merits of any product or proposal because sales are better if one can simply associate one's product with something desired—in our culture high status, an affluent lifestyle, or sexual conquest rank high among the (implicit) promises that are favored. What Henry terms "cultural maximizers" are particularly useful as models in this regard. The cultural maximizer is simply a person who embodies those qualities most valued

by a culture (1965:31). Since our culture values highly the qualities of competitiveness, achievement, wealth, and success, the image of a cultural maximizer as a satisfied consumer of the product one wishes to sell is an excellent symbol to depict. Consider again, education: is it best to talk about the hard work and challenging curriculum required for a degree at University X? Or would it be preferable to simply show ivy-covered buildings, expansive well-kept lawns, and attractive graduates immersed in their high status, high paying careers? Should one talk about accumulated college debt? Or should one claim University X "provides the best education for the money" or that "our graduates get jobs" and show well-dressed students studying biochemistry? Pecuniary philosophy makes no distinction between a college education and a high-priced automobile and—for the most part—neither do Americans make such a distinction.

Henry's concern with all of the above is the impact it has on us, on our very selves. Accepting what advertisers want of us has a tendency to translate into subordinating our actual needs, as we experience them and define how we wish to fulfill them, to whatever it is the external demands of our society desire for us to choose. If the market needs us to consume, pecuniary logic supplies the motivation for us to do so. By renouncing actual needs, however, and substituting the manufactured lures of higher status, more and better goods, or more and better sex, there is a diminishment of the self. A monetized culture based on the acquisition of external rewards exacts a heavy price for what turn out to be mostly the empty promises of shoddy goods not unlike those we already possess. The self—when reduced to a medium for earning, buying, selling, and consuming—suffers an impoverishment that cannot be compensated for with a higher income, more things, or more purchased experiences. Still, the badly battered self struggles on trying to find meaning in realms where Henry suggests there is little hope of finding it since pecuniary philosophy now inhabits every cultural niche. Will increasing opportunity for those in the lower class to partake of our monetized culture help them reach the American Dream? Only if one conceives of the American Dream in the narrowly grounded class and material terms that many have used to define it for so long.

Henry's analysis has found support in subsequent studies, a number of them arising from investigations that one would not think of initially as descendants of Henry's pecuniary logic. Erin Hatton's (2011) examination of the development of the temporary worker industry is a case in point. The temp industry has from its inception liked to view itself as

simply filling a need that existed in the labor force and then responding to that need. Attributing success of the temp industry to straightforward market forces, however, overlooks important issues (2011:9). First, the industry actively created and shaped demand through countless campaigns to "educate" employers to the benefits of temping. In effect, the industry successfully sold its version of the "liability model" to corporate America. Hatton consciously ties this in with the history of developing the "need for products where none existed" which, naturally, was the cornerstone of Henry's depiction of advertising and modern merchandising generally (2011:10). Hatton argues that the temp industry succeeded by "inventing their own disease" for which they then offered a "cure"—overstaffing could be cured by replacing permanent workers with temps. The industry devised relentless campaigns to convince employers that "swelling of the payroll" (overstaffing) was the primary impediment to corporate profits (2011:70). This narrative eventually "sold" well enough that the temp industry secured a permanent place servicing corporations that it had convinced of its own necessity.

Hatton also demonstrates that the temp industry produced many collateral effects. It has exerted downward pressure on labor standards for all workers (2011:13), thereby keeping the minimum wage low, and became a "quasi-structural" feature of the economy that had to be politically reckoned with on labor issues. It did so, in part, by taking advantage of traditional gender narratives of women, including subnarratives addressing women as workers, homemakers, and sexual objects (2011:13). Development of a "two tiered work force" of temporary and permanent workers fit nicely with the wave of corporate restructuring pursued in the 1980s (2011:17). Temp industry leaders strategically used images of gender, race, and class to develop the "archetypal" temp worker stereotype (2011:30). First, there was the effort to paint a feminine portrait of temporary work. Men and nonwhites were not advertised (even though available as workers from temp companies) because the image would threaten encroachment on historic union labor jobs. Second, the female temp worker idealized in advertising was also a "respectable" middle-class woman thereby enlisting class bias as a strategy. Third, enlisting women workers in a "homemaker" first, "worker" second mentality encouraged them to work for less by selling self-fulfillment through work while not dethroning domesticity. The reality was that women who sought temp employment needed the money (39–40), and this included many women who were not middle class. While my discussion of Henry's methodical

deconstruction of advertising did not focus on his commentary regarding the exploitation of gender stereotypes, his observations fully anticipate Hatton's research on how the temp industry fashioned itself to appeal to very specific target audiences (1965:59–68, 81–86). In essence, Henry— like Hatton—grasped the intentionality involved in manufacturing a dream narrative that appealed to a certain type of woman so that the target of its advertising would step up and accept the role that an industry has designed for her to accept.

The American Dream played a prominent role in the temp industry's advertising approach as well. First, it did so by selling "the good life," much as Henry described in *Culture Against Man* (1965). The rhetoric of the good life for employers was to offer a narrative where a company could reduce its permanent workforce, hire temps in their place, and increase profits. This narrative appealed to corporations because, as Henry argued, a (corporate) standard of living in the form of a profit growth economy was something business leaders believed must be sustained at all costs. The American Dream was used to lure potential temp workers, too, because by earning their own money middle-class (and other) housewives could increase their participation in the consumer good life dangled in front of them. By becoming more invested in spending their weekly paychecks, however, workers became part of the industrialized mass labor force: they possessed no negotiating power and were tethered to the temp workplace. Lured in by the manufactured dream of extra money for part-time work, women were simply exploited because they had been persuaded to buy into the industry narrative. Temporary workers thus became pawns in employers' battles with unions and created what Hatton calls a "climate of insecurity" among permanent employees, even those whose jobs were not realistically threatened (2011:83–84). The good life of the American Dream, once established as an irreducible standard, works well against those who have bought into it, as Henry (1965) understood and Hatton (2011) later demonstrated.

A few years after *Culture Against Man* (1965) appeared, Philip Slater (1990) brought out *The Pursuit of Loneliness* in 1970, whose themes echo many in Henry's analysis. Slater examines the American way of life in cultural terms, like Henry. This is not to say that he doesn't address economics, politics, or history but he does not accord them priority. His point—like Henry's and some others—is that every society has dominant issues that pervade a specific era but also has broad themes that transcend the particularity of any given time period. These superordinate concerns

appear as frequently recurring motifs within a culture. Behaviorally, they may be acted out within the context of existing institutions but their influence on the culture as a whole may be greater (or lesser) than the institutional setting was designed to accommodate. When this occurs—and it occurs regularly in American society—there is an irresolvable tension for a time between existing institutional constraints and demands, which have been formed in an earlier era, and emerging innovations that are reshaping forms of cultural expression. Like Henry, Slater finds the cultural strains at work in American society more powerful than, as one example, purely economic forces because it is a culture's interpretation of life events—including economic ones—that ultimately must prevail. Over time, the strains in culture will resolve (otherwise the culture would fly apart as the subtitle of Slater's book suggests: *American Culture at the Breaking Point*). The strains are only abated, however, by relocating the tension in a different cultural niche or otherwise granting temporary relief in the form of a reordered primacy among cultural concerns.

Slater's principal theme is that American individualism—observed by Tocqueville, subjected to historical analysis by Riesman and his colleagues, deplored by Henry as a central link in the mass consumerism and monetization of American culture—had become so extreme that its influence has distorted American life. Like Henry, Slater saw American middle-class culture turning against its own people. Isolated in their suburban existence, Slater believed that the extreme individualism of small, American nuclear families generated intense Oedipal pressures that fed the drives Henry identified as consuming us—extreme narcissistic hunger for status in the form of upward mobility; a blinding immersion in continuously competitive, achievement activities; and futile and illusory subordination of life to the unceasing demands of new technology on the slim hope that it would somehow save us.

As Todd Gitlin remarks in his introduction to the 1990 text, Slater's argument may seem submerged in the details of another distant era (1990:xi). Shorn of dated references and issues that have been made less urgent by the cascade of subsequent events, Slater's major points confirm the work of a number of prior researchers and anticipate the work of others. Slater begins by commenting on our tendency to locate the source of our society's problems elsewhere: a specific group, our political leadership, our institutions—as if our culture had nothing to do with us (1990:1–2). A consequence of this practice, according to Slater, is that our country is divided—an observation that sounds wholly contempo-

rary and piercingly self-evident although Slater was writing 45 years ago. He lists obvious examples of conditions that could constitute legitimate sources of our national frustration—foreign wars and social dislocation; an alternately runaway, then stagnant, economy; crumbling cities (all still good examples in 2016)—but stops to observe, as did Henry, that the real source of our frustration may well be that we cannot meet our inner needs—for companionship, engagement, and interdependence. We seem unable to control our destiny because our individualism, our competitiveness, and our lack of connectedness do not permit us to envision all these problems as *our* problems requiring us to contribute *our* efforts to develop a collective solution (*our* solution). Slater (1990:148) observes that we might well quote the comic strip *Pogo* as we try to explain our culture: "We have met the enemy and they is us."

As Slater discusses, however, neither the quality of life in a society nor the cultural forces at play are solely within the grasp of the individual. Indeed, it is our unexamined dedication to American individualism that deludes us into thinking that there is any real alternative to shared dependence in the face of life. For Slater, because we are blinded by isolated individualism we neither can grapple successfully with the major external problems in our national way of life nor can we meet our desires for community, engagement, and purpose (1990:5–8). In this vacuum, we are at the mercy of the same forces that Henry (1965) perceived battering us about: unrelieved competition that reinforces our atomistic separation and lonely weakness. Unable to effect changes in the social order that would help satisfy our individual hunger, we also can't join forces to design a new strategy or voice a new goal. Trapped in our own individualism we often react by simply grasping at what is readily available—that is, more of the same: more freedom to move about, more automobiles, and more tawdry distractions. Slater (1990), like Henry (1965), sees the excesses of American capitalism driven by these vain attempts to make the illusion of our competitive outcomes satisfying when, by definition, winning the next competition for things that are not worth having is not a prescription for happiness, life satisfaction, or what Lyndon Johnson called "The Great Society" (1990:10–16).

At the root of our disenchantment, Slater sees an "avoiding tendency" that propels us to address symptoms not causes, to act as though we have solved a problem by identifying it. One way we do this is to actively avoid even looking at a problem. Thus, we hide the socially deficient where they won't bother us—in prison, in mental health centers, in group homes,

in our ghettoes—whether white, black, or Latino. In the meantime, we can celebrate the paltry accomplishments of the normal as we escalate them through ranked grades of our conventional institutions where they, too, seldom need encounter the socially deficient (except, of course, for some of their professors!). When these hidden failures resurface—as the occasional parolee who commits havoc in our midst, or Timothy McVeigh, Terry Nichols, and other, more recent, homegrown terrorists do—we are shocked: we thought we had taken care of that! (1990:18–19). Our complex institutions, draped in fine language and arcane procedure, act as insulators since they abet our tendency to "professionalize" all problems, thereby washing our hands of them. Thus, by assigning every problem to a group of licensed, certified, designated handlers, we are able to define professional handling of the problem as the "solution." In reality, there is no solution to most of the problems that bedevil us: crime (and the stock market) is up, crime (and the stock market) is down, crime takes new forms—but there is still crime, just as the mentally ill, the homeless, and the poor remain. Yet, we can't give in for the real reason society's institutions are organized in the manner we have chosen is economic in nature. Like Henry (1965), Slater (1990) believes that we have become trapped by our own affluence and we can't let anything upset it, certainly not the misfits. Thus, we are forever beholden to the need for a growth economy simply to keep the entire groaning machinery running when what we really need is a revised purpose and institutions to match.

Slater's explanation for our subjugation to the dictates of continued production of hula hoops, however, differs from Henry's in this regard: the energy directed to supporting productively unnecessary and socially wasteful activities cannot be sufficiently inspired simply by calls to compete augmented by a seemingly universal desire for more status. Rather, one more factor is necessary in his opinion: artificially creating a scarcity in the environment that members of our society will work continually to achieve. This is done, in Slater's view, by placing time, place, mode, and partner restrictions on sexual expression and doing so in a symbolic manner so that those that might hold sexual interest are made inaccessible, nonexistent, or irrelevant (1990:79–80). Assuming that Slater's grasp of our cultural dilemma has some merit, a missing element in Henry's (1965) discussion of advertising is the impact it has had on sex—that is, to desexualize actual sex and sexualize anything and everything else by artificially associating it with sex. Here we have the "sell the sizzle, not the streak" phenomenon elevated to its natural (or unnatural) extreme.

The notion of romantic love works well in this cultural context, too, for hardly anything could restrict sexual expression further than "waiting for the one and only." While waiting for romantic love, based as it is on an almost impossible dream or fantasy to fulfill, Americans will have plenty of energy to devote elsewhere, which will suit our commitment to a continual growth economy just fine (1990:81–85). Jay Gatsby, besotted with Daisy, was a veritable generating power station for the economy—buying mansions, beautiful shirts, and yellow convertibles—because he could only "earn" (a peculiarly relevant term given our market mentality) her (romantic) love against all comers by the means of out-competing his adversaries in the contest for wealth and status. His willingness to bet on an emotional long shot by putting everything on the table was, of course, doomed in the end, and Slater's analogy to what our economy asks of us anticipates a similar outcome: just as romantic love that couldn't be consummated didn't overcome life's obstacles for Jay Gatsby so our American effort to fulfill all our wants (and do so many times over) runs into Henry's observation that the task is impossible—there will always be new wants artificially created for us and by us (1965:19–22).

Regardless of the merits of any particular observation or argument that Henry (1965) and Slater (1990) pose, their cultural analyses permit us to relinquish the underlying assumption of most American Dream studies: we need not limit our thinking to discussions of whether the "opportunity gap" can be narrowed and the promise of upward mobility in American society restored, thereby "saving" the American Dream. Rather, we can take up the issue of ultimate questions and ask what our country and culture should be like; we can ask ourselves about the quality of our direct experience; we can dispense with living to support the Gross National Product. As Slater takes pains to remind us over and over: "[Our obsession with growth is] only measurements of means—what is the goal? *What do we want to do with our work and our resources?* Just make jobs? Just make money? A job *does* something. Money *buys* something. We keep forgetting what it is we want—what kind of environment, what kind of life" (1990:149; emphasis in original). In this regard, a true study of the American Dream must finally address just what it is that Americans want (and not only what Americans think they want or have been told to want), which may not include many (or any) of the presently available options.

A second strength of both Henry's (1965) and Slater's (1990) books is their understanding that the USA's economically driven competitive culture produces backlash. Thus, the success ethic, as Merton (1938)

informed us, produces adaptations that can alienate us from our country and from each other. For Henry (1965:323–32, 248–62; 350–85), the waste products of American capitalism include dysfunctional families, alienated adolescents, and the marginally (and grossly) mentally ill. Slater (1990:134–37) notes the many subgroups that are marginalized on the fringes of society but saves his most serious concern for the young, generally, who he fears may be lost by winning. Absorbed into the conventional culture by commitments to work, marriage, and parenthood, Slater foresees that their liberating impulses will be co-opted by the existing cultural demands, thereby diluting any energy or focus the young may have available for cultural change. The implicit lesson from both authors is simply to look to the cultural misfits—and especially those who have in one way or another dropped out of the American Dream race although they were well equipped to succeed in it—to find out how the Dream is doing. This is an important lesson as a study of the disaffection generated by and against the American way of life has been a missing consideration in many of the studies we have examined.

A prominent investigator of disaffection with USA's culture among the young during the 1965–70 period in which Henry (1965) and Slater (1990) were writing was Kenneth Keniston. In two books, *The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society* (1965) and *Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth* (1968), Keniston analyzed the psychological processes that led some affluent, achieving young Americans to distance themselves from the mainstream American culture. While one group used their alienation from conventional American values to foster their commitment to efforts directed at radical political and social change, the other group simply abandoned their own culture's central premises. Both groups, however, represented and symbolized the process of cultural estrangement and disaffection that the American way of life can generate. For these Americans, the conventional American Dream died. Although dated, and therefore occasionally referencing events that are mere historical notes today, the analyses are perceptive in their evocation of the grounds upon which Americans are persuaded to renounce any allegiance to the American Dream. Keniston's work enlivens us to the dangers and limitations inherent in the American Dream beyond those we have considered.

In *The Uncommitted* (1965:3), Keniston writes of an era described by his contemporary social commentators as characterized by "[a]lienation, estrangement, disaffection, anomie, withdrawal, dis-engagement, separation, non-involvement, apathy, indifference, and neutralism." As Keniston

(1965:7) points out, while the alienation of the poor, marginalized, and rejected should concern us, it is the estrangement of the average, affluent, otherwise adjusted member of society or the withdrawal of the fortunate, talented, and privileged—some of whose lives he will examine—that perhaps raises even greater cause for concern. For the poor, there is a relatively simple explanation for alienation: for them, the material prosperity of the last century does not really exist. The general material progress of Western society affects the impoverished little and for those otherwise rejected as misfits, material well-being cannot compensate for social exclusion, isolation, and disconnectedness (1965:7). For the group of Harvard College undergraduates Keniston identifies, however, their alienation has few roots in oppression, denial of opportunity, exclusion, or material deprivation nor can it easily be cured by admission to our finer institutions, social cheerleading, or higher incomes. His study subjects are a group of Americans who possess no obvious reasons to be indifferent, or worse, to their culture and society.

Keniston's investigation began when he discerned that the outlooks of the alienated formed a coherent pattern which he termed "alienation syndrome" (1965:14). Keniston spent several years attempting to delineate the core features of this alienated perspective from a broad study of more than 2000 students. He then identified 12 students through the use of psychological tests who exhibited extreme alienation. He coupled this group with a dozen students who exhibited extremely low scores of psychological alienation, and a control group of a dozen students who were not extreme in their ratings in either direction (1965:14). For the study, each student wrote a lengthy autobiography, a statement of values, and a philosophy of life; took the Thematic Apperception Test; participated in a variety of psychological experiments; and sat for repeated interviews. The study subjects' involvement entailed about two hours per week over three academic years (about 200 hours of total contact), a length of time that permitted Keniston to come to know each student well (1965:14–15).

The portrait of alienation Keniston developed is instructive because it reveals a degree of unhappiness and discomfiture with American society that is distressingly at odds with most notions of the American Dream. Moreover, the students' disillusionment is apparently relatively immune from the various "solutions" proposed for revival or redirection of the American Dream from among those conventionally offered. As Keniston astutely recognizes, alienated individuals may well possess distinctive psy-

chological histories that make them more susceptible to marginality and estrangement as a group, but the alienated syndrome also requires for its gestation a society, and culture, that inspires scant enthusiasm, even among the normal, because of its alienating qualities. In this latter sense, then, Keniston's study is an investigation of the manner in which the American way of life has gone wrong, an examination of why the American Dream appears to offer nothing to some who would seem to be its most honored beneficiaries.

Keniston's analysis of the alienating features of the American way of life begins with his observation that societies, like individuals, often ignore their own most troublesome traits. Like individuals, a society engages in denial because conscious recognition of the taken-for-granted nature of some activities would be disruptive; consequently, focusing on the painful, but obvious, shortcomings of our society—the economic inequality, the class, and racial residential segregation—meets with a resistance that is often nothing short of virulent. The social analyst who has the courage to force such awareness will perhaps be experienced, and then castigated, as a critic and naysayer—especially if he or she does not provide an easily digestible "solution" to the problem. Keniston offers no such easily swallowed placebo.

Keniston begins his discussion of those features of American society that contribute alienating forces to our lives by addressing chronic change, both technological and social. Keniston notes that American society since World War II has formally and consciously focused its praise on the unprecedented new opportunities that mid-twentieth century industrialism brought to the USA. Still, even though American society has benefitted materially the changes required—at home, in the workplace, in our collective social and political lives—have still been a source of deep stress to many. As Keniston observes, when a society changes quickly, it develops the feeling among its members that little can be counted on to endure. There is little in these circumstances that elders can pass on to the young and little the young believe they can learn from the old. The young see no better prospect for themselves with respect to any children they may bear. All become focused instead on the present and preparing themselves to accommodate whatever demands for change society imposes on them next (1965:210–12). Rapid change thus has a tendency to fracture relationships. Importantly, changes that inspire stress and anxiety are among the sources that drive any society to devote energy to developing explanatory myths (1965:222). According to Keniston, rapid change has

forced American society to respond this way; it has altered the traditional relationship of Americans to the passage of time, to their forebears, and the future (1965:228–34, 234–40). American society therefore needs a myth that can knit the culture together without disrupting its commitment to progress, regardless of how destructive to individuals or American society the commitment to unregulated change can be (1965:222). Although Keniston does not say so in as many words, this mythic function is fulfilled by the American Dream, a myth that conceives of change as progress and always for the good (1965:223–25).

Unrestrained change, however, is not the only feature of our society that compels us to believe in the American Dream. The division of life into multiple crosscutting groups, the fragmentation of labor into the coordinated efforts of increasingly specialized workers, the consequent shattering of community across the boundary lines of class, race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation (1965:241–60)—all lend support to the practical importance of developing a shared cultural myth that has the potential to reunite what has been broken asunder. The old problem of freedom—the need to seek the greatest possible relief from social restraint and oppression—has now been replaced by the new problem of freedom—how to make like choices in a constantly changing environment. The American Dream, nebulous guidepost that it is, still offers a protective umbrella under which one can try to gather together the shards of American culture and form something of a way of life. It offers a framework, even if filling in the details feels like a forced attempt at creating a wholly unique integration of self. As Keniston observes, in any society one of the basic binding forces between members is the collective myth (1965:315); a successful cultural myth offers members of a society room to find a positive identity within its embrace (1965:317). The American Dream is our collective myth; its binding force works as positive goal for many, but not all, Americans. Hence, the serious attention accorded it.

Finally, Keniston addresses the central function of any society's life—the obligation to bring up its young in a manner that socializes them to embrace and perform the tasks their society will require of them. Keniston concludes that three outcomes are predominant goals within American child socialization: methods that foster cognition and reason (as opposed to spiritualism or inner contemplation), encourage a desire to achieve, and to push the child into independence (1965:289). Each of these qualities is fostered by allegiance to the conventional American Dream: cognition

and reason within our postindustrial society will enable a child to achieve; a child motivated to achieve will have the skills and wherewithal to do so; and independence will be necessary to apply both attributes to the ever-changing American environment.

The convergence of the cultural forces Keniston describes produces some who reject American society even though they hold a privileged place in it. The students who possessed alienated attitudes exhibit a deep and pervasive distrust of conventional American institutions and the conventional Americans who hold positions of trust within them. Political and social activities strike them as futile; attachment to existing groups unattractive; and the potential for real communication and intimacy doomed to failure. Materialism, the success ethic, security through social conformity, standardized and homogenized features of our mass culture— all repel them. They hold the view that the universe is essentially empty and meaningless; happiness—a goal enshrined in both the Declaration of Independence and the American Dream—holds no appeal but rather garners contempt, anger, and scorn. Optimism and progress clearly do not hold a place in their outlook (1965:143–80). From all that the USA and American culture have to offer, these alienated students could find little worth pursuing.

Like *The Uncommitted*, Keniston's *Young Radicals* is based on a case study of roughly a dozen young people. His subjects were actively engaged in the New Left organizing effort termed Vietnam Summer in 1967 at the movement's national office in Cambridge, MA. Keniston was invited by some of the leaders to participate, and although he first declined he eventually spent the summer tape recording multiple lengthy interviews with 17 individuals. His psychological profile of these young radicals grew out of these transcripts. Generally, Keniston proceeded as he did in *The Uncommitted* (1965)—by looking for crucial themes within the past and present lives of his subjects that would illuminate their personal development growing up within American culture (1968:3, 8–13, 20–25).

Among the critical themes Keniston noted among the subjects, a number have an obvious connection and relevance to our inquiry here: the relationship of these young people to middle-class monetary and success values; a feeling of openness to the future; the gradualness of entry into radicalism and a concomitant loss of past friends and associations; the desire to find the "personal in the political" and the need to find new friends in that context; a sense of personal inadequacy; and questions that

members of the group continually voice about their own future and their future involvement with radicalism (1968:26). To a substantial degree, the comments the young radicals offer about their life and motivations create a window into the source of their dissatisfactions with the American way of life that sometimes mirrors Keniston's observations in *The Uncommitted* (1965). For example, one young man discussing negative features of his parents' relationship that he seems to be reproducing with his girlfriend observes, "That makes me very upset because I consider my father a failure." Keniston notes that fear of being like one, or another, or both of one's parents is a recurring theme this young man shares with others within his group of subjects (1968:34). Closely related to this theme of parental rejection are fears of absorption in conventional middle-class life. This reluctance is based on a shared recognition among the subjects that "things are not working" in American society (1968:39). For one young woman, it is the materialism evident in her mother's life that inspired her gradual engagement with radicalism (1968:3). For other interview subjects, finding any model for an adult life within American culture is the problem. Keniston quotes a female subject:

> There is that whole conflict about being a professional, leading a middle-class life which none of us have been able really to resolve. How do you be an adult in this world?…It's very easy to get caught back up in it, especially when you don't know what you're going to be doing over the next years…I don't want to get caught up in that whole professionalism and lose something of what has been built into me….In a lot of people, especially people that are doing professional organizing work, there is a huge conflict…about being middle-class, about having things, and all that means. (1968:39–40)

Importantly, while rejection of the American middle-class lifestyle is a recognizable pattern, the inability to identify a meaningful alternative is of equal note. In essence, these young radicals, having rejected the conventional American Dream, have not been successful in formulating an alternative Dream for themselves. Like the subjects Keniston found among Harvard College students in *The Uncommitted* (1965), estrangement from the conventional American way of life is the easy part; imagining and constructing an alternative American future within the USA is much harder.

Slater's (1990) description of our way of life posits that many—and, really, perhaps all—of our problems are of our own making. Henry

(1965) and Keniston (1965, 1968) do not explicitly express the same conclusion but identify many of the same alienating forces that undergird Slater's central theme. Pressured by cultural forces on every side, we have fashioned our hopes and expectations for life out of shards of experience and accidental historical circumstance. We have then invested these homemade dreams with the power to blind us to the deceptive reality of our own acts. We have made the bed we must now lie in because we accepted the imperatives of our collective culture which, unexamined, we have let run wild. The income gap that we have recently rediscovered exists because of what we have done (efficient and successful unfettered modern capitalism) and what we have neglected to do (create sustainable communities where every American can have a job with a living wage); we cannot solve this dilemma without changes we are unwilling to make. Likewise, as members of the middle class, we have relied on one tantalizing, but ephemeral and untested, lure after another to seek our individual American Dreams while relinquishing any hope of seeing our society reorganized to reduce or eliminate its wastefulness, its unfairness, and its exclusivity. Meanwhile, we dither, and avoid asking ourselves what we really want, and in the rare instance when we permit ourselves to envision something new and personal we desire we shrink from the risk of authenticity. Cumulatively, our actions and our evasions have created a society that disappoints many, alienates a few, and seems to please fewer and fewer. Such critical visions as Slater, Henry, and Keniston offer are, of course, anathema to the American Dream, and, so, it is best to simply ignore them. We did so at the time the criticisms were generated and we undoubtedly will ignore them now, fashioning new Band-Aids for an American Dream hardly worth saving and one that perhaps cannot be saved.

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The American Dream in a Diminished Economy

As we have seen from Galbraith's (1976) analysis of our immediate postwar affluent society, the mid-twentieth-century American way of life was built on a prosperous economic foundation that many believed would never end. As Newman (1993:ix) frames it, "Americans came to assume that prosperity was their birthright: each generation expected to exceed the standard of living their parents had struggled to achieve." The analyses written about the American way of life in the 1980s constituted predominantly a corrective to the notion of a US economy that reflected continuing vital growth and prosperity. Indeed, as Newman (1988, 1993), Bluestone and Harrison (1982), Harrison and Bluestone (1988), Wilson (2012, 1996), and others documented, the late 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s were a period of economic stagnation and decline driven by deindustrialization, outsourcing of jobs, and the disappearance of those unskilled and semiskilled jobs that did not require advanced education or technical training. Indeed, Bluestone and Harrison (1982:3) date the start of the economic decline even earlier but acknowledge that by the 1980s the crisis had become full blown when:

> every newscast seemed to contain a story about a plant shutting down, another thousand jobs disappearing from a community, or the frustrations of workers unable to find full-time jobs utilizing their skills and providing enough income to support their families.

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Newman (1993:ix), commenting on the human toll, pointed to the "culture of optimism" that had prevailed in the postwar years and the fact that the economic decline had "crushed these expectations" for prosperity and a better standard of living for each successive generation. Newman specifically noted that the widespread postwar prosperity was the linchpin for Americans who sought, and in the first postwar generation of workers, achieved their vision of the American Dream (1993:2).

Newman's investigations compellingly document the critical nature of a sustaining economic foundation for the American way of life and the havoc that is wrought when the economic support for a middle-class way of life disappears. As she writes in the preface to her 1988 (ix) book, *Falling from Grace*:

> Hundreds of thousands of middle class families plunge down America's social ladder every year. They lose their jobs, their income drops drastically, and they confront prolonged economic hardship, often for the first time. In the face of this downward mobility, people long accustomed to feeling secure and in control find themselves suddenly powerless and unable to direct their lives.

Newman is not the only writer to examine the anxiety that the middle class experienced. Ehrenreich (1989), writing just a year later, took up the subject in her look at *Fear of Falling*. Recounting the anxious account of one middle-class man who wrote of $4500 monthly mortgage payments, commuting and childcare costs for a two-career couple, payments to retirement funds, and anticipated college costs for a then 2-year-old that economists predicted could exceed $100,000 annually, Ehrenreich (1989:244–45) acknowledges that something is "terribly wrong" when the once modest expectations of Americans cannot be met even with a much higher than average income.

Newman (1988, 1993) contributes an important new element to investigations of the monetary American Dream we have not seen extensively developed by a sociologist before: she documents the *experiences* of middle-class Americans who have descended down the rungs of the economic system or discovered that upon entering the adult workforce the "land of (economic) opportunity" no longer exists in the USA. Yet, she does more, as she also addresses the experiences of those members of the middle class from different generations and contrasts some of their differing views on the American Dream. The 150 in-depth interviews

she conducted and her distinctive orientation offer novel data and a new perspective for the latter half of the twentieth century.

Newman (1988:x–xi) also identifies a significant question that has been missing from many of the prior analyses: what is the *meaning* of being middle class in America? More to the point, what happens to the self when the economic supports for that way of life are withdrawn? Newman, an anthropologist by training (although she has held a number of appointments in sociology departments), provides the usual justifications for her research, but perhaps the most telling rationale she offers is the story of her grandfather. A traveling salesman for a household appliances company for 30 years, he was discharged at the age of 60—in 1959 during a period of national prosperity—when the company was sold to another concern. As Newman (1988:xi) describes it, "He lost his center of gravity, his feeling of worth. He died not long thereafter, a much sadder man than he had been during his working life."

Newman's findings, while not surprising in some respects, are useful for documenting what we have, no doubt, secretly suspected: economic success is seldom enough for many Americans to consider it their sole American Dream. Rather, it is a certain minimum floor of economic success established by our expectations, a crucial baseline for Americans to build an identity, that helps them maintain belief in the Dream. It is also true, as she ably demonstrates, that once the "economic floor" is established Americans invest themselves intensely in the various lifestyle perquisites that are commonly available, and even expected, for a person or family with a certain income. This means that any disturbance to the middle-class economy will be perceived as having a notable effect if it impinges on important status or lifestyle requisites. As Newman's interviews demonstrate, individuals who have been taught to strive for upward mobility do not, by and large, take it well when mobility stagnates or, even worse, turns negatively into a descent. Collectively, the insights that Newman's work offers us suggest that it is *not* economic changes per se that drive, or disrupt, the American Dream; rather, it is the fact that cherished expectations regarding how American life is supposed to work have been met, have not been met, or have been altered in ways that undercut trust in societal institutions.

In her initial chapter (entitled *Nightmares*), Newman's interview subjects express how they and other members of their family experienced their newly changed status. The language the interviewees use is instructive: it often departs from the rarefied analytics of supply–demand

and Keynesian economics; the language differs as well from the bland recitation of statistical data gathered in *Middletown*, the gently soothing verities pronounced by new residents of Levittown and long-time residents of Boston's Italian north end, or the sober policy recommendations of distinguished social scientists. The latter, having looked over the American Dream landscape, often write in a way that suggests they are ready and willing to explain to us what we need to do to fix the American Dream (1) for the middle class, (2) for the working class, or (3) for the underclass. Newman (1988:229) documents her subjects' emotions instead: feelings of anger, near despair, or unfairness are among those commonly voiced by the victims of job actions leading to downward mobility. Human feelings, not economics, finance, or policy prescriptions, are the coin of the outplaced world.

Newman's (1988:2–7) first subject, for example, conveyed his experiences after losing an executive job in the computer industry. Initial optimism about finding a new position through headhunters soon turned to anxiety. After 9 months, David and his wife Julia felt they needed to sell their house to rid themselves of the mortgage payments. The house sold but at a much lower price than the house was arguably worth or that they hoped to receive. Then the social consequences of the economic loss became increasingly apparent:

> After a while [of looking for a new job] David stopped calling his friends, and they ceased trying to contact him. Having always been sociable people, David and Julia found it hard to cope with the isolation.

> When friends ceased to call, David was convinced this meant that they no longer cared what happened to him. At least they should try to help him, he thought. (1988:3)

David and Julia's two teenage children also felt the effects—and unleashed their fury at the disruption introduced into their lives. When the family moved to the New York area, only 2 months before, both teenagers experienced difficulty integrating into their new high school. Now, their son, having established himself in a peer social set, was being asked to move again. Julia found the uncertainty hard to bear. She had few places she could release the strain. David told Newman (1988:5), "Since becoming unemployed there's really nothing, especially for my wife—no place where a woman can talk about things. There are no real relationships. She's hurt. People say to her, 'With all the companies on

Long Island, your husband can't find a job?'" David knew what was happening in the industry; he knew every computer company was discharging employees in response to competitive market forces. He didn't, at first, take it personally. Later, as Newman (1988:6–7) recounts, all he could think was: "What is wrong with me? Why doesn't anyone call me? What have I done wrong?" As difficult as unexpected downward mobility is for those displaced through no fault of their own, it is perhaps even more brutal in attacking the foundations of family and kinship relations (1988:95). While the individualistic focus of American life leads us to rivet our attention on the person immediately affected, the reality is that it is more often not one person's upward trajectory that is derailed but an entire family's ascent. The shared jolt is demoralizing.

David and Julia's experience was archetypal for most members of the middle class Newman studied: financial hardship was merely the start of an experience that made these downwardly mobile middle-class Americans face psychological, social, and practical difficulties that ensued from losing their "proper place" in society. Success—always celebrated in American society with rituals, honors, and events—makes downward mobility, which goes unacknowledged and possesses no accepted symbolic language to accompany it, the hidden and isolating experience of an invisible group (1988:9).

David's story raises the issue of meritocratic systems of assessment and reward. The core idea of meritocracy—that one is selected (for placement, for promotion, for reward) on the basis of merit and that there is a rational process that winnows out those who deserve to succeed from those who do not (McNamee and Miller 2014:1–3)—establishes a cultural expectation gap that is difficult for many to overcome when American reality does not fulfill meritocratic ideals. In a culture of meritocratic individualism, each person is responsible for his or her own fate; those who succeed both reap the rewards and are entitled to them; those who fail must have failed for some shortcoming in themselves. In a society that believes individuals are masters of their own fate, and that one's rise or fall occurs within a system that rewards intelligence, effort, skill, and other personal qualities, a substantial burden must be shouldered by each individual (2014:4). Students of meritocracy and the American Dream have noted the high degree of interrelationship and interdependence between the two. The reader will recall that James Truslow Adams (1933) described a critical feature of the American Dream as a nation in which any person could prosper "according to his ability or achievement." If the American Dream is defined primarily

on economic and class status grounds, a handful of outcomes tend to factor into those definitions, including (1) home ownership; (2) improved life chances for children (which has been further operationally refined in the twenty-first-century USA as the ability to send children to college); (3) opportunities to become financially secure; and (4) support for a financially comfortable retirement (McNamee and Miller 2014:11–12). Belief in the meritocratic ideal is an ideology that proffers these outcomes of the American Dream when a person deserves to receive them according to his or her own talents and efforts. Although there is some modest variability in how the American Dream is defined (see Hochschild 1995 at 23, as one example), the key features of one's own contribution through hard work (that builds on innate qualities like intelligence) are consistently endorsed by most Americans (McNamee and Miller 2014:2–3).

To be displaced through no fault of one's own is a debilitating process. The suspicion in a meritocratic culture will always be that there was, indeed, a reason for the decision; to be unable to find a suitable replacement position—even after months or years of trying—is experienced as a loss of the former capable, deserving self. It is this loss of the self, not merely the loss of income or status, which makes the sting so palpable. As Newman (1988:60) observes, shame and embarrassment consume the discharged manager when he or she encounters former colleagues and friends. Both parties are uncomfortable and both parties make efforts to avoid further contact. While this solves the short-term problem for each, it can only exacerbate the dilemma of the displaced manager, who is dependent in most circumstances on contacts for obtaining a new position (McNamee and Miller 2014:79–80)—for "landing on one's feet." When one's contacts go "dead," one may feel that he or she is "dead" within the only circle that matters. When this occurs, it is increasingly difficult to resume employment at or near the same status level. In the worst-case scenario, outplaced job seekers may find themselves trapped in a low-wage, low-status cul-de-sac that constitutes the dismal "end of the line" for former managerial-level employees (Newman 1988:84). Individuals who find themselves caught in this dilemma typically reported negative feelings to Newman: disappointment at loss of salary, frustration over underutilization of their advanced skills, aggravation over too little recognition, and anger at few or no prospects for promotion, among others (1988:89).

Displacement is one way in which some Americans have experienced the end of the traditional American Dream over the last 30 years. Newman's subsequent book, *Declining Fortunes* (1993), examines a

second, arguably more common way: postwar middle-class prosperity, once accepted as a given by two generations, turns out to be not as secure as many believed. The middle-class ideals of home ownership, financial security, and reliable future prospects all incinerated in the job meltdowns and corporate outsourcing of the 1980s. As Newman (1993:1) opens her narrative she tells the story of how Lauren Calder, born in the halcyon days of the 1950s, pursued the American Dream by completing her education and secured the type of mid-level white-collar job that would make it all possible. Yet, something went awry in America and Lauren suffered the consequences. Home ownership for her seemed an impossible goal. Prices escalated and she was boxed out of the market. Her starting salary meant little to spare and she was tied almost mercilessly to a strict budget. There were no promotions or salary increases in an era where cutbacks and cost savings were the rule. Better educated than her father and with a higher profile professional identity than her mother, the gap between what she had been led to expect and the reality of what she found seemed unbridgeable.

For individuals like Lauren the frustration is not only in results one cannot achieve. It is due in part from the fact that Lauren, like many Americans, believed in the system. As Newman describes (1993:4), Lauren did not take shortcuts; Lauren told her:

> I killed myself in school to get the good grades…All the way along I was rewarded in just the way I was supposed to be….That was what the book said. And then you got out here to the real world and suddenly the last chapter is a sad joke. You're told you work hard for a living and you can buy a house in your hometown, or the next town down the line that's a little cheaper. But it's not true and it's really very perturbing.

While Lauren's story tells the more general story, Newman is adept at identifying the additional fault lines that transected middle-class American existence in the 1980s. She notes that the frustrations and fears of baby boomers do not stop with the economic barriers they faced but extend to the competitive atmosphere their children must confront. As Newman observes, middle-class parents perceive competitive challenges at every level: Children who do not get admitted to good high schools have a hard time gaining admission to competitive universities; young adults in second-tier colleges are then similarly disadvantaged in their attempts to gain admission to quality graduate and

professional schools or in the race to obtain high-paying offers for jobs in a competitive job market (1993:6).

As Newman further documents, transformations in the life chances Americans experience in the generations born since World War II have impacted their personal and social landscape. The diminished standard of living these generations have encountered has inspired domestic conflicts over how to share work at home, the decision to have children (and when and how many), and the time and energy to devote to responsibilities such as aging parents, civic engagement, and social life generally (1993:8). Each of these dilemmas is primarily driven by the erosion of the economic base for the conventional American Dream. Escalating home prices, occupational insecurity, limited internal job mobility, stagnant incomes and the resultant cost-of-living squeeze—all fundamentally undercut an American Dream premised on a vital, and growing, economic foundation (1993:11). Having optimistically come to expect security in an economy that no longer exists, Newman finds many middle-class Americans confused, frustrated, and angry by their unexpectedly diminished prospects.

Bluestone and Harrison (1982) and Harrison and Bluestone (1988) traverse the same generational eras as Newman but do so with a focus on explaining the underlying economic forces that produce these consumer, and ultimately, human strains. They start with the observation that by the early 1980s the national economy had ceased to grow. It is this fundamental difference between the 1960s and 1980s that anchors their investigation into what happened to the American Dream. In their view, the lack of market and profit growth in many industries convinced companies to disinvest their capital. Deindustrialization moved capital from producing goods through plants, machinery, and workers to unproductive speculation, mergers, and acquisitions, and foreign investment intended to grow profits by gaining tax advantages, new market opportunities, and lower wage and benefits costs (1982:6). These decisions, in turn, led to high rates of unemployment, continuing sluggishness in the domestic economy, and the failure to compete successfully in international markets that undercut the prospects for middle-class Americans that Newman revealed. Bluestone and Harrison urge that a fundamental contradiction exists between capital and community. This divergence leads to capital flight whenever and wherever capital investment does not produce profitability for investors. The consequences for the human community are typically economic dislocation of the type Newman (1988) identified among displaced middle-class managers.

In essence, Bluestone and Harrison (1982) confirm Newman's findings, as well as those of the Lynds (1929, 1937) and Terkel (1970) less directly: while economic strains, recessions, or depressions impact many Americans, some Americans prosper in every era. Here, the investors with highly mobile capital can take advantage of that mobility by displacing some American workers who are then left behind. Those American workers who are left behind then must face a restructured job market where a new urban service economy dominates many cities, and their suburbs, and financial market services dominate the corporate sector (1988:69–75, 53–56). The latter employ white-collar professionals in high pressure, competitively sought positions that require college degrees; the urban/suburban service economy does not require college degrees, requires little training, and pays only minimum wage. The upshot has been a bifurcation of labor markets. In Bluestone and Harrison's view, the consequence is a polarization of American society, further stifling the return to robust economic growth and a sustainable middle class.

Kevin Phillips (1992:x), analyzing the politics of the economic decline Newman, Bluestone, and Harrison present, notes that the Clinton victory in 1992 was built on successfully tapping the "middle class anger and fear of the economic future." Like so many of the works examined, however, Phillips seldom mentions the phrase "American Dream," although his entire book is about threats to, and prospects for, achieving it. Yet Phillips is adept at summarizing the converging forces that affect the citizen-consumer's economic way of life—and affect their political direction—more so than some prior analysts. Phillips' list of important factors includes the rise in taxes for the middle class during the George Bush years (1988–91), higher medical costs, Social Security deductions, higher interest rates, and new routine service costs prominent among them (1992:93, 95–96). Phillips acknowledges each of the economic restructuring forces, and their effects, identified by Newman, Bluestone, and Harrison, yet urges that it is the items he enumerates that produced the broadest negative economic consequences for the widest range of people. Collectively, these forces inspired political convergence around economic issues at what he calls the "boiling point." Bill Clinton was the political beneficiary.

Phillips is also more focused on pointing out the societal danger of middle-class economic decline. In his view, the principal danger is the potential for a middle-class abandonment of government and politics (1992:258–59). If the country lost this "vital center" the country might face political ruin. The periodically resurgent populism that Phillips

identifies as allowing the USA to safely weather social and economic crises by tacking back and forth to either side of an orderly, centrist direction might thus be lost. Phillips astutely recognizes that the pain and loss Newman's subjects reveal, and the structural economic deterioration that Bluestone and Harrison report, constitute merely the "tipping point" for the political groundswell that followed. In short, threats to the economic foundation for the American Dream are political gold. While the American Dream may falter and fail, such circumstances will only provide politicians rhetorical ammunition to discharge at their opponents and political promises to sprinkle among voters.

Perhaps the most ambitious effort to wrestle with the American prospect during the 1980s was Robert Bellah's team effort in *Habits of the Heart* (1996), originally published in 1985 and later updated. Bellah and his four collaborators announced their conception of the undertaking on the first page of the Preface:

> How ought we to live? How do we think about how to live? Who are we, as Americans? What is our character? These are questions we have asked our fellow citizens in many parts of the country. (1996:xli)

As the authors explain, the title of their book came from Tocqueville who described the early American mores he discerned as "habits of the heart" (1996:xlii). Among the American institutions that he believed would serve Americans well were family life, religion, and engagement with local politics, although he expressed concern about excessive individualism. For Bellah and his colleagues, the growth of individualism has become the central problem that warrants their extended inquiry into the American way of life (1996:xlii). Their language is nearly apocalyptic in tone:

> We are concerned that this individualism may have grown cancerous – that is may be destroying those social integuments that Tocqueville saw as moderating its more destructive potentialities, that it may be threatening the survival of freedom itself. We want to know what individualism in America looks and feels like, and how the world appears in its light. (1996:xlii)

To carry out their investigation, they state they will focus on how private and public life work in the USA with special emphasis on why citizens do, or do not, participate in the public sphere.

   With a small research team and modest budget, Bellah and his collaborators chose to concentrate their research on white, middle-class Americans, a choice that has obvious limitations. Their justifications include the importance of the middle classes for successful democratic institutions and the historic centrality of the middle class in American society in particular. The project involved four field sites with a focal topic addressed by each site team. The four approaches included two studies of love and marriage—one directly through interviews with residents in the San Jose, CA, area and a second through interviews and engagement with therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists in a major southern city and in the San Francisco Bay area (1996:xliv). Two other projects addressed public life issues—one through interviews of residents in a town not far from Boston and in a suburban area near San Diego, CA. This project focused on how Americans become involved in public life. A second study of public engagement involved two political organizations (Institute for the Study of Civic Values, Philadelphia, and Campaign for Economic Democracy, Santa Monica, CA) (1996:xliv–xlv). The field research, conducted over 5 years from 1979 to 1984, ultimately drew on over 200 interviews with unique respondents, some of whom were interviewed several times. Opportunities for participant observation in the field also existed.

   Habits of the Heart is populated by the voices of Americans telling the stories of their goals, problems, and engagement within American life interspersed with the author's reflections on the values and struggles being expressed. Brian Palmer's story, on the first page, tells the tale of a successful San Jose, CA, businessman whose success drive and workaholic lifestyle led to the end of his first marriage, by his own admission. He is now remarried with a second family. He tells the interviewers he has relinquished his obsession with his career and reduced the number of hours he works. His family life now absorbs his time and energy (1996:3–5). Although Brian's reorientation from excessive careerism to deep engagement with family appears to be a monumental change, it remains an individual success story predicated simply on a new assessment of what would contribute to his personal happiness. It is the result of Brian's own revised utilitarian calculus; his American Dream is not embedded in a culture of values in service of some wider framework of social goals (1996:5–6). It is, in effect, simply reconfigured individualism. Brian and many Americans appear to proceed on the basis of "it is good if I find it rewarding" and if, due to circumstances, one's priorities change then that, too, is good. As Tocqueville feared, in individualistic American society there is, for many,

no more substantive foundation on which to build. Brian sums up the California version of this ethic as, "the rule of thumb out here is that if you've got the money, honey, you can do your thing" (1996:7).

The authors make an effort throughout the balance of *Habits of the Heart* to emphasize the tentativeness, confusion, and genuine searching for meaningful ways of authentic life that many of their interview subjects express. Still, when all is said and done, the authors' periodic summary statements routinely return to recognition of the self-interested individualism involved. Thus, in discussing the dominant themes that recurred through their 200 interviews, they acknowledge that the four "representative" individuals they profile in the first pages "[all] assume that there is something arbitrary about the goals of a good life" (1996:21) and yet also seem to agree with most of their interview subjects that "freedom [one of the dominant themes] turns out to mean being left alone by others" (1996:23). Read together, arbitrary goals that must be established by each person and a widely shared understanding that being left alone to pursue one's own ends is the essence of freedom amounts to simply a modern American statement of core individualism. The authors pithily observe, "And if the entire social world is made up of individuals, each endowed with the right to be free of others' demands, it becomes hard to forge bonds of attachment" (1996:23). Paraphrasing one of their interview subjects' statements, Bellah and his colleagues conclude that "for her, freedom to be left alone is a freedom that implies being alone" (1996:23).

This tone of reluctant resignation pervades almost every chapter. For example, having reviewed their interview data, the authors remark that two of the basic components of the good life brought up repeatedly were success in one's work and the satisfaction one receives from serving one's community. Yet, they observe how fragile these seem to some respondents since the "two elements of a good life are not organically unified but exist in a constant state of tension that could always result in their dissolution" (1996:196). In the fragmented America that Bellah and his colleagues hear about, "The individual's need to be successful in work becomes the enemy of the need to find the meaning of one's work in service to others" (1996:197).

The late twentieth-century rhetorical adoption of the word "lifestyle" to denote a way of life leads the authors to similar conclusions about Americans' retreat to the empty freedom of noncommitment. Noting that "lifestyle"—as distinct from "way of life"—commonly arises within a narrow world of leisure and consumption, where the ordinary demands of

getting a living actively do not apply, making a life seem suspended; a lifestyle floats—without any permanent grounding—in a collection (not a community) of socially, economically, and culturally similar individuals, all of whom are living there by choice—but a choice that can be revised at any time, by a single person, without consultation. Indeed, as the authors observe, entire lifestyle enclaves have sprung up across the USA where devotees of particular forms of leisure and consumption can consciously come to live together and seek, if not always find, the self-expression and meaning missing from the rest of their lives. Founded on superficial, external criteria, such lifestyle-based alternatives often succumb to the shallowness they embody. A "community" produced by individualism suffers from the lack of any shared rationale for forming attachment when the individual's whims and priorities are the sole determinants.

In the final analysis, Bellah and his colleagues find that Americans appear to be substantially limited in their efforts to transcend personal ambition and consumerism by the language of individualism. Rather than trapped by Max Weber's iron cage of rationalism, the authors find their subjects trapped by the limiting range of their language of narration. Regardless of the goal or motivation announced, the researchers find over and over that it is couched in an individualistic framework that few can shed. Human relationships are routinely reduced to either their simple economic significance to the self or conceptualized in narrow terms such as romantic love, which remains a prevalent form, and target, of individualism in American culture. In all respects, then, what the authors find is a powerful strain of self-interested indulgence that probably takes on a greater burden than it can bear as Americans struggle to move beyond the private self to a deeper and broader engagement with their place in society (1996:290–92). Fearing that there may be no way to relate to those who are different from themselves, Americans are inclined to try and create bounded safe havens—gated communities of the self—and stick within them. Having shrunk the self so far, however, reciprocal understanding and loyal bonds are often precariously balanced on razor-thin margins that leave little room for humanly connecting at some deeper level (1996:250–51).

One of the strengths of *Habits of the Heart* is its relinquishment of the exclusive focus many investigators of the American Dream concentrate on personal income, monetary success, the economy, and the financial and class gaps. This is due, in part, to the limitations researchers have accepted by defining their study population as white and middle class: these are Americans who, as a group, need not be as obsessed with financial

success. Indeed, the people Bellah and his colleagues spoke with seem to struggle financially far less than Newman's or Bluestone and Harrison's subjects. Whether this lack of verbalized financial concern is a matter of selection bias or produced otherwise by the researchers due to their stated interests in provinces other than the economy is difficult to say. Still, it is a refreshing demonstration that (1) sociologists need not subordinate their inquiries or analyses to economic factors and (2) life in America and the concerns of Americans reach beyond the boundaries of economy, work, finance, and success. As the authors remind us, "It should be clear that we are not arguing, as some of these we criticized…have done, that a few new twists in the organization of the economy would solve all our problems." They are undeniably correct but given the tendency in American Dream studies to repeatedly hoe the same narrow row it is worth noting. What they have done in its place is recognize that the desire for material betterment and related efforts to move up the ladder of success are simply elements of individualism. Both require a calculating attitude toward social relations, educational attainment, and occupational choice and the American middle class has been especially good, and dedicated, to adopting, and maintaining, this frame of mind. Indeed, this modern-day embodiment of Jeremy Bentham's hedonistic calculus embraced by the middle class has arguably stretched far beyond its economic origins and invaded every sector of American life. Cost–benefit analysis arguably now determines one's choice of spouse (or no spouse), friends, voluntary associations, causes, and recreations (1996:148–49). It is this runaway, unrestrained individualism that Bellah and his collaborators identify as the fly in the American Dream ointment; materialism, consumerism, and obsession with upward mobility constitute merely symptoms.

Charles Murray (2012), writing more recently, also adds perspective to fluctuations in the American Dream during the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. He, too, is concerned with the polarization that has been introduced in American society and identifies some social indicators that have received little attention from prior commentators. Thus, Murray records changes in what he terms "neighborliness" in long-established communities and declines in civic engagement in solving local problems (2012:228). Murray traces changes in these social indicators to declines in the number of marriages formed within stable communities as people either (1) marry less or (2) marry but move away. As Murray (2012:245) observes, marriage is critical to civil life and civic participation because of the environment—including play and group participation opportunities—that parents are

attempting to foster for their children. Murray argues that these changes in marital practices impact some Americans more than others. Notably, the changes are more common among what he terms the "new lower class" than among the upper middle class and higher classes. Other cultural differences between these two groups that Murray discerns—declines in industriousness, honesty or integrity, and religiosity—also are enlisted to suggest that achieving the American Dream is less a consequence of opportunity and an uneven playing field and more dependent on individual characteristics than generally acknowledged.

For Murray, economic declines are most important because they destroy the trust that diminishes community and, correspondingly, decrease the ability to mobilize other's resources (called "social capital" by sociologists). In Murray's view, any social changes that undercut stable, friendly neighborhoods, and the middle-class way of life, in particular, are corrosive to society—and the American Dream—more generally. Relying on Francis Fukuyama's (1995) thesis regarding social solidarity, Murray argues that communities which share a generalized expectation that other people in the area will do the right thing most of the time support the capacity to engage in reciprocal social exchange (2012:247–49). Reciprocal social exchange would enhance opportunities for members of the new lower class to acquire more social and cultural capital from those in higher classes. For Murray, these qualitative declines in the American way of life were the true shortfalls of the 1980s and 1990s and contributed, in boomerang fashion, to continued deterioration of the landscape of opportunity inherent in the American Dream.

Murray's argument has been criticized on a number of grounds but perhaps the strongest objection is his failure to distinguish cause from effect (McNamee and Miller 2014:32). For example, Murray's reliance on rates for arrest and incarceration as proxies for honesty or integrity is severely flawed since a number of studies have shown that even middle-class criminologists commit various crimes at rates little different than those of prison populations (Robinson and Zaitzow 1999). Thus, there is apparently little individual difference in honesty and integrity between those who make it in American society and those who end up in prison. Likewise, marriage rates differ among African Americans and white Americans because many African American women cannot find suitable mates. This is due in part to the fact that African American men are much more likely to be unemployed or subject to the criminal justice system than white American males (Rose and Clear 1998). While black women may forego marriage due to a

lack of suitable partners, they do not likewise forego motherhood—which is the real source of Murray's concern. Thus, it is not a difference in motivation to marry or the desire for stability but rather the deficiencies in the environment in which marriages can arise and the lack of suitable husband material that makes the difference, not individual values.

Murray's effort to analyze changes in the USA over the half century from 1960 to 2010 has the merit of taking a long-term view of the American way of life that is seldom replicated. The three *Middletown* studies over the course of 50 years likewise had the potential to offer an incomparable picture of life in a certain type of American community. It is true that the predominantly Protestant, overwhelmingly Caucasian, Midwestern, small industrial city dominated by a single company that the Lynds chose is unrepresentative of the USA, more so now than it was even in 1925. Yet, there are other qualities of the research, both good and bad, worth noting due to the fact that no other series of studies on American life offers the sort of comprehensive longitudinal data that the *Middletown* studies aggregated.

In *Back to Middletown*, Rita Caccamo (2000), an Italian sociologist from Rome, reconsiders the *Middletown* studies after spending a year in Muncie and conducting extensive research at the *Middletown* archives at Ball State University. Arthur Vidich, writing the preface to the English translation for the American edition, notes that Caccamo brought a distinctive anthropological perspective to her review since she was a nonparticipant in any of the three *Middletown* studies. Thus, she was truly an "outsider" to both the process and the conclusions of the prior researchers (Caccamo 2000:x). Caccamo's reexamination of the Lynds' two studies generally sketches many of the points already raised that are important to our understanding of *Middletown*'s relation to the American Dream. She brings forth the details of the criticisms directed at the Lynds' original study based on its failure to include the influence of the Ball family on the community until their restudy in the 1930s. However, her most important contribution is her chapter on the *Middletown III* project directed by Theodore Caplow of the University of Virginia. Vidich, commenting in his preface, suggests that Caccamo's account leads him to conclude that Caplow seemed to believe his survey research approach would discredit the Lynds' commitment to the role of personal observation in social research. Instead, Vidich expresses the view that Caplow's choice of large-scale surveys was "responsible for the failure of his research" (2000:xv).

Caccamo's summary of Caplow's *Middletown III* study focuses on its dissimilarity from the Lynds' *Middletown in Transition* with its emphasis on conflict. Caplow's two volumes proffered instead a vision of social integration. Caccamo attributes this, in part, to the project's reliance on the same questions derived from the same six categories chosen by the Lynds as the core method of inquiry. However, Caccamo is also clear that she believes the differences between the Lynds' work and Caplow's project further arise from his underlying optimism in the effective interworking of the various parts of the American social system. Caccamo finds similar views in his previous book, *Toward Social Hope* (1975), and in statements Caplow made regarding the *Middletown III* project in writings he and Howard Bahr, one of the project field directors, never published (2000:103–05). Caccamo does not raise the point, but it is worth stating the obvious: why shouldn't Caplow be optimistic? After all, at the time he led the project, he was Commonwealth Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia; had published many successful books, including a widely used sociology textbook from Prentice Hall; and was the recipient of a number of National Science Foundation research grants to support the *Middletown III* study. It is a disciplined person who does not permit their own success to permeate their attitudes toward work and society. While sociologists are arguably trained to restrain themselves from both pessimism and optimism, in part by their selection and pursuit of social science methods that provide for crosschecks on their findings, this seems to have been a special problem for the *Middletown III* team. In sum, while Caccamo assesses the Lynds' approach as embodying a mild "social pessimism and cynicism," she evaluates the Caplow-led project as scarred by its "excessive optimism" (2000:113).

Caccamo's comparison of the underlying attitudes she identifies as illustrative of the Lynds' work and Caplow's attempted replication raises a significant issue for all studies of the American Dream: to what extent can social researchers separate their own predilections and confidence about the essential, underlying beneficence of social life from the object of their study and commentary? Moreover, is the goal of a detached, neutral social science devoid of opinions about society the only responsible way to examine the American Dream or, alternatively, is it necessary to approach its study with a willingness to critically examine the possible divergence between American ideals, American aspirations, and the American reality to honestly assess our social life and its future prospects?

Reviewing the published summaries of the findings and conclusions of the *Middletown III* study in *Middletown Families* (1982) and *All Faithful*

People (1983), one is struck by the hopeful "glass is half full" tone of the analyses. The reader may experience this tone in passages addressing topics as innocuous as those discussing the community's media habits. Caplow et al. (1982:23–24) write:

> It is hard to believe, but the older mass media have not been displaced at all. Middletown had a single morning newspaper in 1925. It was still being published in 1975 under the same name and with much the same editorial tone, and its circulation increased in exact proportion to the increase of Middletown's population during the interim…
>
> Radio broadcasting did equally well….
>
> Motion picture theaters were at first hard hit by the advent of television;… By 1977, Middletown had a larger array of movie theaters than ever before.

This account doesn't sound like a summary by writers indifferent to the results they are reporting. To the contrary, it sounds like a summary written by a team of authors who have become invested in, and enthused by, results they find comforting. Sociologists whose preferred conception of society is one where stability prevails and change is incremental would, one suspects, be heartened by findings that support their worldview. Here, there seems to be a troublesome congruence between what the researchers would like to find and what they report, especially given the methods they employed. Thus, although the authors claim they have followed the Lynds' example, the Caplow team relied predominantly on large-scale survey results and did not pursue the intensive interviews that the Lynds conducted. As Vidich concluded, this may well have been the factor that most led the Caplow team astray.

The *Middletown III*'s report on wife and child abuse provides another example of the weakness of the authors' method. The discussion of this topic covers exactly one page of print in *Middletown Families* (1982) across pages 335 and 336. Without explaining the manner in which they collected data on these crimes, and without providing any of that data, the authors conclude, "But there is no evidence whatsoever that these ugly behaviors have been increasing." Noting only "the number of criminal charges for domestic violence" as a possible basis, the authors completely fail to discuss the well-known fact that many crimes go unreported, or have the charge withdrawn, domestic violence of all types prominently among them.

The *Middletown III* project's second volume, *All Faithful People* (1983), displays similar problems of method. Here, the principal authors cheerily delegate an entire chapter on religion to a Muncie church-affiliated insider, Laurence A. Martin, then the pastor at First Presbyterian Church. It is difficult to reconcile the demands of any form of social science with this decision since Protestant religious leaders are typically untrained in social science methodology and no information to the contrary is introduced regarding Pastor Martin here. The chapter on "Cooperation Among the Churches of Middletown" consists of a mere dozen pages (Caplow et al. 1983:267–79). Like other sections within both volumes, there is no specific discussion of how the information regarding church cooperation was gathered. This leads one to believe the process was purely informal and therefore nonrandom and nonsystematic. Pastor Martin, leading an influential church ministry in Muncie in 1973, simply "knows" the things he chooses to report. Of course, this begs the question: what about all the instances of cooperation or noncooperation among Muncie churches that he does not know about?

Even more intriguing is the question of why cooperation among the churches of Muncie was pursued as a research initiative at all. Thus, Pastor Martin begins his chapter by acknowledging that "Robert and Helen Lynd had little to say about cooperation among the churches of Middletown in 1924–25" and fails to mention whether or not the same was true for their 1935 restudy (1983:267). Still, Pastor Martin has no trouble assessing for himself what it all must have been like, stating: "Middletown was probably not much different from many other communities of its generation" (1983:267). Such carelessness is surely inimical to any reasonable attempt to do social science. It is little wonder that Vidich characterized the *Middletown III* project as a "failure." Unfortunately, for many similar reasons compared to those already discussed, *Middletown Families* (1982) and *All Faithful People* (1983) offer little to us in our search for the empirical content or social meaning of the American Dream. Has there been evolution in the goals and aspirations of Middletowners over 50 years from 1929 to 1979? It is difficult to say given the questionable methods and evident underlying optimistic stance of the researchers. The failure of method has the effect of discrediting the "good news/everything works as expected" report they issued.

We have already seen from other researchers that everything was not working in the USA in the 1980s and 1990s for the middle class. William Julius Wilson, in successive books first published in the late 1980s and

1990s, documented the impact of economic changes on the underclass and new urban poor. In *The Truly Disadvantaged* (2012), originally published in 1987, Wilson offers a portrait of the poor that places the downward mobility fears of the middle class in sharp relief. Wilson's effort was inspired in large part by conservative analyses that placed ghetto-specific behavior and cultural values at the center of their explanations for the transmission of disadvantage across generations (2012:13–18). Wilson patiently dismantles what he characterizes as the "tangle of pathology" that exists among the urban underclass by focusing on the combined effects of historic discrimination, the size of the flow of migration from southern states to northern central cities, changes in the age structure of these communities, and the impact of basic, structural economic changes (2012:20–46). In Wilson's view, the cumulative effect of these changes was to produce a concentrated poverty population in African American northern urban ghettoes. The concentrated nature of the problem built upon the foundation already present, reinforcing an already deteriorating economic and social milieu that individuals and families often could not overcome (2012:46–62). In this milieu, even if families maintained middle-class values the barriers to achieving a sustainable American Dream were cumulatively insurmountable.

In *When Work Disappears* (1996), Wilson again examines the inner-city environment inhabited by the urban poor. In typically direct language, Wilson notes that most adults there are not working in any given week because work has disappeared from their neighborhoods and much of the city as well. This is a change from what had previously been described as an "institutional ghetto" where most poor residents were working; today, the nonworking poor predominate, and this is the reason Wilson characterizes them as the "new urban poor" (1996:19 and 23). While he found that inner-city black Americans were experiencing the most severe joblessness, he also concluded that the economic marginality of those in black urban ghettoes arose, in part, from the same forces affecting other Americans in the 1980s and 1990s. That is, Wilson identifies the same constellation of economic issues recorded by Newman (1988, 1993), Bluestone and Harrison (1982), Harrison and Bluestone (1988), and Phillips (1992), among others, as contributing to the structural conditions leading to joblessness in the cities: Demand has shifted away from low wage, unskilled workers as a result of increasingly integrated global economy (1996:224), and no public policies have been pursued to counteract these trends. One particularly notable factor he identifies is the departure of large manufacturing plants from these neighborhoods, which

leads rather directly to a declining number of smaller local businesses that feed off the wages paid workers by large employers (1996:35). This is significant because the displaced managers and executives studied by Newman (1988) and the unemployed new urban poor may well have arrived at their new, unemployed status due to plant closing and "industrial restructuring" decisions made by the same, or similar, companies, often as not for the same competitive reasons (1996:35). Consequences for poor urban neighborhoods though were substantially different than the consequences reported for the middle class. Rather than declining middle-class mobility or a personal fall from grace, the new urban poor faced commercial abandonment of entire communities, an escalation of interpersonal violence, infiltration of organized drug rings, uncorrected deterioration in a neighborhood's housing stock, reductions in the quantity and quality of city services, and the increasing unavailability of health care due to relocation of major city hospitals, often to the suburbs. These circumstances affected everyone in the community, unlike the misery and hardship experienced by individual members of the middle class reported by Newman and others. A 29-year-old black male stated:

> You could walk out of the house and get a job. Maybe not what you want but you could get a job. Now, you can't find anything. A lot of people in this neighborhood, they want to work but they can't get work. A few, but a very few, they just don't want to work. The majority they want to work but they can't find work. (1996:36)

The community impact was perhaps described best by a 33-year-old mother of three from a very poor West Side, Chicago, neighborhood:

> If you live in an area in your neighborhood where you have people that don't work, don't have no means of support, you know, don't have no jobs, who's gonna break into your house to steal what you have, to sell to get them some money, then you can't live in a neighborhood and try to concentrate on tryin' to get ahead, then you get to work and you have to worry if somebody's breakin' into your house or not. So, you know, it's best to try to move in a decent area, to live in a community with people that works. (1996:11)

While crime can be found in every community, these were not the concerns expressed by Newman's middle-class interview subjects nor were similar concerns voiced in other working-class or middle-class community studies we have examined.

Wilson's work does not explicitly define the American Dream, query his respondents regarding it, nor analyze his many findings about the new urban poor in terms of it. Yet he does discuss the theme of individualism in American culture and the role it plays with respect to the new urban poor. Since individualism is so central to the idea of the American Dream, Wilson's discussions in this regard bear examination. Newman's (1988, 1993) struggling or displaced middle class, one should recall, felt isolated because American culture places the burden of achieving success squarely on individuals. While her displaced managers and financially squeezed younger generation aspirants who saw their American Dream slipping away were not at fault, members of both groups at times felt guilty for not doing better and making it on their own. For Wilson's new urban poor, individualism is used against them, too. Thus, poverty generally is treated as an individual problem in the USA even though it is apparent this is not the case in perhaps most instances. This attitude is reflected in our welfare and unemployment compensation laws and holds truly disadvantaged groups such as the new urban poor responsible for their own plight, contrary to a good deal of evidence (1996:158–59). A second element of the American Dream, however, has the potential to reverse some of these negative effects for both Newman's subjects and Wilson's new urban poor. That theme is opportunity. Although "opportunity" may not have figured explicitly in the calculations of those who first emigrated to America, the theme now resonates strongly with Americans from all classes. Both the middle class and the new urban poor seek opportunity but the taxpaying middle and upper classes will more readily support opportunity-enhancing programs for the truly disadvantaged than simple financial help. Where the proposal is to support the opportunity to benefit oneself through training and hard work, voters are more likely willing to help the underclass of our society (1996:204). Infrastructure maintenance, capital upgrade initiatives, and labor-intensive public service jobs that provide basic enhancements to the quality of life can offer employment opportunities in any community; they especially represent opportunity for those who would otherwise be shut out of the modern economy (1996:226–27, 231). Even where providing access to the American Dream is not articulated explicitly as the rationale for opportunity-enhancing programs, it is apparent that any factor that improves the quality of life has that potential. Here, all Americans seem to be able to agree: everyone should have the opportunity to work hard and make it. That, more than anything else, may be the core of the American Dream.

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Dreams, Class, and Opportunity at the *Fin de Siècle* and Beyond

One of the more compelling books written about the American Dream was first published, and then refined in successive editions, in the 1990s. Steven Messner's (and, now, Messner and Rosenfeld's) *Crime and the American Dream* (2007) adopted, revised, and reinvigorated Robert Merton's (1938) paper on anomie theory by further developing its theoretical focus on the role of institutions in contributing to the criminogenic tendencies within the American Dream. Widely considered an important contribution within criminological theory, Messner and Ronsenfeld's argument has a number of implications for our more general consideration of the meaning of the American Dream.

Briefly, Messner and Rosenfeld accept Merton's premise that excessive emphasis on success goals in American society and a correspondingly lesser emphasis on the legitimate means to achieve those goals leads to deviance, one form of which is crime. Moreover, Messner and Rosenfeld acknowledge Merton's observation that opportunities to achieve economic goals within the USA are unequally distributed. Forced to compete, many do not have the wherewithal to compete successfully. Thus, the pressure to succeed—which universally applies to everyone under the theory of "equal opportunity"—meets with the limits of a social structure that cannot possibly deliver success for everyone. This is the "strain" that leads to crime (2007:57–59). Finally, Merton believed that "success" in American culture becomes dominated by the logic of the marketplace and therefore defined in pecuniary terms. Money is not merely a medium of exchange

to the American mind but is accorded a special place by American culture: it is so highly sought after it becomes the metric—or measurement—for success (2007:70). Messner and Rosenfeld's distinctive contribution to Merton's theory is to suggest it is not only the strength of the cultural admonition to succeed at all costs that produces deviance but also the weakness of institutional controls. The fact that American institutions only weakly constrain nonnormative behavior facilitates deviation from legitimate means of achievement. In shorthand, this means that in a well-balanced, functioning society, political, familial, religious, and educational institutions will place constraints on the economic drive for unrestrained monetary success; when these institutions are weak, the failure of political, familial, religious, and educational controls will permit the American Dream, defined as an exaggerated emphasis on achieving material success, to permit individuals to seek success in any way they can (2007:74–87). The weakened American social structure thus imposes no limits on the runaway cultural imperative to succeed at any cost.

The above synopsis is altogether too brief and unreflective of the nuances of Messner and Rosenfeld's insightful addendum to Merton's (1938) anomie theory. It does permit us to make some observations useful to our goal of better understanding of the nature of the American Dream. Messner and Rosenfeld's re-examination of Merton's work leads them to affirm the critical role that individualism plays in our culture in supporting the success ethic embedded in the conventional, achievement-oriented American Dream. As Messner and Rosenfeld phrase it, "This obsession with the individual when combined with the strong achievement orientation of American culture…[and]…[t]he intense individual competition to succeed pressures people to disregard normative restraints on behavior" (2007:69). It is merely another way of saying that in American society, self-interest is given priority over virtually any form of shared or social interest, whether in the family or any other institution. Second, Messner and Rosenfeld's recognition of the weakness of our institutions, and the contradictory messages our culture communicates, will help us understand some later analysts' approaches to the American Dream and the sort of policy recommendations they offer. Thus, Messner and Rosenfeld criticize the lack of family support our country offers even though the USA is rhetorically committed to "family values." As they point out, family leave, job sharing, flexible work schedules, employer-provided child care, and numerous other policies and practices one could name are decidedly less common and available in the USA in comparison with other First

World, industrialized nations (2007:112–14). With the American cultural emphasis on monetary success, the lack of family support policies communicates to Americans "shortchange your family if necessary, the money's the thing." In the end, Messner and Rosenfeld's reinvigoration of Merton's theory reminds us the degree to which commodification of many values has occurred in the USA. Education has been devalued so that it is only something to be bought, at a good price, so it can be sold to an employer at a better price (2007:77, 83). Politics, too, has become an arena in which money calls the tune to which everyone must dance. The family, already mentioned, must always give way when the economy dictates it. Thus, it is commonly recognized that people move long distances for a good job in the USA even when it requires leaving one's family. Messner and Rosenfeld's systematic presentation of these modern trends illustrates the strength of the view that the American Dream has been operationally reduced to a scramble for monetary success. In such a culture, every value and human good can and will be measured by some dollar value, and the sole measure of success becomes monetary acquisition.

The 1990s brought an even more dramatic change than a reinvigorated 1938 theory of the role of the American Dream. On October 23, 1991, President Bill Clinton, looking for an issue to galvanize his domestic agenda, gave a speech promising "to put an end to welfare as we know it" (DeParle 2004:4). Clinton's initiative in welfare reform eventually became legislation, and then federal law, in the form of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Act (TANF) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Hays 2003:8.15; DeParle 2004:144–54). The poor who lived on government funds from welfare programs, as Clinton noted in another speech on February 2, 1993, were among those many Americans who "never got a shot at the American Dream" (DeParle 2004). Politically, it was useful for Clinton to suggest that welfare reform might reopen opportunity for welfare recipients; as a matter of fact, however, the primary purpose of the legislation was to shrink the welfare rolls and thus undercut the political position of Clinton's opponents. Thus, the 1990s became a decade in which a dramatic social experiment in reorienting the welfare state was initiated; whether it would lead to a revitalized landscape of opportunity to achieve the American Dream remained an open question. As Hays (2003) and DeParle (2004) recount, the hopes of those at the bottom of the American income scale were only partially realized. For many, the hope of achieving their American Dream remained elusive.

Hays' investigation of welfare reform was based on 3 years of work (from December 1997 to January 2001) visiting two welfare offices and the homes of welfare clients. One of the welfare offices was in a mid-size town in the Southeast and the other in a large metropolitan area in the West. Her research was conducted at the time that these offices were familiarizing themselves with the requirements of the new laws (2003:24–25). As Hays points out, her work with clients was almost exclusively with women welfare clients since 90 % of recipients are single mothers. In the final analysis, Hays finds that the new welfare laws embody contradictory values, including support for independence, productive work, engaged citizenship, family unity, community involvement, and child welfare (2003:21). Her interviews suggest that these become distorted and pitted against each other in the crucible of political and cultural polarization that drove the legislative initiative in the first place.

Hays presents many carefully developed, empirically supported observations about the practical implementation of welfare reform. She quotes many welfare recipients about one or another of their experiences of receiving welfare. While Hays acknowledges that welfare reform did have some success in achieving policy goals, her interviews with welfare clients revealed many of the frustrations and barriers the women continue to experience in their quest for some part of the American Dream. There was, for example, the experience of being subject to the whims of a bureaucracy: being at the beck and call of a caseworker and subjected to the "hassles" of constant reporting. One woman told Hays, "They're always telling you to hurry up and go! 'Get that form! Go to the workshop! Go over there! Come back here!'" (2003:7). The sanction process imposed on the welfare poor by the new laws also heaped further indignity on a population that experiences humiliation regularly. As Hays recounts, clients were routinely sanctioned and stayed in line with bureaucratic requirements because they feared the punishing process that it constituted. Recipients expressed first surprise and then anger at the sanction process and many—perhaps up to one half according to Hays—did not understand the nature of the rule infraction that incurred reduction in benefits (2003:41–42). Caseworkers and clients both saw the ludicrous—and shameful—reality behind the "successful" welfare client who obtained work at a low wage job but one that would not support her and her children. Andrea found a job making $5.75 an hour at convenience store and left the welfare rolls. Twenty-eight years old with two children, her expenses included $475/month for housing and utilities and $200 for food, leaving her only $50 for the balance of the month. She simply couldn't make it work

on this amount. Even if Andrea did not have children her wages would be insufficient (2003:50–51). Newman (2000:68), in her study of the working poor in minimum wage and low wage jobs confirms the fact: whether one starts on welfare or not, the money is not enough to live on.

In the end, Hays is equivocal but also clearly concerned in her evaluation of the "success" of welfare reform. On the one hand, she acknowledges that more welfare clients were getting jobs more quickly and the welfare rolls were declining in size. Yet this was due in part to families that were simply discouraged from applying and fewer who attempted to return to welfare even when they needed it (2003:222). Hays notes that many of these families—about half of those who have left welfare—sometimes are without sufficient funds to buy food. One third also needed to cut the size of their meals and half cannot afford to pay their rent or utility bills. As Denise sized up the prospects for welfare mothers living the American Dream for Hays, "there are women that want to go out there and get a job, but who's gonna watch their kids?…; there are women who have been abused [and need assistance in order to exit the abusive relationship]" (2003:218).

DeParle (2004), too, expresses reservations about whether welfare reform has created any real opportunities for recipients to achieve some semblance of the American Dream. DeParle's look at welfare reform is both more ambitious but less broad than Hays' research. DeParle's investigative reporting searches the family history and lives of just three women and their ten children within the context of the new era of 1990s welfare reform. DeParle's (2004:223–24) summary conveys his mixed views at the conclusion of his work:

> By moving poor women into the workforce, the welfare bill contributed to [their] progress materially….

> [Yet] The upbeat statistical reports scarcely fit the hardships before my eyes…In the trio's lives, the layers of disadvantage ran even deeper than I first glimpsed – the garnished wages, the loss of heat and lights, the fights over the last drop of milk.

> In getting to know Michelle Crawford, the welfare-to-work heroine championed by [former Wisconsin Governor] Tommy Thompson, I found a similar story of work mixed with woe. Michelle, too, had made an unlikely journey off the rolls – yet she too was running out of food, coping with physical attacks from a jealous man…, and panicking over a teenage son's arrest, twice, for selling cocaine.

As Angie, one of the three women DeParle's narrative followed, says in a poem he reprints in his book (2004:338),

Better days are here, so they say

So why am I still working, running, fighting and crying?

For my better days?

Although titled *American Dream*, neither DeParle nor Angie mention it as the book closes.

Dubois, Frazier, and Wilson's African Americans Meet *Our Kind of People*

Lawrence Otis Graham, a lawyer who attended Harvard Law School in the mid-1980s, had occasion to meet Reginald Lewis once, when Lewis was the wealthiest black man in the USA. Lewis, father of two daughters, wanted Graham's advice on how his daughters, growing up wealthy, could connect with elite black society in the USA. Graham, he knew, although not from a wealthy family, had grown up in contact with many of those elite black families. Graham gave Lewis some tips about organizations and private social groups and Lewis said, "You ought to turn this in to a book." Eventually, Graham did so in *Our Kind of People* (2000). The highly class-conscious, linked families and associations he documented opened an often-hidden world of wealth and elite social status among black Americans.

Graham's report on the existence of an American black elite with ties beginning as early as the 1880s was received poorly by many middle-class and lower-class blacks, although many among the black elite were critical as well. A quasi-insider, Graham relied on his connections to gather information and entered into casual participant observation at Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard, a black elite enclave, as he researched his topic. Graham's account revealed an exclusive world dominated by relationships formed and maintained by participation in Jack and Jill clubs, AKA, the Deltas, the Links, and the Girl Friends (2000:4). It is a world in which the elite go to the "right" camps, the "right" private schools, the "right" cotillions, and attend one of three "colleges that count" (Spelman, Morehouse, and Howard) (2000:63–82). Once at Spelman, Morehouse, or Howard, one joins one of the accepted fraternities or

sororities (2000:83–100). In general, one always associates with "our kind of people" in order to maintain an exclusive round of connections, activities, and opportunities.

All in all, the story of America's black elite is one of striving and achievement, a lifetime of preparation for arriving and, once having arrived, of perpetuating the same achievement ethic in succeeding generations though what researchers of childhood have called concerted cultivation (Lareau 2011). As Graham reveals, the black elite children are carefully socialized to always look ahead and prepare for the next step in their maturation to become the next generation among the black elite. It is a social world like that of the white American aristocracy E. Digby Baltzell (1964) revealed—one that can only be understood on its own terms. Like the WASP world of exclusive privilege, the likelihood that one can ascend into the elite ranks of black America from very far down the economic or social ladder is exceedingly low. As Baltzell (1964) discovered earlier, the admission barriers to the black elite, many unstated, are rigidly graded and aggressively enforced to ensure exclusivity. Although the American Dream celebrates opportunity for all, Baltzell and Graham's studies repeatedly identify *selection*, *invitation*, and *exclusion* as critical entry regulators that protect the prerogatives of class. When parents inculcate their children with values that arise from their own life experience within a social class, they are consciously and unconsciously preparing a child for entry into that class by teaching them the attitudes and behaviors that will meet with acceptance there (Kohn 1977). Those who learn the proper social codes—who meet the standards—will be admitted there; those who can't or won't do so will not gain acceptance. Graham's research illuminated an insular world of exclusive privilege shared nationally wherever a bastion of achievement-oriented, wealthy black families exist in the USA.

While the details of the internal connections Graham describes are endlessly fascinating, it is the black elite world's engagement with the American Dream that warrants discussion here. As Graham (2000:396) comments:

> It is a group that values intellect, success, and tradition. And while they may have arrived in this country as slaves or free men and women from Africa, the West Indies, or Europe, their accomplishments and contributions were achieved on American soil. Making the climb from slavery and blatant discrimination to wealth and achievement is what the promise of America is supposed to be about. The families of the black elite embody the best of the American dream. For this reason, the story of the black upper class is a story of America.

While this rosy assessment no doubt has some validity, the balance of Graham's book tells the story of a fierce sorting between those who are in (or let in) and those who are out (and kept out). For example, consider the matter of skin color among African Americans. As Graham mercilessly recounts, favoritism granted on the basis of light skin color was virtually omnipresent in black elite voluntary associations, college fraternities and sororities, and wherever the black elite would gather. A late 1980s Jack and Jill graduate told Graham,

> I was always the last girl to be asked to dance or to be invited to parties,… I can't tell you how many [times]…somebody would say something like, "You're pretty attractive for somebody so dark. You have nice white teeth." It was excruciating…and it happened when I saw these same people at other places [where the black elite gathered]. (2000:37)

Graham's comment is equally telling: "As disappointing as it was, this young woman's story rang completely true to me" (2000:38). Equally worth noting are Graham's conclusions that cliques were common in elite black organizations and that, beyond shades of skin color, cleavages routinely formed around economics and professional status, or less often around geography—particular shared private school backgrounds or shared college affiliations (2000:38). As the title *Our Kind of People* suggests, if you don't have/aren't made of "the right kind of stuff" you need not apply for admittance. Social mobility into the black elite could only realistically become a part of your American Dream only if you could meet the exacting physical, social, intellectual, and associational tests that would be applied to you. Like many other venues in the USA, the opportunity to compete for admission was, really, often no opportunity at all.

The Riddle of Opportunity: Unexpectedly Granted/Improvidently Squandered

The solidly achievement-oriented lives of the majority of the children of the American black upper class may be fruitfully compared with the stratospheric rise, but eventual downfall, of Robert Peace, even though Peace was far from being a member of the black elite. Peace's story is an archetypical American Dream story: he rose from poverty to obtain a Yale University education and respectable job as a teacher but he also suffered social setbacks, including a tragic end (Hobbs 2014). More than

one reviewer noted similarities to *The Great Gatsby*, with Peace in the Jay Gatsby role and Jeff Hobbs (2014), his college roommate, and biographer, a latter-day Nick Carraway.

Peace was born in Newark, NJ, in June 1980 to Jackie Peace and Skeet Douglas. Jackie had lived on Chapman Street in Orange, NJ, since 1960 when she was 11 years old. By the time Robert was growing up in the late 1980s and 1990s, Newark had degenerated into urban poverty and social chaos; Orange was not far behind. During Rob's early childhood, nearby East Orange represented the second-highest concentration of African Americans living below the poverty line in America, behind only East St. Louis, IL. His mother worked in the kitchen at St. Mary's Hospital. Skeet had a more colorful life on the street—small-time hustling and dealing drugs. Jackie raised Rob by reading to him, her only child. Even in kindergarten, Rob became known as "the professor" because he knew so much more than the other kids.

On August 9, 1987, Skeet was implicated in the murder of two sisters. He was eventually located by authorities, arrested, and convicted. He spent decades in Trenton State Prison, was briefly released on a post-conviction review, but ultimately his conviction was affirmed. He died in prison. Rob, as he became a high school and—later—college student, became invested in his father's claim of innocence and maintained very close ties with his father. This meant, in part, he maintained close ties with the street life his father came out of and represented.

Fast forward: Robert gets admitted to St. Benedict's high school, Newark, in 1994, a preparatory school for boys founded in 1868 that had endured some very tough times. The school briefly closed after the 1967 Newark riots. It reopened in 1973 under the direction of Fr. Edwin Leahy and prospered. As a result of the protective milieu and demanding curriculum, Rob and his new friends—all of whom were from "troubled circumstances" but supported by the school—made it through high school. Peace graduated in May 1998. A benefactor to the school— Charles Cawley, CEO of MBNA, a major credit card issuer—granted Rob a blank check to attend the college of his choice. He selected Yale where he met his new roommate, the author of the book about his life, Jeff Hobbs.

At Yale, Rob maintains his academic excellence but also starts selling marijuana to other students just after Thanksgiving, freshman year. He meets his "connect" (the bulk supplier who he buys from) through one of his old neighborhood-St. Benedict's friends, Julius "Flowy" Stokes.

Through the winter and spring of that year Rob became "one of the lead-ing drug dealers on campus." As Hobbs (2014:185) relates, regardless of one's background, students were undeniably sheltered at Yale. Soon, however, as graduation approached, they would all leave and be exposed to where "reality waited" and "decisions would have consequences" far beyond those experienced by college students (2014:185). Hobbs claims that while he and other friends had little idea of the magnitude of his roommate's marijuana business, Rob netted just over $100,000 selling marijuana in 3.5 years (2014:189).

Although a highly honored Yale grad with a science degree, Rob's graduation plan in 2002 was vague: he expected to live with his mother in the poor neighborhood in Orange where he grew up. As graduation winds up, Rob worked on the custodial staff to clean up the college over the summer. He also worked for 9 months in one of the science labs after graduation. To do so, he lived in a basement apartment with a female friend; they kept their clothes in plastic containers and cardboard boxes. When he got back to Newark he began dealing drugs again—through Carl, a friend of his father's. Eventually, Rob decided he needed to "laun-der" his drug profits. He did so at Yale through a lab budget. Now he needed to find a new cover.

His life, relieved of college, became unmoored. Rob took off and flew to Rio simply because he wanted to go there. He stuffed his remaining $60,000 in drug profits in a black trunk which he left with Carl; when he returned, the money was gone. Chastened, he came back and was given a chance to teach science at St. Benedict's—which he did for 4 years. He bought a house for $90,000. It took him 2 years to renovate it but then two of the three units could be rented netting him $1000 a month. He was still dealing drugs but hoped to reduce his dependence on that source of income (2014:220–244).

All his thoughts now revolved around money. One plan: start "Peace Realty" by buying undervalued properties, renovating them, then rent-ing and/or flipping them. He immersed himself in complex calculations and spent all of his spare time developing real estate schemes. He started dreaming—envisioning commercial renovations of empty storefronts—but his entrepreneurial activities gradually disengaged him from his teaching.

Street life, too, kept pulling him back. His single real estate venture was not sufficiently successful to support his withdrawal from marijuana deal-ing. He started getting into "beefs" with other dealers. He also became argumentative with his mother about his plans/lack of plans. His claim

that he would be applying to grad schools—now more than 5 years old—was empty: he hadn't completed any applications. Finding tenants who could pay consistently became a problem. He started thinking about buying real estate elsewhere—Cleveland or Miami—and flew to both cities to investigate possibilities. Tickets for $300 were an expense, though. He decided to get Nathan, his cousin, to get him on at Continental Airlines as a baggage handler. Once at the Airline he could fly standby for free. Still, flights to look at Miami real estate were mostly fruitless ventures—which then required him to work 16-hour days to make up time he was off the schedule. His life, always compartmentalized, remained so. When he runs into his roommate Jeff after a long separation, Rob tells him about all the traveling but not about the fact that he works as a baggage handler. Finally, he started using Continental flights to be a "bulk courier" thereby making the trips "pay" in a different way (2014:261–306).

The fact that everything turned on money became more and more a prominent feature of Rob's life. He tried to convince a girlfriend to get a legal gun license, buy a few handguns, and file a claim the guns had been stolen. Rob would then sell them on the black market for a profit. A good friend, Oswaldo, noticed what he called a "narrowing of vision"—Rob no longer was curious nor sought knowledge; he was only obsessed about money. Meanwhile, he fantasized about a new dream: using Section 8 Housing Funds to make money in real estate. The 2008 housing downturn inspired more dreams about realty with foreclosure houses readily available. In the midst of all this, Rob, now a "tug" supervisor for Continental, damaged a plane by failing to take down the baggage conveyor steel rails before moving it. Rob was fired as a result. He had to live off rental income and unemployment checks (2014:307–328, 340).

So, here he was with a Yale degree—having only worked as a lab tech, teaching high school, and then a baggage handler—a woeful downward trajectory that found him unemployed. The money obsession was now driven by more actual need than it had been. Rob wanted to invest in a "big score"—but he needed to borrow the money to make the initial marijuana purchase. He cobbled together funds by bringing in his friends as investors and then borrowing from other friends. They bought 50 pounds of bulk and Rob started to make "Sour Diesel" out of it—his special recipe. It took 10–15 hours to process each pound. The size of the buy meant there were 22,500 units to sell (dime bags). His friends backed out of this part. Rob was overburdened with processing *and* selling. Then, he started to use young sellers—and perhaps one of them spoke

about his dealing in bulk. At the age of 30, 8 years out of Yale University, Rob was shot to death in his basement by two anonymous gunmen where he had been processing marijuana. The two gunmen were never caught (2014:348–379, 396–7).

Rob Peace's ordeal confronting the American Dream offers only one of many cautionary tales that the American way of life can generate. Michaelson's (2009) account of the "inside story" of Countrywide Financial, by 1992 the largest issuer of single-family home loans in the USA, tells a different, but equally dispiriting, story driven by the American Dream. Beginning in 2004, Michaelson was responsible for customer acquisition marketing for Countrywide. As Michaelson's narrative in *The Foreclosure of America* (2009) unfolds, it readily becomes apparent that the borrowers' vision of the American Dream and the creditor's adoption of an American Dream sales strategy converged with disastrous results. The practices of investment banks, hedge funds, and government regulators, all loosened by financial deregulation within the mortgage industry, combined to create the American nightmare we now call the Great Recession of 2007–09.

Angelo Mozilo, a charismatic salesman, founded Countrywide in 1969 in New York City. He and his partner wanted to build a mortgage company that would provide access to home mortgages for those Americans who were historically left out of home ownership. The company was modestly successful. However, by the time Michaelson became a senior marketing officer for Countrywide, the company had ridden the housing market boom to unprecedented heights. As Michaelson tells it, he and many other employees of Countrywide felt that they were engaged in an ennobling mission by providing financing for Americans' dream of home ownership (Michaelson 2009:54–55). In a certain sense they were not wrong, either. After all, the American Dream of owning one's own home was not an original idea developed by Countrywide. As Williams (2009:1) expresses it in her book: "Of course I want a home. I'm American; it's encoded in to my cultural DNA." Indeed, in nearly every study of the American way of life we have examined, owning one's own home is a goal that resonates with many, if not all, Americans.

Michaelson's mundane job, however, was to help Countrywide acquire new customers through advertising and he was soon hard at work producing materials for the consumer public. Among other campaigns, Michaelson produced "Realize Your Dreams," a series of brief vignettes that showed first-time homebuyers who had their problems obtaining mortgages solved

by Countrywide (Michaelson 2009:129). As Michaelson (2009:129–31) recounts, these advertising spots combined warm, fuzzy images of the good life of home ownership with vague or nonexistent information about the realities of home financing and the suggestion that Countrywide can solve anyone's problem in obtaining a mortgage. However, as Michaelson (2009:131) further observes, Countrywide was not alone; rather, it was simply one of many banks and lenders anxious to provide home loans with no down payment to persons of low income, poor credit, and with insufficient (or untruthful) documentation.

Ultimately, what Countrywide provided as a "solution" to first-time homebuyers' problem of obtaining a mortgage was a "no money down" adjustable rate mortgage (ARM) that would reset in just a few years. To the extent a housing market is rising, interest rates remain low, homebuyers remain employed, there is little problem when an ARM resets. When it resets in a rising interest rate climate, of course, the rate will increase leading to an increase in monthly payments. For subprime borrowers especially, an increased monthly payment may not be sustainable. Moreover, when the growth in housing market values slows, or declines, refinancing is not an option. The mortgage holder is "locked in" as the banks often say about rates. Finally, when a recession sets in and unemployment rises, consumers who could barely afford the original monthly payment become truly unable to pay their increased monthly mortgage. Thus, the combination of mortgage companies' need to generate new business, Americans' artificially manufactured social need to participate in the American Dream through home ownership, and the casual financial practices and acumen of both the industry and the homebuyers led to an unsustainable result. Or, as Hyman (2012:246) pithily sums up, "In the fall of 2006 the impossible happened. Housing prices began to fall." Since the entire mortgage industry relied at this point on the simple assumption that housing prices would always go up, the economic fallout was devastating and widespread. Indeed, since the credit industry was now a global phenomenon, and many nations had adopted the "American plan" of purchasing homes on the basis of mortgages, the housing recession spread through many countries in the developed world (Hauhart 2011).

As Michaelson (2009:312) also realizes, our national practices—as reflected by government—are not appreciably different than the manner in which American consumers are encouraged to acquire more debt than might be prudent. Thus, our government over the last 50 years has frequently encumbered itself with risky, crippling debt loads

to finance various initiatives, like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Whalen's (2011:329) history of American public debt and its inflationary effects also recognizes the confluence of government's reliance on debt financing and what he characterizes as Americans' "unwillingness" to live within their means. In short, while mortgage companies' capitalist objectives, consumers' undisciplined habits, and Americans' desire for the "good life" may be the most direct precursors of the Great Depression, our national culture of public indebtedness cannot be overlooked as an influence.

The above story of home ownership would have a happy ending—much like the fantasy version of the American Dream—if it were not for the fact that other economic actors and all of the negative economic forces converged at the same point in time. First, the system in which consumers take on substantial debt and then pay it off is typically dependent on a jobs sector that maintains stable employment and supports employment at something resembling a living wage. Second, the system is equally dependent on support for the legitimacy of the political and economic systems in place for when ordinary debtors come to believe that the system is a rip-off there is less moral incentive to pay back the debt. Third, the ability to pay back consumer debt incurred based on one's asset balance is governed in large part by the stability of the market value of one's assets. In the event of a sizable market downturn and a corresponding decrease in one's asset balance, the ability to pay back is correspondingly diminished because one cannot sell assets for what they were formerly worth. Fourth, the government's ability to stimulate any of the market sectors impacted by a balloon in private debt is affected by the growth in public debt. The negative variability in these four factors collectively explains the cause of the Great Recession of 2007–09. The impact of this financial debacle, driven in large part by the aspirations embodied in the American Dream, decimated any opportunity of achieving it for millions of Americans. Many Americans' dreams of homeownership have still not recovered.

The impact of Countrywide's implosion on the US housing market can best be understood within the context of changed labor, housing, and credit practices within the American middle class. Leight and Fitzgerald (2007), writing just before the onset of the Great Recession that Countrywide partly inspired, succinctly sum up the converging forces. As Leicht and Fitzgerald document, the middle class has experienced a decline in real purchasing power due to income stagnation since the late 1970s. However, the middle class was able to maintain a semblance

of their standard of living since the gap between stagnant incomes and consumption aspirations was papered over by easily obtained credit. The use of debt as an instrument of maintaining consumption has produced a new form of social control—which the authors label "debt peonage." Easy credit keeps the middle class afloat but locks them into an inescapable round of degraded employment options to pay the service on the debt. Meanwhile, very real productivity gains have been given to others ("the 1 %") rather than redistributed to the middle class. These financial changes have been inspired by the marketing of illusions—that deregulated, easy credit will serve everyone well (when, in fact, it dis-serves most) and, as Michaelson (2009) noted, housing prices will always rise (when, in fact, like all markets, housing prices will sometimes fall). Overloaded with debt, Americans were unprepared for the Great Recession with very little flexibility built into their household economics. The authors conclude that reduction in the financial solidity of the middle class led to serious declines in feelings of reciprocity and community, record numbers of personal bankruptcies, and a "politics of displacement" (2007:145–46) arising from cultural resentment in which Americans get angry about virtually anything except money and wealth (2007:xiv). Although some middle-class Americans eventually overcame the last symptom and marshaled their anger to inspire the *Occupy!* Movement, beginning September 2011, for most Americans the protests did little good. Buried in debt, the majority of middle-class Americans had little choice but to accept continued debt peonage to maintain the illusion of middle-class prosperity. Leicht and Fitzgerald (2007) herald, in their own way, earlier analysts' conclusion that money has become the sole measure of the good life for Americans. Here, however, Americans' pursuit of the consumer good life has turned against them in ways that even some astute financial planners seldom foresaw.

Michael Sandel, in *What Money Can't Buy* (2012), also laments the commodification and overcommercialization of contemporary life in the USA. Certainly, the studies and accounts offered in this chapter document an increasing tendency in American life to put money first—and everything else a distant second, third, or fourth. Sandel (2012:110) notes that there are two primary arguments against a society dominated by markets and the market mentality: the fairness objection and the corrupting influence of monetizing everything. The fairness argument focuses on the exclusionary effect that a market-based society imposes on those who cannot participate in the market due to a shortage of funds. The corruption objection is based

on the recognition that commodification intrinsically changes the object of monetization. Taken together, they present a strong argument that broad market monetization impacts society negatively. Consider, for example, a musical instrument. Musical instruments cost hundreds, and often, many thousands of dollars. Thus, there is an exclusionary effect: not everyone can afford a musical instrument. Of course, acquiring a musical instrument, even if one can afford it, does not mean one can play the instrument. Should we live in a society where only those who can afford instruments ever have a chance to play them? At the same time, valuing musical instruments only in terms of their cost corrupts the nature of the instrument: it exists to make music and arguably only an instrument that is being used to make music should even be called a "musical instrument." (Is a piano that is nothing more than a piece of static furniture still a musical instrument?) Is there then a sound moral objection to owning an expensive instrument, solely because one can do so, but an instrument that is never played?

In this example, the market controls and limits opportunity; the commodification effect stifles creativity, skill acquisition, and cultural exchange. Applying only a market valuation to a musical object changes its very nature in this regard since individual ownership thwarts the communal event that making music inevitably entails. In short, commodification destroys culture. As Sandel observes generally, monetary valuations and incentives act to undermine intrinsic ones, thereby changing the nature of any act or item (2012:61). American culture, intent on placing a monetary value on everything in its path—time, friendship, learning—thereby undercuts its own inherent integrity. The consequence is to *devalue* any object or experience unless we can identify the gain, or profit, we will receive from it. Such a universally instrumental view turns every moment into merely one more occasion for calculation and negates further the possibility of generosity, loyalty, or other self-less behavior.

The tension revealed by the studies in this chapter appears to be the same recurrent cultural strain we've encountered in earlier eras. Where the American Dream is conceived in individualistic terms with a pronounced emphasis on self-aggrandizement, pecuniary success, and upward mobility, the danger of disruption to the social fabric is substantial. The web of culture, a fragile thread, is easily broken. The American way of life seems peculiarly animated by strains induced by these factors. The dilemma these factors produce seems to arise from a permanent condition of mutual unrest observed first by Tocqueville, pulling and pushing Americans in different directions, so that the resulting tension periodically threatens to engulf us.

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Contemporary Twenty-First Century Assessments of the American Dream

By now, we have examined a number of variations and multiple dimensions of the American Dream. Some have been the subject of extensive, even exhaustive, review. Other elements or factors within the ambit of the American Dream seem to have received substantially less, or even very little, attention. First, many studies of the American way of life focus on community and show a decided bias in favor of social forms of living. This may have made statistical and demographic sense at the time these studies were conducted. While it has been pointed out by others that the traditional American nuclear family was likely never the predominant form of household even at its height of popularity, there has been a certain reluctance, or simple inability, to explore further the alternative ways of living that may have arisen in recent decades. Second, and closely linked to the first, is the relative failure of sociology to investigate in any consistent, broad-based, empirical manner the actual expressed aspirations of various cohorts and strata of Americans. This is particularly true by means other than standard, closed-end surveys which have their limitations for revealing social goals that are not defined within the categories envisioned and anticipated by the researchers. Combined, these two shortcomings suggest that sociologists, who naturally enough come from somewhere within society, have adopted methods and explored populations that have limited their understanding of what the American Dream may entail for some Americans. A third weakness of some sociological studies is perhaps their failure to examine social processes that are "too close to home" for academic sociology. Thus, studies of the impact of the social organization

of higher education—where mainstream sociologists pursue their trade—may also have been neglected within studies of the American Dream to date. Education, long seen as one of the primary pathways to the American Dream, may have become instead a narrow funnel whose primary function may be to winnow out the marginal and noncompetitive and gather in the privileged. The cumulative effect is that the research we have examined up to this point has failed to inform us sufficiently of the broader expanse of goals and forms of living that characterize the twenty-first-century USA and hidden, rather than revealed, the impact of the contemporary intersection of higher education, class, and opportunity for mobility. Lastly, there has perhaps been a failure to subject overly optimistic assessments of the positive value of the American Dream, and policy prescriptions tied to it, to any form of serious scrutiny. In this chapter, we will review the most recent works brought to bear on the American Dream and pay particular attention to these issues.

One exception to the first two weaknesses is Eric Klinenberg's (2012) investigation of living as a single in the USA in *Going Solo*. Although not without its own deficiencies in terms of method, Klinenberg's analysis and findings stand as potential correctives to other recent studies. Klinenberg begins his examination of living alone in the contemporary USA by reviewing some of the reasons that prior studies by sociologists, and others, have focused on group living. These include the biological, security, and developmental reasons for doing so as well as the competitive advantages conferred on members by living in groups (2012:2–3). Marshaling evidence regarding contemporary society, Klinenberg argues that living alone has become more common—often for some of the same reasons that group living was the preferred mode in other eras. If true, this is a notable change in the manner of living for many in the USA. Moreover, if Americans begin to define among their reasons for living alone a reformulated and reconstituted American Dream, then we have the makings of a quiet, but significant, social revolution.

As Klinenberg argues, numbers alone do not tell the whole story but changes in numerical trends are the core foundation for his observations. Thus, he reports that in 1950 22 % of American adults were single but only four million Americans lived alone (9 % of US households). Being single and living alone in 1950 were commonly short-term adaptations on the way to a traditional married state living in some form of shared household. Today, Klinenberg reports that more than 50 % of adults are single and approximately 31 million (or about 14 %) of all adults live alone

voluntarily. (Klinenberg's figures exclude those—like prisoners and others who live alone involuntarily—who are identified by census figures as living alone.) These figures substantially increase the percentage of US households that shelter just one person: 28 % of households now house just one individual (2012:4–5).

The significant questions to be posed about this increasing phenomenon of living alone have to do with the reasons for changing the historically more typical American way of life. Klinenberg notes, for example, that rather surprisingly the new forms of living alone have become among the most stable of American household arrangements. He observes that over a 5-year period people who live alone are more likely to maintain that lifestyle than any group other than married couples with children (2012:5). The current trend to maintain the living-alone lifestyle over time contrasts markedly with the short-term manner of living alone prevalent in earlier decades. What has inspired this upsurge in living alone?

Klinenberg begins by pointing to broad-based economic prosperity in First World countries like the USA and the social security provided by modern social welfare programs in those countries (2012:10–11). Still, having more easily accessible and generous resources does not, in and of itself, constitute a necessary and sufficient explanation of why living alone has become a more common lifestyle of choice. With respect to the changed allocation and deployment of resources, Klinenberg points first to the modern emphasis on individualism as the source of motivation. Remaining single, for example, was once a stigmatized status. Today, as he observes, cultural attitudes that formerly judged the single state harshly have ameliorated (2012:12–13). Citing and quoting sociologist Andrew Cherlin, Klinenberg argues that the panoply of values that characterize modern First World societies all favor giving the individual priority—freedom, flexibility, personal choice, and limited obligations to others among them (2012:13). He notes that other trends over the course of the twentieth century—the rising status of women, the communications and technology revolutions, mass urbanization, and longer life spans—are also instrumental in supporting the emphasis on individualism and individual values. In particular, women's increased control over their own reproductive capacity has enabled women—and by extension, men—to both maintain independence and enjoy the pleasurable parts of marital life without the attendant chores and obligations (2012:14–15). Likewise, the combination of mass urbanization, increased ease, accessibility to and reduced cost of transportation, and improved communications technologies makes

maintaining connectedness over distance a real possibility. These have significantly enhanced the quality of life for those living alone. Living alone no longer needs to be an isolating experience and those who voluntarily live alone are not, Klinenberg finds, hermits. Formerly, the number of age grade singles in a particular locale might be small enough that living single would involve limited social opportunities. The sheer volume of single living—especially in urban areas—has largely eliminated this problem. Thus, it is the conjunction of economy, infrastructure, technology, inclination, and numbers that constitutes the true foundation for what he finds to be a significant and identifiable modern trend. While the trend may not be limited to the USA, American culture's emphasis on individualism certainly makes it congenial and supportive of single living.

Klinenberg's methods warrant a few moments for consideration. The sources for the original research he reports are a combination of ethnographic observations and data in the form of responses to long-form, semi-structured interviews with more than 300 people who live alone in a metropolitan area (2012:235). Klinenberg describes the different recruitment methods he used to obtain interview subjects from five groups whose members are high among those who live alone (young adult professionals between the ages of 28 and 40; middle-age middle-class adults ages 40–65; poor men living in single room occupancy (SRO) accommodations ages 40–65; and the old, ages 65 and above; as well as "special efforts" to recruit African American women because of their relatively high rates of living alone) (2012:236). Still, he concedes that "most people who live alone are financially secure enough to do it, which means our interviews, as well as the analysis I offer here, focus mainly on the experiences of the middle class" (2012:24). Klinenberg conducted the interviews himself or, in some cases, interviews were undertaken by graduate students he hired and trained. Klinenberg worked from the detailed field notes graduate students maintained and his own interview results to reach the findings he reports. Generally, he states that he wanted to uncover the shared experiences that would inform him about the "fundamental features of social life" for single living. His goal was to distinguish between the "common and uncommon" factors and experiences of living alone (2012:237).

Since the results produced by any science are highly dependent on the methods employed, Klinenberg's findings must be viewed with that caveat in mind. Generally, Klinenberg finds many of the people his team interviewed who live alone report they are happy with their experience. These subjects were, however, largely clustered among the young urban

professionals (ages 28–40) and middle-age, middle-class adults (ages 40–65). In most of these cases, it was clear that Klinenberg's respondents chose to live alone and could afford to do so in circumstances that were comfortable. For many of the young urban professionals, the choice to live alone was an extension of their single adult status. Traditionally, five milestones have been used to chart the transition from adolescence through "emerging adulthood" to full adult status in our society—completing school, leaving home, attaining financial independence, marrying, and having a first child. Millennials (those born between 1980 and 1990) are reported to be making this transition as much as 5 years later in their lives than earlier generations (Henig and Henig 2012:3–4). One aspect of this longer transition has been the increased age at which Americans marry, thus delaying this common reason for forming a larger household (2012:85–86). In addition to the impetus to move away and establish themselves, and the increased age at first marriage, persons in this age group are in Klinenberg's words young adults who "were brought up to do so [i.e., live alone successfully]" (2012:48). By this, he means many of them grew up in an era where they had their own room as a child and then either had their own single dormitory room at college or clearly wanted one, a further delineation of the middle- and upper-class nature of his Millennial respondents. As a consequence of these experiences, his subjects were often children who spent an unprecedented amount of time alone and learned to accommodate, and value, solitude with less experience of being lonely. Some, too, had bad experiences with roommates and that made the decision to live alone even easier once they could afford to do so.

For example, Klinenberg tells the story of Justin, an aspiring journalist he found sharing with roommates in New York City who were college friends. That arrangement was congenial—for about 5 years. After a series of transitions among his roommates, Justin found himself sharing with someone who simply got on his nerves. He began to dread seeing his roommate in the living room or at the dining table. He started to avoid his own home or sequester himself in his room. Justin moved out, found a better roommate situation, but discovered he now longed for privacy. If he cut some of his expenses, he could afford a one-bedroom apartment: for him, the choice was an easy one and living alone became his preferred lifestyle (2012:54–56).

For the middle-aged, middle-class subjects of Klinenberg's interviews, living alone often became their preference after a divorce. When Klinenberg interviewed her, Helen was in her early sixties and had lived

alone for 30 years. Married at 25, she divorced after 2.5 years. Within a few years, she married again at age 32—but divorced again in another 2.5 years. Ever since, she has lived alone, a "fiercely independent" writer and teacher as she described herself (2012:85–87). While Helen had not pursued a renewed romantic interest, some of the other "urban divorced" middle-age interview subjects had, but many still did so with an eye to remaining single and living alone.

As Klinenberg recites, one of the qualities that unite these two groups is the capacity to live alone. One important feature of that capacity is economic. Beyond the financial means, however, there is the ability to generate a pleasing life without the aid of another person. Various respondents tell Klinenberg that living alone is challenging and that the ability to "reframe" the experience as one that is positively valued is a key attribute (2012:58). Living alone can be experienced as social failure; successful living alone requires self-confidence and an individualistic attitude; one interview subject tells Klinenberg that one must be willing to fight to be successful at it. A person living alone must be prepared to undertake solitary projects and make major decisions repeatedly on one's own. Klinenberg concludes that those who can voluntarily use their controlled domestic space as an oasis from an otherwise busy successful work life are among the most successful (2012:112).

Among those who have fewer happy experiences to relate about living alone are disadvantaged city dwellers, among them men in SRO dwellings. As Klinenberg notes, the number of men in this situation has grown due to the collapse of the industrial labor market for blue-collar workers, deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, and the population growth within the criminal justice system (2012:115). These men—rather than feeling energized, liberated, or reinvigorated by living alone—generally accept it as a necessary evil given their limited circumstances. Self-imposed social isolation in this manner, while superficially voluntary, is—in reality—an option of last resort pursued by those with no other choices. Rather than life satisfaction, single living of this nature produces at best a grim resolve. The young urban professionals and middle-age, middle-class urbanites that live alone successfully rely to a great extent on a relatively expansive social network of friends and other close contacts. Rick, who is 50 and gay and lives in an SRO, was at a loss when Klinenberg asked him about his close relationships: "Everybody's dead. Everybody….I lost, like, eight to nine people within a period of, like, five or six years" (2012:118). Miguel answered similarly after having withdrawn socially: "I can't really say right now that

I have a close friend, or that I'm even looking to get a close friend." His goal, he says, is to achieve a greater degree of autonomy so that he will not be forced to depend on other people who, he fears, will only disappoint him or disappear from his life leaving him only more alone (2012:119). Nick, in his mid-thirties and living in another SRO, tells Klinenberg, "most of my old friends are either dead or incarcerated" (2012:119).

The implications for the American Dream of Klinenberg's work are substantial. One can read his study broadly to suggest that the traditional family forms that constitute one version of the American Dream for many people have receded in importance. Under this reading, individualism—a prominently noted American characteristic from the earliest days of the Republic—has permitted some Americans to reframe living alone as their route to the American Dream. Klinenberg's work can be read more narrowly as well. Thus, it is clear from Klinenberg's method and his findings that his work should be understood only in light of its limitations. His aggregate number of interview subjects was small (300+ in a country with 31 million people now living alone) (2012:5), the method of selection was nonrandom, and by Klinenberg's own admission respondents were predominantly middle class. These features suggest that we should be reluctant to read too much into Klinenberg's conclusions. Perhaps more importantly, we should recognize that a significant number of the subjects he interviewed—and likely many more of the millions he didn't—were certainly not living their dream. The idea of the American Dream is bound up with the ideas of aspiration and choice. Those who live alone but do not do so by choice can hardly be said to be living out their American Dream. The men living alone in SRO accommodations have not affirmatively sought out their manner of living; rather, they have opted for what seems to be the last best option among a range of truly bad choices. SRO living in this sense is not a choice that any of these men would have made to the extent they had better choices. None of the men in these circumstances said they would have chosen SRO living as their mode of choice had there been a real choice. It was not part of their American Dream to live alone in a single room in a cheap hotel.

Like many of the studies we've examined, William Deresiewicz does not identify his goal in *Excellent Sheep* (2014) as an effort to dissect the American Dream. Rather, he describes his book as a critique of the current trends in American elite university education but, too, a search for what a "meaningful way of life" might constitute in the contemporary USA. The

result is that almost everything Deresiewicz has to say is obliquely, and sometimes rather directly, a commentary on the American Dream as it is conventionally pursued.

Deresiewicz is not a sociologist but taught English at Yale after earning his PhD in English from Columbia University. He begins *Excellent Sheep* by advising the reader of the centrality of the success ethic to his life and the thesis of his book:

> I was like so many kids today…I went off to college like a sleepwalker, like a zombie….You went to college, you studied something…Up ahead were vaguely understood objectives: status, wealth, getting to the top—in a word, "success." … What it meant to get an education, and why you might want one…all this was off the table. (2014:1–2)

Deresiewicz goes on to describe elite higher education in the USA as a system of tightly interlocking parts that "manufactures students who are smart and talented and driven, yes, but also anxious, timid and lost, with little intellectual curiosity and a stunted sense of purpose" (2014:2–3).

Deresiewicz's critique of elite higher education can be understood best as a critique of elite striving within a series of social systems that put a premium on success. Elite higher education at Ivy League universities (and others that model themselves after those institutions) is merely the tip of the iceberg that Deresiewicz examines. As he notes in the introduction:

> When I speak in this book of elite education, I mean prestigious institutions like Harvard or Stanford or Williams as well as a larger universe of selective second-tier schools, but I also mean everything that leads up to and away from them: the private and affluent public high schools; the ever-growing industry of tutors and consultants, test-prep courses and enrichment programs; the admissions process itself, squatting like a dragon at the entrance to adulthood; the brand-name graduate schools and employment opportunities that come after the BA; and the parents and communities, largely upper middle class, who push their children into the maw of this machine. (2014:2)

The common denominator that Deresiewicz identifies in these various components of our elite educational system is competition and a cultural imperative to achieve success. The process starts early according to Deresiewicz as he describes the superlative students who populate elite universities as "enviable youngsters, who appear to be the winners in the

race we have made of childhood" (2014:7). To the contrary, Deresiewicz contends that the successful competence these achievers project merely is a cover for "toxic levels of fear, anxiety and depression, of emptiness and aimlessness and isolation" (2014:8). Deresiewicz refers for support to surveys suggesting that college students' self-reports of emotional well-being have fallen substantially over the last 25 years. However, his principal source of evidence is a series of anecdotal communications from students. Collectively, these stories confirm the existence of a competitive culture that causes students to compromise their health; sacrifice meaningful relationships; curtail curiosity and intellectual exploration; refrain from pursuing activities for their own sake; and seek high grades, networking, and resume building as though their lives depend on it.

As a matter of fact, these students' lives do depend on grades, networking, and resume building if they wish to maintain their standing in elite institutions. The students Deresiewicz describes are academic performers: like all-American athletes or thoroughbred horses, these elite students have been selected, coached, drilled, and responded successfully to each challenge put before them. The students have taken the bit between their teeth and will run the race. They are, in essence, system conformists. As Deresiewicz phrases it, "Whatever you demand of them, they'll do. Whatever bar you place in front of them, they'll clear" (2014:12). Deresiewicz's concern is that these academically superior students have only learned to be successful students; they have not, in his experience, learned to use their minds or develop and pursue intellectual passions. In short, the students have analyzed the purpose of elite institutions as being gatekeepers and ticket punchers to the good life. Their response is to insure they acquire the credential that will certify their admission to the next level. Still, one must ask, the next level to what?

The answer, according to Deresiewicz, is the golden opportunity to make money. He notes that in 1995 economics was the most popular major at 3 of the top 10 liberal arts colleges in *U.S. News*; in 2013, it was most popular at between 8 and 14 of the top schools (variance introduced by the reporting methods). Over the same period, Deresiewicz reports that finance and consulting emerged as the most coveted career choices at these elite schools (2014:16–17). A significant factor for most of those who choose these popular fields, not surprisingly, is money (2014:18). A former student told Deresiewicz he was not very happy in consulting and wanted to do something creative but that he had become addicted to a lifestyle that only the consulting money could support (2014:23).

The emphasis that Deresiewicz finds on achievement and success is not the only cultural feature of life at these elite higher education institutions that resembles some descriptions of the rat race version of the American Dream. A second feature is the oft-stated and widely encouraged claim that these students' opportunities are limitless. The consequence, Deresiewicz contends, is that students who have been told repeatedly that they have unlimited potential to do anything want to forestall committing to serious choices. They do so by following what he calls "clear paths" that may require a competitive application process but lead to (1) any position that won't foreclose options (2) while padding one's resume with another impressive placement (2014:18–20). The paradox of having the potential to pursue endless opportunities is that once one does make a serious personal investment, the potential to move on to that next "unlimited opportunity" becomes limited. One consequence is students who have been told they have unlimited opportunities become highly averse to experimenting; they conform out of fear of the perceived loss they may invite by straying. Deresiewicz is sympathetic to this dilemma. He regularly points to the possibilities that are shut down by lock-step adherence to the smooth escalator that moves top students at elite universities from competitive high schools on to successful entry into competitive jobs that pay well. He is concerned about the loss of self that can arise due to subordination to a system that offers students nothing more than safety and money.

The cultural system Deresiewicz describes is simply the American success ethic (as embedded in elite higher education institutions) run amuck. It is not, as Deresiewicz recounts, some new invention but it is instead the most current configuration of a status exclusion system at the highest levels of American society. In capsule form, Deresiewicz traces the history of Ivy League colleges from their inception when they were relatively small, local, powerless institutions that trained young men who were gentlemen's sons to the late nineteenth century when the Protestant establishment created a range of institutions for themselves, elite colleges among them. Exclusivity was maintained in a number of ways. In the early twentieth century, Harvard maintained exclusivity by admitting virtually all graduates of Groton, the private preparatory school, denying only 3 among 405 applicants from 1906 to 1932 (Karabel 2006:564, note 60). The elite schools also dropped admissions standards but then were forced to develop procedures—like required letters of recommendation—to insure only the "right sort" (meaning not Catholics and Jews) were admitted. This system of preferences disintegrated in the 1960s when, as

Deresiewicz phrases it, "old aristocracy [gave way] to the new meritoc-racy" (2014:32). Admissions standards were raised, and while preferences for athletes and legacies were not abandoned the emphasis had decid-edly shifted. Competing among themselves, the elite national universities maintained their aura of prestige so that competition for admission became ever fiercer and the pressure on students who were admitted became more intense. An emphatic high point was reached in 1983 according to Deresiewicz when *U.S. News and World Report* began its annual college ranking issue. Although widely derided as documenting an illusory and unscientific comparison, the issue inspired an upsurge in applications to the elite schools, unabated today. The only reason for this frenzy is the same as for any competition: winning. As Deresiewicz pithily observes, "The main thing that's driving the madness is simply the madness itself. 'The resume arms race,' as it is invariably called, is just like the nuclear one. The only point of having more is having more than everybody else" (2014:39).

Deresiewicz establishes another close connection with the American Dream when he discusses the role parents play in the process. He points out that, "Families are scared, and good reason. Social mobility has stalled" (2014:41). Why should this matter to such a degree, one might ask? The answer is clearly that tenet of the American Dream which suggests to both American parents and their children that vertical intergenerational mobil-ity is a cornerstone of the American way. Neither American parents nor their progeny can apparently withstand the idea of a "no growth" way of life. Children of the upper middle class simply must do better than their parents. But what is the competition for? Deresiewicz claims it is about selecting winners and also-rans within the upper middle class and does not even involve aspirants from the lower and middle classes who are, by definition, not in the game (2014:41). As Deresiewicz snarkily character-izes it, "It doesn't matter that a bright young person can still go to Ohio State, become a doctor, settle in Bloomington or Dayton, and make a very good living. Such an outcome is too horrible to contemplate" (2014:42).

Psychologically, this intertwined ambition of the elite schools to remain ascendant and the goal of parents of students admitted to those schools to have their children be more successful than they have been places stu-dents under enormous pressure. Its most invidious quality is to deprive the child of an autonomous self and to make that child feel as though it is an extension of someone else's desires (2014:44). In a society where success is overvalued, like ours, some parents feel strongly their children must be

successful; for them, to fail is a reflection on the parent, who clearly failed as well. Deresiewicz sounds ominously like Philip Slater (1990:9) here, who noted in 1970 that children were not fooled by parents who said "what's it all for anyway?". Deresiewicz observes that today's parents who intone "do what you love" and "follow your dreams" are not believed by their children (2014:45). In this environment, the high school student self becomes nothing more than a way to "package themselves for [college] admissions offices" (2014:57). The college student self, once admitted, will then be ready to be successfully packaged for the next level.

In the end, where does Deresiewicz's analysis of elite higher education institutions leave us? As he summarizes, "Fortunately, our colleges and universities are fully cognizant of the problems" (2014:59). He then ticks off a list of idealistically driven responses intended to ameliorate this situation. On the next page, he deflates the reader's hopes by acknowledging, "I'm kidding, of course" (2014:59). What Deresiewicz sees instead is a system of mutual accommodation driven by real-world incentives. In this nightmare scenario, faculty at elite institutions, who wish to be rewarded for doing research, spend as little time on their classes as they can and award students increasingly higher grades for lower-quality work. In a phrase, grade inflation provides the solution for everyone (2014:64–66). This quid pro quo also suits university administrators because it keeps the students coming back and paying tuition. The eventual outcome—and, indeed, the only function of a system like the one described—is to reproduce the national class system already in place. As Deresiewicz records, elite institutions draw their students from the higher echelons of society and spit them back out to the same environs. His conclusion: "It is no coincidence that income inequality is higher than it's been since the Great Depression, or that social mobility is now lower" (2014:207). The American Dream, for some, is apparently thriving.

A third recent book that addresses some of the critical unanswered questions regarding the American Dream is *Chasing the American Dream* by Rank et al. (2014). The authors are well versed in the history and conventional understanding of the American Dream for middle-class Americans. Their exploration, while anchored by the traditional conception accorded the American Dream, also extends beyond these narrow confines in certain respects. The result is a carefully researched and argued update on the issues of inequality, vertical mobility, and opportunity with the added benefit of some imaginative inquiries into other possible meanings for the American Dream.

Rank et al. (2014:12) identify three fundamental components of the American Dream: (1) the freedom to pursue one's passions in order to fulfill one's potential by living out a personal dream; (2) the belief that one should work hard to pursue one's dream but that, in the end, the bargain struck should provide basic financial security; and (3) the need to be able to experience hope and sustain optimism with regard to one's own progress toward the dream and similarly experience a sound basis for looking ahead with confidence that one's children can do so as well. In the authors' view, these three elements constitute the core features of what Americans mean by the American Dream.

Rank et al.'s discussion of the freedom to pursue one's own conception of the American Dream and fulfill one's potential illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of their approach. The heart of their discussion is epitomized by the life histories of Matt, an aspiring professional baseball player; Rachel, a securities attorney who was able to rise to become a US attorney, a US magistrate, and a US district judge; and Tom, an actor who experienced great difficulty supporting himself and his family solely on his passion for the stage. These stories make compelling observations about the American Dream. First, each protagonist possessed a true passion for the calling he or she chose to pursue. Second, each of the three also faced challenges: Matt struggled to hit at the plate and spent too many years in the minor leagues to make it to the majors; Rachel, who experienced more success than she ever imagined, strove to do justice within a country and a system that seems to care little about the disadvantaged; while Tom's quest for a high level of performance on the stage left him wondering what he can offer his wife and children from a life of paltry paychecks and yellowing press clippings (2014:17–26). Regardless of these difficulties, in the end, each agreed that it was important to be able to pursue one's own destiny. Psychologists who study life satisfaction have confirmed that commitment to the pursuit of intrinsic goals that are inherently rewarding is a key to achieving personal happiness (Lyubomirsky 2007:208–09). As the authors add, however, in order for this to happen, Matt, Rachel, and Tom required a basic level of economic support and security, sometimes supplied by society but often offered by family as well.

It is difficult to argue that the pursuit of liberty is not intrinsic to the history of the USA. As Rank et al. recognize, and as I have laid out in my first chapter (Chap. 1), early English colonists pursued the freedom to practice their religion in Massachusetts while others sought to exercise economic freedom in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere. The weakness of

their approach, however, is the relatively short shrift and limited treatment they give to two aspects of freedom to pursue one's dream. First, while the authors acknowledge one way Americans can choose to follow their dream is a life of crime (2014:16), they offer only a 50-word paragraph to address it. This is especially puzzling since they certainly know that quite a number of sociologists and criminologists have examined this influence of the American Dream with respect to crime and deviance. Indeed, new books documenting the (often tragic) vitality of this variation on the American Dream are regularly released by major publishers (Messner and Rosenfeld 2013; Hobbs 2014; Contreras 2013). To fail to discuss this impact is to gild the American Dream with gold filigree and treat negative effects, like crime, simply as dross. Second, they acknowledge that it was obvious from many they talked to that the ability to pursue one's passion was a bit of a privilege and luxury that Matt, Rachel, and Tom possessed. As the authors comment about these other interviewees, whose stories they did not tell, "[T]hese were individuals who were working at jobs out of necessity, rather than because they were personally fulfilling." The choice to tell Matt, Rachel, and Tom's stories—and not these unnamed Americans' stories—has the tendency to highlight the "success through hard work" theme often woven into the American Dream. The more common story the authors perhaps heard, "hard work at the minimum wage, barely living paycheck to paycheck, with no chance of advancement" (or some approximation thereof), was left out. Certainly, this is the story Ehrenreich (2001), and others (Newman 2000; Shipler 2004), told about the American working poor and there is little reason to suspect things have appreciably changed. Finally, by focusing on the protagonists in their stories, the authors disregard the aspirations of others in Matt, Rachel, and Tom's support networks. Did Matt's wife—who was superficially described as "supportive" of his dream of playing baseball—have a dream of her own? What was it? Was it suppressed and overridden by her support of Matt's dream? How did she feel about that? And Tom's children, did they feel that their own dreams were constrained by Tom's marginal income as an actor in regional theater? We won't know the answers to these questions because Rank et al. did not report on these issues.

Among the many strengths of their book, Rank et al.'s handling of the issue of basic economic security stands out. Their treatment begins with the recognition that there is a significant difference between the goal of economic well-being for one's family and economic success in American capitalism's race to grasp the gold ring. The authors rely on

survey responses Americans offered and by the work of other researchers. Both sources suggest that what Americans seek is not to become wealthy (2014:45) but rather to "keep their heads above water" or to provide for one's family (2014:29). These results are confirmed by psychological studies that indicate that pursuing extrinsic goals, especially the goal of making money, are often only successful in providing limited life satisfaction at the service of other, more personal, intrinsic goals (Lyubomirsky 2007:209–10). Moreover, they are correct that Americans perceive the promise of the American Dream as an exchange, not a right, entitlement, or gift. The authors reference survey responses and quote from their interviews the widely held view that if one works hard the result should be a living wage and security for one's family (2014:29–35).

Rank et al. have other points to offer regarding the manner in which economic security factors into the American Dream. For example, the authors analyze data using four different measures of economic security that suggest four-fifths of all Americans will experience at least 1 year of economic instability and insecurity over their working lifetime (2014:36). Those who do will either need welfare assistance, fall (at least temporarily) into poverty, face a period of unemployment, or suffer from some combination of these circumstances. They are also perceptive in separating the umbrella term "economic security" into discrete parts. They note in this regard that income is readily distinguishable from savings and that both or either can contribute to sustaining financial security. Savings, however, offer the benefit of solvency when living paycheck to paycheck fails during downturns or personal crises. Similarly, owning a house offers not only a haven in a heartless world for one's family but a valuable asset normally worth about one-quarter of a household's total assets. The authors discover perhaps their most revealing observation about the impact of wealth from an interview with a financial advisor for the truly wealthy. Robert Greenfield, whose clients' assets totaled from 100 million to 3 billion dollars, noted that his clients often struggled to be independent of their wealth. When the authors queried him about his meaning, he described the immense burden that many of his clients experienced managing, possessing, and disposing of their wealth. It was, in fact, a task that imprisoned many of his clients in a narrow horizon and made them unhappy. Unable to ask what is my wealth for, his clients found little satisfaction in their money (2014:45–47). As the authors note, psychologists who have specifically investigated the "wealth effect" on happiness have generally found that above an annual income of $75,000 Americans seldom

experience any further gain in life satisfaction (2014:47). Psychologists who study life satisfaction and happiness generally report similar findings (Lyubomirsky 2007:43–44). Greenfields' story seems to bear this out.

Rank et al. also handily summarize some of the structural forces shaping the landscape of economic opportunity in the USA over the last several decades. Briefly, they note a relative change in availability of permanent, full-time jobs that offer a living wage and can support a family compared to a surfeit of lower-paying, often part-time jobs with less stability and fewer prospects for promotion or mobility (2014:67–75). The impact of these trends on the conventional American Dream that relies on upward mobility through education is pronounced. Many argue that college degrees are becoming less effective at guaranteeing a middle-class income, even in a good economy, simply due to the fact that the increasing number of college graduates far outstrips the projections for commensurate white-collar job growth (Dasgupta 2015:83–84). Even those jobs that are created often do not require a college education to perform the job. College graduates are reported to have accepted jobs as mail couriers and receptionists simply to have a job (2015:84). To compound the problem for those holding many of these lower-paying or part-time jobs, many employers demand open shift availability from their workers: The employers refuse to give their workers a consistent weekly schedule making it impossible for these workers to hold a second job (Rank et al. 2014:72). Comments from interview subjects among these workers range from resignation to despair. This structural condition contributes to the growing inequality gap reflected in incomes, assets, and social capital in the USA (2014:78–82).

The importance of the inequality gap is best understood in terms of its effect on vertical mobility. As Rank et al. demonstrate, fathers' income in the USA historically has had more impact on sons' future income than in most other countries. This means that economic mobility is more constrained by one's starting point in the USA than in other countries (2014:90). At the same time, the authors also find substantial fluidity in income at both the high and low ends of the income spectrum throughout the life course in the USA. This is not necessarily a good thing, however, as it is really a comment on lack of income stability and the likelihood that Americans will experience more income volatility than those in other countries (2014:95–100). Income stability also correlates with reported happiness; variation either up or down can introduce anxiety and become disconcerting.

Rank et al. falter to a degree when they discuss the role of motivation, hard work, and skill in connection with "getting ahead" or "making it" economically in the USA. Generally, they argue that motivation, hard work, and skill are necessary but not sufficient conditions for economic success. Their evidence is purely anecdotal and limited to two case histories and some stories they are told by focus group participants. Moreover, one can easily find among their interview subjects a contrary account: Tom, the actor, who has worked hard throughout an entire career but never succeeded financially. As the authors observe, there are good reasons—none of which relate to Tom's lack of motivation (he was highly motivated), his lack of hard work (he worked regularly), or his talent or skill (he won many positive reviews for his performances). Rather, the authors point out that (1) Tom was in an extremely competitive field where (2) many circumstantial factors likely influenced the result more than Tom's personal efforts. Among these factors, the authors list (1) serendipity in being at the right place at the right time to secure another acting role when a performance ended; (2) the good fortune to have made key contacts and connections, or not, especially early in one's career; and (3) possessing (or not) a certain look or style that coincided with entertainment industry fashions at various points in one's career (2014:105). Although they raise the issue, they present no empirical data that seriously addresses whether it is factors like these that primarily impacted on Tom's relative success. Consequently, their conclusion regarding the influence of motivation, hard work, and skill on success is mostly conjecture.

Rank et al. are on firmer ground when they address the concept of cumulative disadvantage. This is the notion that Americans do not compete on a level playing field or, as Billie Holiday sang, "Them that's got, gets more" (2014:109). Their conclusion is based on data the authors presented earlier: Differences in parental incomes and resources exert a powerful likelihood that sons and daughters will do well themselves. This is due to the competitive advantages financially secure parents can purchase for their children. For example, the economically well-off can support extra expenditures to insure their children get extra skill training, education, and socialization activities (2014:108). These differences in human capital and enlarged social network will, in turn, influence favorably how children are able to compete—whether in educational settings, the labor market, the social market, or the marriage market. Moreover, as many studies demonstrate, there is an enhancement effect between success in one venue—for example, employment—and success in collateral realms such as social networks and domestic stability. The

effect produced is simply that, on the one hand, advantages and opportunities can be multiplied throughout a lifetime by accumulating relative success after relative success. Conversely, inequities can be successively passed on from one generation to another through systemic disproportionality driven by residential segregation, public school financing practices based on districting, and the corresponding influence that the range and quality of educational opportunity have upon careers and income (2014:110–22). Notably, sociologists have presented evidence to suggest that the income inequality effect on educational attainment is now twice the impact of race (Reardon 2011).

Although Rank et al. muster powerful data and astute observations regarding economic themes underlying the American Dream, they surpass themselves with a thoughtful and perceptive analysis of the elements of hope and optimism. While the authors are not the first commentators to include either hope or optimism as a component of the American Dream, these features have often been relegated to an afterthought. As Rank et al. capably and persuasively argue, hope and optimism are crucial elements within the American Dream. Without them, there would really be no "dream" aspect to the concept, and without the invitation to dream beyond the present, what would really be left?

As Rank et al. succinctly summarize, hope, optimism, challenge, the next horizon, progress, tomorrow—in one form, or another, the idea of the American Dream embodies features that invite Americans to strive and meet difficulties. The authors neatly sum up this optimistic underpinning in a single phrase: "the American Dream offers the hope for a brighter day to come" (2014:53). The authors demonstrate through a number of interview responses that the hope for a better life is central to the stories of the millions of immigrants who have ventured to the USA (2014:34–56). Although the authors' understanding of the critical importance of hope and optimism within the American Dream is a signal contribution, they perhaps fail to emphasize sufficiently the importance of its corollary—the necessity to fight for that hope to be realized. Mike Campbell, a motivational speaker, told them:

> The challenge is, (with) the American Dream you don't just wake up and get there. You have to pound repeatedly and humbly to achieve it. If you're willing to do that, and if you're passionate about it, and you tell your story and your dreams enough, you'll find yourself, in time, living the American dream. But not because it was easy. (2014:54)

Without the emphasis on this prong, however, Americans are apt to embrace the lure of easy success, whether in monetary form or some other. Confidence in the outcome without sufficient basis, or due diligence, leads often not to success but to disappointment. Those who overmatch themselves due to lack of any realistic, tested grounds against real competition can easily come up against hard reality when they are tested. Con men and scammers of all varieties depend on these qualities of overconfidence and unexamined optimism to exploit their victims. Indeed, at least one journalist has argued, in effect, that the American Dream itself is the scam: those induced to chase after it will merely experience a more sophisticated version of "bait and switch" than deceptive advertising alone could produce (Ehrenreich 2009). In other instances, Americans' native, unrestrained optimism and hope for a better future invites simple delusions or, in the phrase made famous by former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan in a 1996 speech before the American Enterprise Institute, irrational exuberance.

Rank et al. also address directly a topic that many analysts of the American Dream studiously avoid confronting: the element of chance or, as they phrase it, twists of fate. They begin their discussion with the lead author's account of how he narrowly missed being involved in a serious—and perhaps fatal—automobile accident by hesitating, for no discernible reason, and turning his head, to see a full-size pickup truck ready to run a red light and crush his small car on the driver's side. Fortunately, the author looked and stopped in time (2014:13). Twists of fate may involve less dramatic, but equally life-altering events, such as chance encounters that lead to new opportunities. The problem that the element of chance presents is it severs the link between hard work and eventual reward. If one's future success in life is primarily dependent on being born to the right parents, for example, which Rank et al. demonstrated earlier, then the motivation to work hard is lessened. Rather than proffering hope, the American Dream would then generate cynicism. The authors do not directly confront this question but they discuss the factor that they believe mitigates, or enhances, the element of chance: the manner in which individuals respond to a twist of fate, whether one for good or ill. Their evidence, however, is purely anecdotal, based on three cases, and—by and large—inconclusive.

Thus, the authors tell the story of Kevin who is released from his job simply because the company states it is "going in a new direction." When the authors conducted their interview, Kevin was still in the process of

looking for a new position. While he had some leads, he had "nothing definite" yet (2014:137). What should we make of Kevin's situation in terms of understanding the American Dream? Following the authors' theoretical proposition, did Kevin respond properly to the unexpected twist of fate he encountered? How will we know? Will the test be whether or not he gets a new position commensurate with the one he lost? What if he gets a position but one not as good? Finally, what if he doesn't obtain a new position—will that tell us he didn't respond well? The authors fail to follow through and tell us the answers to questions like these.

Rank et al. face a similar difficulty in factoring chance into their desire to encourage sober, rational policy initiatives to support the American Dream. In their view, public policies to support the American Dream fall into two categories. First are policies intended to expand the number of quality jobs that will support a decent standard of living and benefits. Immediately, the authors encounter the dilemma that faces all US presidents in this regard: neither they nor the president can pilot the economy under normal economic conditions. Rather, as they concede, the creation of new jobs is dependent on a robust growth in demand or innovation that produces new demands which can then be satisfied economically (2014:162–63). Second, the authors seek to encourage policy initiatives that "open up the avenues of opportunity so that all Americans are able to strive toward their potential" (2014:162). This goal, of course, is nebulous in the extreme. As a practical matter, what would that policy initiative look like? Is there a way to legislate something so vague? Here, the authors recommend a standard series of liberal programs to help "level the playing field." These include support for good health care for mother and child during pregnancy, continuing quality health care for all through childhood, creating "thriving neighborhoods and communities" where children can grow up safely, supporting "first-class education" for all children, increasing access to community colleges and technical schools, making higher education affordable for all, and reducing or eliminating barriers such as racial discrimination (2014:164–65). These classically liberal prescriptions fail to tackle the obvious political and economic constraints to all such proposals: where does the political will to initiate such proposals come from and where will the money to fund the proposals be found? The authors have nothing to say on these issues. Perhaps an even better objection is the fact that the authors fail to explain why well-known existing programs, like WIC which supports good mother–child nutrition for the poor, are insufficient. Finally, how will ameliorative programs and policies

like these eliminate the class-based exclusionary practices that insulate elite levels of government, the professions, and the corporate world? The most probable answer is: they won't.

The explanation for why these superficial proposals are put forward at all is in the nature of the American Dream itself: for the American Dream to maintain its quality of hope and optimism, it must envision progress toward a better tomorrow. The authors note in their third element that the American Dream requires that each generation have confidence that the USA will offer sustainable opportunity for their children to achieve the American Dream as well. If authors writing about the American Dream didn't explain how a "better tomorrow" could be created, their failure to do so would display their lack of confidence in the American Dream. Their lack of belief in progress toward the American Dream would also make them less credible. American readers do not wish to hear that neither they nor anyone else close to them will be unable to achieve the American Dream. The authors, like their audience, seem to want the American Dream to work. This suggests they must offer a "patch"—or in today's terms a "work-around"—that will paper over some of the gaps in American society, at least rhetorically. Never mind that programs addressing some of the authors' concerns already exist; never mind that hardened political polarization makes implementing some of the authors' proposals unlikely; never mind that chance will still intervene and defeat rational social policy in any event. It seems that chasing the American Dream requires social theorists to forego analysis and offer us back the illusory dream itself when the American Dream's questionable credibility is at stake.

The most recent analysis of the American Dream on offer is in Robert Putnam's *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis.* Putnam begins by harkening back to his hometown experience in the 1950s—Port Clinton, Ohio—which he characterizes as "a passable embodiment of the American Dream, a place that offered decent opportunity for the kids in town, whatever their background" (Putnam 2015:1). The premise for his book—that the American Dream is in crisis—is also stimulated by his thoughts regarding Port Clinton, which he now describes as a small city in which "kids from the wrong side of the tracks that bisect the town can barely imagine the future that awaits the kids from the right side of the tracks" (2015:1). Putnam's book is, in part, the story of how this quiet community was transformed from incubator for the American Dream to a cauldron that contains only the polarized American nightmare. Sam Quinones' *Dreamland* (2015) tells a somewhat similar tale of Portsmouth, Ohio—200 miles

south of Port Clinton—where rust belt economic stagnation took hold 30 years ago and for half that time permitted Portsmouth to become a Midwestern leader in heroin use, trafficking, and heroin-related deaths.

Putnam's depiction of America in the 1950s immediately raises some questions as to its accuracy. In the first few pages, he contends that in the 1950s "economic and educational expansion were high; income equality was relatively high; class segregation in neighborhoods and schools was low; class barriers to intermarriage and social intercourse were low; civic engagement and social solidarity were high; and opportunities for kids born in the lower echelon to scale the economic ladder were abundant" (2015:1–2). Grounds for objection exist with respect to each of these claims. There is, for example, no evidence supplied for one or another of these assertions; indeed, this sentence is largely the last time they are mentioned. Thus, there is no further discussion of class intermarriage, whether then or now, and scant evidence provided of equality in the realm of social intercourse during the 1950s. Putnam's assertions regarding class segregation in neighborhoods and education are quite open to challenge. For example, Putnam offers no neighborhood-by-neighborhood analysis of residential segregation but relies mostly on anecdote and a survey of the memories of his 1959 high school graduating class. With respect to education, Putnam's discussion of the effect of private schools on access to opportunities consists of a single, dismissive paragraph (2015:173).

This is particularly surprising as Putnam is fully aware of the social capital benefits of possessing enhanced social networks of elite connections (since he teaches at Harvard). Putnam notes, a mere 30 pages later, that it is upper-class parents who are in a position to enable their children to form weak ties with influential people by enrolling them in organized activities and introducing them to professionals and other successful adults. Putnam then observes, quite correctly, that the weak-tie advantage of having access to an expansive social network for the purpose of upward mobility is most valuable where the social ties are to "professors, teachers, lawyers, medical personnel, business leaders"—that is, the kind of people who in many instances attended private schools (2015:208–10). He further notes that social capital in this form can protect children from a privileged class from being derailed by the ordinary risks of adolescence: influence and expertise can be deployed to reduce the consequences of negative behavior or misadventure—precisely the manner in which private schools have been used historically to incubate the sons and daughters of the wealthy. In short, Putnam's own book contradicts his assertion that private schools are

"not so important … [to the opportunity gap]…as many people think" (2015:173).

Putnam's failure to follow up more assiduously on some of his non-economic empirical claims, however, is understandable since the primary thrust of his book is to demonstrate the existing gap in access to opportunity between poor families and those that are better off. It is the Port Clinton of today (as a proxy for the USA of today) with its "stark class divisions, where … wealthy kids park BMW convertibles in the high school lot next to decrepit junkers that homeless classmates … live in" that is the subject of Putnam's concerns (2015:2). As Putnam easily demonstrates, many of the things upper-class and upper-middle-class children bring to school (over and above BMW convertibles) make a substantial difference in their ability to benefit from educational opportunity. To be sure, many of the factors that Putnam names arise from social capital or cultural capital, but their original source stems, not unexpectedly, from access to financial capital. First, residential segregation by class in the contemporary USA shunts students from high-income families into different schools (some private, most public) than students from low-income families (2015:163). Second, who one goes to school with matters a great deal for academic success, thereby magnifying the impact of residential segregation by class: it clusters advantaged kids with other advantaged kids (and poor kids with other poor kids). Studies suggest that regardless of one's own background students do better academically when they attend schools where the other students come from affluent homes (2015:164–65). Third, while factors such as the number of experienced teachers at a school may make a difference, studies have shown that those benefits children bring with them from home affect outcomes most, whether positive or negative. Thus, the children of privileged parents tend to bring high parental engagement in children's educational attainment and school activities. These higher expectations and higher investments of time and attention pay dividends for their children. Similarly, class differences tend to reproduce themselves in children's peer groups so that students at high achieving schools foster more academic achievement because there is a culture of achievement that produces a catalytic effect (2015:166–69). Putnam illustrates this with his comparison of two Orange County, CA, high schools with comparable starting statistical profiles (similar size, spending per pupil, student–teacher ratios, etc.). It appears it is the poverty rates, English proficiency scores, and ethnic backgrounds, cumulatively and collectively—which differ dramatically at

the two schools—that make a social, cultural, and, ultimately, academic difference (2015:169–70).

Putnam, like many other social analysts of the American Dream, recounts personal narratives for a number of young Americans to illustrate the accrual of advantages, or disadvantages, that people experience in their lives. The profiles he relies on were selected because they contrasted the lives of "American young people from more and less privileged backgrounds." Not unexpectedly, he finds that "economic disparities among the families have been an important part of each story" (2015:227). Although Putnam points out that the link between income inequality and what he calls "opportunity inequality" is not a simple straight line, he believes the link exists and bears disproportionately on the choices that young people have available. As reasonable as this is, it skirts to a substantial degree the core issue: just what are these young people's American Dreams? What gives them life satisfaction? What do they want? What are they hoping for? Putnam, for all his dedicated accumulation of evidence on upward mobility, just generally assumes that this is what his subjects want and that it will, in the end, provide them life satisfaction—that is, fulfill their American Dream. While some of his subjects are sufficiently cooperative to express thwarted achievement goals tied to their lack of money or further education, some of his subjects decline to do so, expressing instead more idiosyncratic goals that suggest achievement is not that important. Then, too, some of Putnam's interview subjects simply seem rather clueless about what it takes to be successful.

Elijah, a 19-year-old who was raised in a series of chaotic households and holds a job packing groceries in Atlanta, expressed a number of different dreams to Putnam, many of them wildly unrealistic. For example, in one, he imagined himself as an evangelical preacher working in partnership with his father—a man who abandoned him (as did his mother) by leaving the Army and returning to the USA, later spent time in jail, and who beat Elijah when he was arrested (for arson) as a juvenile. In Elijah's American Dream, he will have his own church and "We gonna have plenty of money" (2015:107). In the course of the same interview, he describes himself as a "hip-hop head" who wants to produce music, saying, "I wanna be a DJ. That's my dream right there, to have my own record label," while conceding, "I'm at a point now where I just don't care" (2015:108). Putnam characterizes this second dream as "ultimately more compelling" than the first—although it is somewhat hard to see why—as Elijah proceeds to inflate his goal to "being one of the greatest rappers of

all time…So that's what I see myself doing: being a rapper, living the high life" (2015:108). For Putnam, Elijah's story is simply representative of the many troubling class-based disparities that have emerged, but Putnam has difficulty aligning the details of Elijah's story with income inequality or a lack of opportunity for upward mobility. There is, for example, no suggestion that his mother and father's abandonment was driven by economics; as he tells the story to Putnam's interviewer, both his parents became involved with other partners when he was an infant (2015:101). Elijah then was forced to live with his paternal grandparents in a New Orleans housing project. It is true that Elijah's upbringing was impoverished (2015:102), but Putnam—acknowledging that Americans don't favor income or asset redistribution—doesn't seem to have a policy recommendation that will embrace all of the chaos that Elijah experienced. Putnam, seemingly rather desperate to develop an economic policy solution to everyone's shattered American Dream has to ultimately settle for the faint hope that solving the opportunity gap will make up for all human failings. This seems as palpably unlikely as facilitating Elijah's desire to be the greatest rapper of all time through reduced inequality. Putnam's belief in policy solutions seems to blind him to their inefficacy for some human problems.

In the end, Putnam seems to want Americans to be upwardly mobile more than some Americans themselves do. This is due, in part, to his belief that failed youth constitute a cost and burden that society must otherwise shoulder. Drawing on a number of economists' work, Putnam argues that the economic costs of the opportunity gap should persuade us that there is, indeed, a crisis in the American Dream. Putnam bemoans the lack of civic engagement reflected in many studies of high-school-educated youth as compared to college-educated youth—and then bemoans the fact that even affluent kids are withdrawing from civic life (2015:234–36). Here, too, Putnam fails to pause and consider whether it is American institutions and the conventional formulation of the American Dream that are the issue. Acknowledging widespread evidence of growing political estrangement from youth of all class backgrounds, Putnam can only fret that the combination of growing economic inequality and growing political disengagement present a "double whammy"—and double challenge—to traditional US ideals (2015:237). Putnam fails to consider whether the universal cultural goal of upward mobility embedded in the American Dream might itself be the problem in a low-growth global economy.

Putnam's prescriptions to "help poor kids begin to catch up with rich kids" suffer from some of the same unreality as Elijah's goals to be either

an evangelical preacher with his father or a hip-hop king. Putnam acknowledges that it will take "hard work" to turn his set of suggestions into a "comprehensive plan of action" (2015:243), but he offers no coherent explanation of just who will be willing to dedicate themselves to do this hard work or where the resources for it will be found. Klinenberg's yuppie urban solos, as one example, seem unlikely to volunteer for duty in Putnam's proposed war against the various forms of inequality that permeate the contemporary USA. Putnam does not seriously try to develop a political plan that will appeal to those who make decisions within government even though the majority of his proposals (additional funding for poor schools; extending school hours for more extracurricular activities; placing more social and health services in schools serving poor children) require more money. Even if one were to agree that the opportunity gap— and America's myriad social problems—could be solved by turning all children into middle-class and upper-middle-class strivers who would then have opportunities galore to pursue, Putnam's hopes for doing this seem hardly more likely to be realized than either of Elijah's plans for his future. Moreover, unlike Rank et al. (2014), Putnam allocates no role for chance in his American Dream calculus and does not seem to be able to envision any American Dream that doesn't revolve around economic opportunity. Putnam, for all his many words, leaves us with very little.

The spate of recent books that have addressed inequality and the prospects for the American Dream attest to the concept's centrality to our culture and the American way of life. While some of these analyses have broadened earlier investigations into the meaning, role, and impact of the American Dream, too few have pursued these questions beyond studies of the middle class. In the following chapter, I will present data from interviews with those living and participating in urban street culture and compare their responses to the aspirations of middle-class survey respondents in an attempt to further elucidate the class dimensions of the American Dream.

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Down and Out or On Their Way: Street People, the Homeless, and College Students Envision the American Dream

Our investigation into the American way of life and the American Dream has up to this point been pursued largely within the province of the middle class with occasional, brief forays into working-class culture or the rarefied enclaves of the upper class. It is true that we very briefly considered the plight of truly disadvantaged African Americans (Wilson 2012) and welfare mothers (Hays 2003; DeParle 2004), but with these modest exceptions we have not examined the prospects for the American Dream among those who are down at the bottom or on the margin of American society. In this chapter we do so.

Conventional definitions of the American Dream focus on attainment of material well-being, financial security, and upward mobility. Translated into everyday terms in the contemporary USA, this often involves a dream of one day owning one's own home (Williams 2009; Rank et al. 2014:42). However, as Wasserman and Clair (2010:5) write, "But caught between the American dream and a much different reality is the problem of homelessness." Homelessness is a difficult condition to define and an even more difficult condition to accurately count or estimate (2010:49–54). There are particular difficulties in delineating the size and nature of people who are "street homeless"—that is, persons who are homeless and choose (or end up) living on the street rather than in shelters or programs (2010: 54–58). There is also the problem of people who are on the street—that

is, persons who form part of, and regularly participate in, a locale's "street culture"—but, in fact, are not truly homeless: they may be "doubling up" in an apartment or residence or simply have a home that they periodically do not choose to reside in for reasons known to them. One reason for young people to leave home, whether temporarily or permanently, is the inability to get along with parents, or perhaps equally common, to suffer abuse (Flores 2012).

In addition to the aspirational features of the American Dream, the sources we have examined frequently note that it is defined in individualistic terms while having universal application. Both of these features are of interest with respect to the homeless and other members of street culture. The focus on individualism means that those who are homeless, or otherwise down and out on the streets, are presumed to be responsible for their own plight (Wasserman and Clair 2010:5–6). Remarkably, those who suffer this indignity often hold this attitude (2010:7). Universalism suggests the American Dream applies to everyone: there are, the argument goes, opportunities open to all who wish to avail themselves in the USA, regardless of financial circumstances, such as free public education up until the age of 18. Since the (theoretical) opportunity to make it is arguably available, the responsibility for one's circumstances falls squarely on each and every American's shoulders, including the homeless. Thus, it would be a mistake to not examine the American Dream with reference to populations of the homeless and those immersed in street culture.

The homeless are of interest for another reason. While most studies are interested in those pursuing the American Dream, many of the homeless and members of the street culture are among those who either are *resisting* the conventional American way of life or have been *rejected* by our society. The latter have arguably been disenfranchised from their American birthright—the right to seek the American Dream (2010:58–60). As Merton (1938) recognized, the American Dream is structured, explicitly but also implicitly, to inspire competitive strivers, both legal and illegal. Yet the American Dream also has the collateral effect of producing those who oppose it, reject it, or are beaten down by it in one manner or another. Studying the meaning of the American Dream for the homeless and street people therefore fills an existing gap within the literature of the American Dream. To cite recent studies, neither Rank et al. (2014) nor Putnam (2015) make any appreciable effort to include these populations in their interviews or within the ambit of their studies generally.

Living the American Dream: Interview Responses from Street People and the Homeless

Interviews of the homeless and denizens of street culture were conducted in public places in a small to mid-size city in Washington State during daylight hours. The schedule of questions used and a description of the nature of the research were submitted by the author to the Institutional Review Board, Saint Martin's University, and duly approved. The principal interviewer was Jessica M. Flores, a 25-year-old graduate of the University. The interviewer dressed in a manner similar to those she would be interviewing: casual, inexpensive, and slightly worn dress without adornment, jewelry, or makeup. The purpose of this approach, as described in the literature, is to increase cooperation and trust among respondents (Babbie 2013:251). The interviewer and her attire were clean and neat. As Babbie opines, basic cleanliness and lack of discernible status markers (indicating either high or low status) seem to suggest neutrality and a lack of agenda to most subjects (2013:251). An interviewer generally decreases the number of "don't know" responses and increases participation generally (compared to mail or online surveys). The interviewer can also clarify vague responses and elicit respondent cooperation through a pleasant demeanor (2013: 250–51). Here, the interviewer has previously conducted interview research with the city's street population and proven herself adept at communicating cordiality, interest, and neutrality to the subjects. The interviewer has also proven herself adept at "probing"—a useful skill in obtaining further elaboration with respect to open-ended questions in semistructured interviews (2013: 253). A major advantage that interviews offer (as compared to surveys) is the interviewer's ability to pursue follow-up questions that permit the respondent to enlarge upon his or her answer, adding detail, emphasis, and nuance.

Questions addressed the following topical areas: where the respondent lived and conditions there; whether the respondent worked and where/doing what; current relationship status and attitude regarding the relationship; religious or spiritual beliefs; educational experience—past, present, and aspirations for; the meaning of the American Dream for the respondent; early life goals/current life goals; and factors that influenced the choice of personal goals, including limitations or barriers. Respondents were also asked for an assessment of their happiness on a scale of 1–10. An effort was made to choose respondents in a manner to include both

genders equally, a range of ages from late adolescent to mature, senior adults, and from various ethnic and/or racial groups. The selection was nonrandom and generally opportunistic although subjects who gave every indication of spending their time "on the street" or otherwise appeared homeless were those sought and selected. This is generally called purposive (or "judgment") sampling in the literature (Bernard 2006:189–91). Purposive samples are useful for pilot studies or for reaching hard to find populations, both applicable to the present study. In all, 40 subjects were interviewed in late summer/fall, 2015.

The interview responses selected here were chosen to illustrate recurrent themes from the interviews conducted. None of the interviews are reported in their entirety due to space limitations; however, each response quoted is unedited with respect to the subject's answer to a particular question. Ellipses indicate pauses by the respondent or brief breaks where interviewer silence or an interviewer probe may have evoked further response from the subject. In certain instances, quotes are placed in context by paraphrasing respondent responses that came before, or after, the particular quote reported. All interview subjects have been assigned names consistent with their gender that are not their real names in order to preserve confidentiality.

What Is the Meaning of the American Dream?

When asked about the meaning of the American Dream generally two types of response were elicited. First, some respondents offered up descriptions that reflected the features commonly attributed to it in our society but usually did so with an expression of opinion added. Dean, a darkly tanned, olive-skinned male, 45 years old, with tattoos on his face, arms, and chest and piercings in his face and ears, responded:

> [The American Dream] is a lot of pressure. The American Dream is going to college, get a corporate job, have three and a half kids. If you don't achieve this, you're going to be a failure. (pause) You must conform to their standards to not be a failure.

Donna, a tanned, olive-skinned female, age 46, in worn and slightly ripped clothing, was sunbathing in the grass at a public park. When asked whether she would participate in an interview regarding the American Dream, she blurted, "Money makes the world go round!" Later, when asked about her own American Dream, she stated: "I always wanted to be

a nurse," but followed by admitting she skipped school regularly, failed to graduate high school, and has now settled for "romance and money." She concluded, "Traveling would be a dream-come-true."

Bill, an African American male, age 48, adorned in worn, ripped clothing and carrying a large backpack, also interviewed at a local park, responded, "[My American Dream] is to be a jet pilot," but the respondent quickly acknowledged he dropped out of high school due to drug activity, finished a GED, tried to then pursue culinary arts, but wound up again involved with drugs, criminal activity, and jail. With respect to his living situation he stated, "I've spent most of my life in jail; I consider that a residence." In these interview responses, one can clearly see the interviewees' immediate evocation of career choices as central to their idea of the American Dream: corporate job, nurse, and jet pilot. However, one can also see the antipathy generated by the American Dream in Dean's response and the limiting factors of lack of education, drug involvement, and criminality leading to arrest, conviction, and incarceration in Bill's answers.

A second pattern of responses to our inquiry regarding the meaning of the American Dream revealed sharper, critical answers. Daisy, a white female in a short dress, unshaved bare legs, and black Doc Martin shoes, interviewed outside a modestly priced, local café, scoffed at the question and said:

> We don't really know what the economy is going to look like—the baby boomers fucked it up. The American Dream was never a thing. We're all just indentured servants. It's just an idea put in place to reinforce the structures in place. (pause) People are scared to admit that we aren't that far from being the person who works at McDonald's or the guy on the street. (pause) The American Dream is victim-blaming. (After commenting on her personal situation she returned to the American Dream.) I don't want to be like my parents. I don't want to be locked in. They don't seem to care about anything. (pause) They go to work, watch TV, go to bed. It's practically just going to sleep.

Kellen, a tanned, olive-skinned male, age 28, with a loose, black Mohawk haircut, black construction boots, with visible scars on his hands and arms, was interviewed at the interviewer's place of work. Respondent had been seen parking his car on the lot, filled with personal belongings, and giving the impression of homelessness. In response to the question about the American Dream, he forcefully blurted:

A lie to convince people to work harder! A carrot dangling in front of a fucking horse! (pause) The government does nothing to help ordinary Americans. Being a white male in this country is a double-edged sword. Everybody looks at you like you did it to yourself [in reference to earlier comments regarding his own past homelessness, financial struggles, and lack of conventional success].

Samuel, a pale white male, age 23, wearing a tan shirt, suede vest, and straw hat, was interviewed outside a local café/tea shop often frequented by students at a local state college. When asked about the American Dream, the interview subject—smoking a cigarette—responded:

Something that's intentionally unattainable. It seems like an old idea now. (pause) Society gives the direction to keep order, to build structure in an acceptable way. Society wants to see people go in the same direction.

Tim, a pale white male, age 22, with shoulder length, ragged brown hair, dressed casually and with tinted sunglasses, was interviewed outside the same café as Samuel, a companion. When asked about the American Dream, he offered:

Upward mobility. You can do anything if you work hard. (pause) I don't believe it though. It's a really simple idea, but it's more complicated than that. (pause) Success is being able to pay my expenses by doing [music, specifically playing the drums] full time.

Harold sat on blankets, jackets, and shirts on the pavement with three other males (two of whom later became interview subjects). The men were huddled in the shelter of a doorway to a closed business to stay, as much as possible, out of the rain. Harold was a Caucasian male, 35 years old, with scruffy facial hair, dressed in dirty jeans, a sweatshirt, and a beanie cap. He had red, puffy eyes and smelled strongly of marijuana. When asked if he would participate in a survey about the American Dream, he spontaneously uttered: "We're not living it!" When he assented to participate and was asked to rate his life satisfaction on a scale of 1–10, Harold said, "Fuck. Ain't no happiness." He followed with, "Miserable. A five." Later, when asked about his goal in life, he responded, "To survive." A fifth male then arrived with cigarettes and Harold discontinued cooperation to smoke. However, Johnny, seated nearby, agreed to participate. A Caucasian male, 27 years old, the subject

wore a black denim jacket covered with patches and the sleeves cut off. He was adorned with many tattoos, piercings on his face and ears, and a tall, spiked, bright red Mohawk haircut. When asked about the American Dream, he responded:

> There is none. The American Dream gave up a long time ago on its citizens....You can't live the American Dream unless you have the freedom to do your own will. We don't get there here in America.

Unemployed and homeless, Johnny said he was looking for a job and said, "I would clean dog crap off the sidewalks if paid."

In this second group of responses, it is apparent that a consistent pattern of skepticism, even hostility and contempt, pervades respondents' answers. The American Dream is bitterly dismissed as "a lie," "unattainable," "a carrot dangling in front of a horse," and "victim-blaming." It produces people who are "scared" "indentured servants" who are "locked in." People who are living (or attempting to live) the American Dream merely "go to work, watch TV, and go to bed." They are "practically just going to sleep."

Plummeting from the Heights of the American Dream

US society and its American Dream culture may be especially susceptible to creating conditions within which individuals can both scale the heights and dive to the depths of the social order. An interview subject who encountered the interviewer on the sidewalk outside a downtown gay bar, appeared ecstatic to have the opportunity to talk. A 56-year-old white male, he introduced himself in a flamboyant manner with a courtesy bow, and offered that his street name was "Gambler," although he declined to elaborate. Thin, crouched over with a crooked stance, with thinned out but colorful hair, Gambler was dressed in baggy orange and purple cheetah print, ankle-length pajama pants, ankle-high military boots, Elton John-style oversized sunglasses, and draped in Mardi Gras beads although the date was late summer. Upon hearing that the interviewer wanted to ask about the American Dream, Gambler did not wait for questions but launched spontaneously into his story.

Gambler started by showing the interviewer three drivers' licenses, which he withdrew from a flimsy, handmade wallet constructed of duct

tape. The first license showed a heavyset man with dark hair parted neatly to one side, dark glasses, wearing a clean, plaid, collared dress shirt. The second ID showed the same man but 50 pounds lighter with slightly thinned out hair, still parted to one side, wearing a buttoned-up shirt but without glasses. The third photo barely resembled the man in either photo, although the name was the same. The man appeared in only a t-shirt, with uncombed thin hair, an extremely thin neck and face, and prominent, glossy eyes. Close inspection suggested that what the interviewer was examining was the downward progression of Gambler as captured by state Department of Motor Vehicles cameras.

Gambler explained that he formerly worked in healthcare, managing medical spending accounts for the state of Oregon. He experienced a medical condition (unexplained) that caused him substantial pain and impaired his ability to sleep. Although he pursued medical care, Gambler stated that doctors were unable to prescribe medicines or treatment that allowed him to live comfortably with his condition. He stated, "So I got in to drinking, drank for pain management." He was able to function at work for a short time even though he was drinking heavily but he was fired from his job after about a year—a job that paid him $190,000 a year.

Having lost his job, he eventually left the state and moved to the mid-size city in Washington, where the interviewer spoke with him, so that he could gain easy access to medical marijuana and other resources for the homeless. He was currently living under a downtown bridge and sought space in a local homeless shelter during colder months. Recently, he had been approved for disability and hoped this would help get him off the streets. Gambler claimed to be "on the wagon" and free of alcohol use for "a few weeks." He stated he did take sleeping medication, antidepressants, and medical marijuana to regulate epileptic seizures. Unemployed, Gambler identified his work as being an "unpaid life coach" who spent his days walking the streets offering moral support. He described his role as, "I'm teaching a new creed on the streets: seek peace, do kind acts, experience joy. Start with yourself and pass it on." The interviewer, seizing the opportunity to squeeze in another question, asked Gambler what his life goal for the future might be now. At this point, the interviewer's notes show

> [Gambler's] words became jumbled and his sentences became unstructured. He responded that his "new mission" is to "seek counsel from his guardian angel on how to kill God." He then took his focus off of the interviewer

and [he] began talking to the air behind [the interviewer]. He threw his arms around as if in an argument with an invisible person and began to walk away mumbling random words under his breath without any further acknowledgement.

Although in one sense Gambler did not address all of the interviewer's questions, his manner of withdrawal from the interview was perhaps a more eloquent testimony regarding the American Dream than any detailed verbal exposition could convey.

Build It Yourself: Living on the Street in a Youth Subculture

Damian, a short Caucasian male, 24 years old, was standing with a group of youth dressed in street punk and grunge styles outside an inexpensive downtown pizzeria. When approached, the youths scattered, except for the subject who boisterously agreed to participate in an interview. The respondent wore denim shorts that appeared to be cutoffs, a denim vest with cutoff sleeves and embellished random patches, facial studs, hoop earrings, jewelry that appeared to be of Nordic design, a heavy black and silver studded belt, and black, fingerless gloves (although the season was very early fall).

When offered an explanation of the nature of the questions he would be asked about the American Dream, Damian pumped his fist into the air and said, "Aha! These lead into the core roots of what the American Dream has become!" He proceeded to tell the interviewer that he has lived in several states, including Oregon, California, and Texas, prior to Washington, and lives "around" wherever he can. Over the last few years he said he has lived in several modest-sized towns in western Washington and presently lives in a shared house in an old timber mill town about 25 miles from the site of the interview. With respect to the American Dream, he offered that "The society we live in keeps [my experience] from being [rated] a ten." He continued, "Don't try to be a piece of modern society. Your individuality isn't subject to everybody else's." The respondent expressed concern that his life would become worse if he changed himself to comfortably fit into conventional society.

A question regarding his employment status led to the interview subject's explanation of the core nature of his lifestyle. Pressed to explain how he could afford to share a house while unemployed, respondent offered

that he was employed "in a way" but that it was "under the table." When pressed further, he asked the interviewer if she had ever heard of Pirate Punk. He explained: Pirate Punks identify themselves as a genuine community but members are scattered through different towns and communities in Washington State. The house he lives in is a Pirate Punk house. He earns the right to stay there by taking on the role of watchdog, or overseer. His job is to regulate activities to make sure the behaviors and conduct don't get too far out of hand. He noted, "I live places because I'm willing to regulate."

Pirate Punk is a variation on the (white male) punk scene in which skateboarding, skanking (dancing to Ska music in a manner that resembles running in place with flailing arms), two-stepping, finding good local shows, *mackin* chicks (i.e., to make moves on girls/women through "showing them your game"), seeking adventures, minor vandalism and destruction, and general law disobedience are valued. Pirate Punk is often distinguished by vestiges of pirate dress or adornment and "talking Pirate Punk," a jivey argot using fake pirate slang as signifiers (Aye, matey!). Respondent stated he was the leader of the Pirate Punk community in a third town about 50 miles directly west of where the interview took place. He was in this mid-size city to try and "reach out to old-style punks" and establish a Pirate Punk "chapter" locally. When asked about his future dreams he noted, "[My American Dream] is to own a punk rock venue and a home." He stated he believes he will be able to accomplish this in the mid-size city where the interview took place due to the fact there has historically been a local music scene with a punk component to it. When asked what might prevent him from achieving his dream, he offered: "The American government is the antagonist! But without them, who would try to stop me? If I wasn't trying to fight someone or some group I wouldn't want to pursue something. It wouldn't mean as much to me to achieve it. The pushback is necessary." Earlier, with respect to his role as a Pirate Punk adherent and community organizer, he observed, "It's fun [the Pirate Punk lifestyle] and brings life satisfaction."

Shattered: Love and Hope and Sex and Dreams and Still Surviving on the Street

In 1978, the Rolling Stones released the album *Some Girls.* It included a staccato, pulsing, beat-driven paean to urban, and personal dysfunction, "Shattered." The essential theme of the song is the ability to survive on the

street despite the many vicissitudes visited upon the narrator: his brain has been battered, he's in tatters, there are rats on the west side (of New York City), bedbugs uptown, and it's "tough, tough, tough, tough, tough!" to live at the lowest level in New York. The narrator concludes by advising, "Don't mind the maggots" (Jagger and Richards 1978). The Rolling Stones are, of course, by some accounts the most successful rock 'n' roll band in history and their compositions, like "Shattered," are merely commercial pop art pastiche. Still, the song gets at the core of street living for many: they have been battered; they are shattered to a greater or lesser degree; and the experience of homelessness and street living keeps many in tatters, both physical and emotional. While the interview with Gambler hints at this state, other interview subjects convey even more evocatively the degree of dislocation experienced by some while living the (street version) American Dream.

Sarah, a substantially overweight Caucasian female, age 19, with dirty, uncombed brown hair, was approached where she sat on the sidewalk under a large entryway to a building in downtown. She was one of four girls sitting on blankets and shirts laid out on the sidewalk. Sarah agreed to an interview but only if the interviewer would sit down on the pavement with her, which the interviewer promptly did.

Sarah gave one of the lowest responses to the ranked life-satisfaction question our interviewer received: 2 out of a possible 10. She stated the reason was that she was experiencing homelessness due to family feuds. Among other issues on which she declined to elaborate, her mother kicked her out because she acquired a service dog to assist her with her health concerns (which she declined to specify) because her mother did not want to accept the dog. While her immediate family declines contact, Sarah offered that her grandmother would sometimes walk the downtown streets to find her in order to give her some cash, food, or clothing as she is unemployed. She chose the mid-size city where the interview took place because it is the easiest place in Washington for "spanging" (i.e., asking "spare any change?"). In this way, she said she makes enough money during the week for food and, occasionally, some hygienic necessities. Otherwise, she relied on support from her "street family"—other homeless individuals with whom she has established a certain level of trust. When asked about what would make her life better, she noted that having a central location for the homeless community to obtain needed medical supplies in downtown would help as would other resources. She specifically observed, "Counselors coming down here would help us out!" She

followed by quietly confessing that she had attempted suicide a few weeks ago and had only her street family members to encourage her and offer any emotional support. As if on cue, a homeless man approached, bent down and hugged Sarah, to whom she responded "Hi, Mom." This individual then became the next interview subject.

Taylor, a tanned, scruffy man, age 28, with poorly maintained facial hair and several missing teeth, wore a beanie cap that nearly covered his eyes, ripped and stained jeans, and an extremely worn Carhartt-style working man's jacket. Although he stated he was 28 years old, Taylor looked at least 40 years old to the interviewer. When asked why he was referred to as a "street mom", Taylor explained he was a transgender female stuck inside a man's body; later, he further explained that he was a "second generation care-giver" with a motherly instinct which also led to his designated role. He has stayed in the community living on the streets for the last year because "a small handful of people…understand me." Previously, he was homeless in the Spokane, Washington area. Asked about achieving his own dream goals, he offered, "The government keeps some people away from their dreams and lets others achieve theirs." Pressed, however, he was unable to offer any more specificity or clarity regarding this view. Although he possessed only a high school diploma and some unspecified "military training," he identified his life ambition was to become a pilot. When asked for more specifics, however, he had none to offer. He hesitantly acknowledged that he would probably need more education to pursue this goal, saying "I'm trying to get reeducated," but gave no further elaboration on how or where this might occur. Taylor rated his life satisfaction as 5 on a 10-point scale.

Carmen was also taking shelter in the lee of the building entryway and overhang where the prior two interviews took place. He presented as bald, tanned, barefoot, Caucasian male between 30 and 45 years of age with henna-like tattoos on his hands and fingers. He was dressed in gypsy-like shirt, adorned with beads, and a sash-like bandana style headpiece he constantly removed and replaced on his head. During the earlier interviews, Carmen moved around, adjusting several of the blankets laid out for comfort, and acting as though the space belonged to him. He also dramatically walked around outside the building, flailing his arms and engaging random passersby in bursts of conversation, followed by moments in which he walked in tight, small circles atop a cushion he had on the pavement as though deep in a meditative trance.

Carmen had expressed clear, although erratic, moments of interest in snatches of the two prior interviews he had overheard, which had taken place near his space. When later asked, he agreed to be interviewed. Yet his responses were often digressive and did not address the interviewer's questions. Instead, Carmen was intent on explaining—and re-explaining—that he was one of the wisest persons in Washington State, and possibly the nation. He expressed irritation that no one else was really smart enough to understand him. (Later in the interview he expressed irritation that those around him could not see that he was wiser than "Jesus, Allah, and Buddha.") His life plan was to gather followers, starting in the city where the interview took place. (Indeed, he expressed that he wished to win over the interviewer as a disciple. In order to continue the interview process, the interviewer agreed to listen to his words as attentively as possible so that she might understand the wealth of knowledge that he offers to others.)

Respondent stated he was born in Missouri; his father—a "cookie cutter disciplined type"—was in the army while his mother was a "diehard hippie" who loved to be involved in special (new age) practices. Soon, however, he spoke about so many things so quickly that the interviewer could neither keep up nor redirect the process. In one extended rant, Carmen talked about carbon dioxide, nukes, communists in America, and that he did not possess the engineering skills necessary to take on the responsibility for addressing all of the world's problems. His primary personal concern seemed to be "relieving his homelessness" but his approach did not seem to include seeking an abode; rather, it appeared he intended to address his homeless state through meditation. At one point, a passerby expressed curiosity as to the subject of the interview and Carmen, apparently misunderstanding that the topic was the American Dream rather than homelessness per se, stood up quickly, walked on a circle on his little cushion, and then apologized profusely for his misunderstanding. Then he asked whether the interviewer truly had time to listen to his American Dream, which he implied was what everyone's dream should be. When he received an affirmative response, Carmen began to rant again about the wisdom he has to offer the world, equating himself with God, and restated his plan to seek disciples to spread this knowledge. Another passerby stopped in his tracks at this remark and said, "So you know my father, then." Carmen ignored this comment at first but then asked, "Who is your father?" The man replied, "How do you *not* know?" The interviewee

then turned his attention to the interviewer and told her she evidently didn't have enough time to hear about the wisdom he had to offer and concluded the interview.

Johnny, a 27-year-old Caucasian male (described earlier) seated on blankets with three other homeless men in the doorway of a closed downtown business, described growing up the son of an alcoholic, stripper mother. The subject stated that his mother would regularly marry a series of different men. She would tell her son each was his new dad and insist that he call the men "Dad." None, of course was his father, and many of the men were poor substitutes; one of the men, for example, raped Johnny's sister in their home. Johnny openly admitted he felt hopeless and helpless in his home situation. His hurt and pain became clear—so clear that one of his friends offered him a water bottle while the interviewer felt compelled to offer her sympathy while Johnny drank and recovered himself emotionally.

The responses of Sarah, Taylor, Carmen and Johnny illustrate representative features of the 40 respondents interviewed for this project. First, there was little indication that the homeless in this mid-size city were voluntarily electing to live on the street. As Sarah acknowledged, she was there because she had been thrown out of her house by her mother. Moreover, while she had a grandmother in the area, her grandmother had not provided her shelter either. Second, her self-rating of 2 confirmed that she did not experience herself as living the American Dream. Indeed, she acknowledged making a suicide attempt within the last few weeks—a rather dramatic indication one was not living a dream existence. Likewise, Taylor explained that he had been living homeless in Spokane, Washington, prior to his arrival in this mid-size city where he continued to live on the street. Nothing he said suggested he wanted to be living in this manner; rather, there were small compensations ("some people here understand me"). He, too, self-rated his life satisfaction at a low level—5 out of 10. Taylor also exhibited a quality that many of the street community expressed when interviewed: a wholly unreasonable life goal given the relator's background and circumstances and a vague—or nonexistent—plan for achieving his or her goal. Here, Taylor expressed the wish to be a pilot—but did not recount ever once having flown a plane nor could he offer any description of how he was going to pursue that career. The third respondent, Carmen, displayed behavioral qualities that—in sum—were active disqualifiers for living in a place or manner other than on the street: he engaged in repetitive movements

(standing circles on his cushion; constant rearrangement of his blankets), random, unsolicited bursts of communication with strangers who passed by, and obsessive verbalization of a single, self-referential thought pattern. ("I am the wisest person in the state, and possibly the nation; I am as wise as God (or I am God).") He was unable to cooperate sufficiently with the interview process to offer the interviewer a self-rating of his life satisfaction: apparently unhappy with the interviewer's perceived inability to attend sufficiently to his wisdom, Carmen simply withdrew. Johnny, like a number of subjects interviewed for this project, described an unstable home life growing up, one filled with abuse in which he felt powerless. Homeless and unemployed, kicked out of school in the tenth grade, Johnny had few prospects and seemingly few marketable skills to offer the contemporary labor market, like many who were interviewed for the project.

Our street interviews, limited in number and location as they were, raise some serious issues with respect to other recent analyses of the meaning, and prospects, for the American Dream. Unlike some recent researchers and writers, who have not pursued their investigations of the American Dream among street people and the homeless, our interviews raise numerous grounds for pessimism with respect to these Americans achieving any life circumstances that might conceivably constitute for them the American Dream. The barriers and limitations our respondents face seem insurmountable: their resources are few; their connections with other Americans who possess greater access to resources are limited or nonexistent; their preparation for alternative, but sustainable, lifestyles is limited since many do not possess even the lowest contemporary levels of formal education; their aspirations are often unrealistic when viewed in light of their actual circumstances, educational preparation, and behavioral qualities; and quite a number exhibit behavioral disqualifiers of one sort or another (extensive alcohol or drug involvement; disturbed mental processes; criminal histories). In sum, it is unlikely one can anticipate finding out more about the American Dream from this population than their exclusion from it and their disenchantment with it. These are Americans who have been shut out of any likely pathway to even the rudiments of the American Dream, however defined. They have been shut out through a combination of their own unforgiving early life experiences; their own bad choices; and the porous so-called safety net that American society provides or, in the more accurate phrasing, largely does not provide for the homeless and marginal in our country.

Pacific Lutheran University Psychology Students Conduct American Dream Survey

Jon E. Grahe, a professor of psychology at Pacific Lutheran University (PLU), worked with his undergraduate students in a statistical methods class to conduct an online survey regarding the American Dream in 2015. Contrasts between predominantly middle-class, college-age populations and street people and the homeless are emblematic of the divide that separates Americans when queried in detail about the American Dream. Unlike the "down and out" respondents in our street interviews, the predominantly middle-class respondents to a survey administered from a private liberal arts college offer an understandably different perspective on making it in the contemporary USA.

Sampling and Participants

Each student researcher at this private liberal arts college invited up to 100 social media contacts to complete the American Dream Survey. The survey instrument was developed from a list of questions that Hauhart and Birkenstein used previously to survey members of their undergraduate course on the American Dream at Saint Martin's University (Hauhart and Birkenstein 2013). The procedure for solicitation started with each student researcher selecting a random sample to solicit by dividing their total contacts list (on Facebook, Twitter) by 100 using the product as the randomizer. Thus with 400 contacts, a researcher would invite every fourth contact to participate. Contacts were skipped if they were in a vulnerable population (i.e., under 18). After the list was compiled, researchers sent an e-mail invitation with a link to the American Dream Survey which was hosted on Google Forms. The researchers compiled a 19.37 % completion rate with $N=155$ (101 women) respondents. The sample demographics included 69.6 % Caucasian, 7.1 % Hispanic, 6.5 % Asian American, 2.6 % African American, 2.6 % African, 10.2 % mixed race, and two refused to answer. Sixty-six percent reported Christianity as their religion and 23 % reported "none" and the rest of the sample responses were single counts of various religious preferences.

Materials and Procedure

The American Dream Survey was administered using Google Forms and respondents completed the survey online with no supervision. The complete survey and other project details are available online (https://osf.io/k8v53/).

Respondents provided informed consent by continuing on the survey. They first completed 20 "American Dream" items of primary focus. These items were identical to queries utilized by Hauhart and Birkenstein in prior surveys of college student populations (Hauhart and Birkenstein 2013). In addition, each student group added a subset of questions to address their own questions. These addition scales measured in the following order: (1) political attitudes, (2) collectivism and individualism, (3) ethical behaviors, and (4) self-actualization. The survey ended with a series of demographic questions measuring age, gender, education, heritage/ethnicity, parent's education, religious preferences, residency status, number of family generations in the USA, whether they served in the military, and their housing status.

The 20 American Dream items were measured on 5-point Likert scales (Very important to Unimportant). The specific items, their descriptive statistics are available on Table 11.1. A principal components analysis (PCA) revealed five constructs (family, power, meaningful existence, carefree existence, and education).

To measure political attitudes, respondents used 7-point scales (1 = strong democrat and 7 = strong republican) to report which party platform they identified with on five common issues (economy, same-sex marriage, taxes, political views generally, and abortion) using items adapted from Klar (2014). These were combined into a single political affiliation construct (alpha = 0.894; M = 3.67, SD = 1.61). They also used 7-point scales to report whether social issues (1) or economic issues (7) were most important and whether political identification was important (1) or unimportant (7).

To measure attitudes toward collectivism and individualism and the degree to which individuals strive for vertical (power and hierarchy) or horizontal (equality and harmony) ideals, 2 scenarios were selected of 18 (Chirkov et al. 2005). These scenarios (which class a student should take; what type of society was ideal) were followed by four possible options and the respondents reported their level of agreement on 5-point scales (5 = strongly agree) for each ideal outcome. These four options represented their level of vertical collectivism (VC), vertical individualism (VI), horizontal collectivism (HC), or horizontal individualism (HI). These four constructs did not achieve high reliability, so the items were considered separately.

The next section (Education and Career Behaviors) measured how likely a respondent would be to engage in a series of activities with varying costs or social norm violations. These items include: continue working at

Table 11.1   Descriptive statics and factor loadings

How important to your American Dream?	Loadings on PCA components						
	M	SD	Family	Power	Service	Carefree	Career
Your own family	4.15	0.840	**.793**	.065	.097	.025	.079
Marriage	4.08	1.087	**.782**	.129	.018	−.160	−.040
Long-term intimate relationship	4.32	0.924	**.666**	.060	−.089	−.051	−.162
Better life for children	4.52	0.809	**.631**	.058	.118	.169	.040
Stay close to family	4.23	1.029	**.456**	−.045	.329	.241	.275
Own land	3.55	1.163	.238	**.721**	−.073	.040	−.374
Own your own home	4.21	0.980	.209	**.676**	−.126	.173	.254
Political influence	2.79	1.168	.121	**.538**	.253	−.073	.149
Wealth	3.42	1.050	.108	**.533**	−.206	.061	.146
Debt free/financial security	4.64	0.612	−.130	**.516**	.139	−.031	−.002
Serve less fortunate	4.01	0.875	.043	−.003	**.833**	.156	−.069
Make a difference	4.37	0.766	.027	−.049	**.733**	.220	.083
Active in my church	2.94	1.570	.353	.094	**.565**	**−.309**	.049
Just want to be happy	4.63	0.665	.165	−.117	−.174	**.741**	−.077
Exercise my freedom	4.36	0.867	−.077	.232	.179	**.542**	**.438**
Travel	4.08	0.901	−.011	.020	.231	**.541**	−.022
Gaining knowledge	4.55	0.615	−.100	.266	**.360**	**.509**	.119
Complete college	4.19	1.110	.167	.198	.209	.017	**.628**
Good job/career	4.54	0.714	−.068	**.387**	.046	**.311**	**.606**
Have a good friend	4.43	0.781	.115	.153	.240	.174	**−.582**

Note: Extraction method: principal component analysis (PCA), rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization

an undesirable job, hang out with friends, refuse an immoral request from a boss, falsify information on a job application, continue a class without seeking help, and plagiarize a paper. These items were not intended to act as a scale.

The Brief Index of Self Actualization (Sumerlin and Bundrick 1996) included ten items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree). This scale was selected to measure the degree to which respondent had achieved Maslow's need to self-actualize. The scale was reliable (alpha = 0.720, $M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.58$).

Results: Data Analysis Approach

We examined the reliability and validity of the American Dream survey via an exploratory analysis. After examining the descriptive statistics of the American Dream items (see Table 11.1), we conducted an exploratory PCA and extracted the factors using regression scores to create reliable American Dream constructs. These constructs were then correlated with the measures that the student researchers hypothesized.

Principal Components Analysis

PCAs were conducted to examine multiple possible factor structures because the scree plot suggested three factors, but there were seven eigenvalues >1. These conflicting signals suggested that a statistical adjustment should be employed. The decision was made to extract all factor structures starting with 3 and ending with 7. However, PCAs with three and four factors included too many variables that loaded on multiple factors and PCAS with 6 and 7 included factors containing only single items. The PCA with five factors accounted for 52.89 % of the variance and yielded factors labeled: Family, Power, Meaningful Existence, Freedom to Choose, and Education.

Relating the American Dream to Other Constructs

In the next phase of the analysis, the relationships between these constructs and the students' constructs were examined using correlations. The descriptive statistics for each of the student constructs as well as the correlations with the American Dream constructs are presented in Table 11.2.

Demographics and the American Dream

The various demographic items were dummy coded and correlated with each of the American dream factors. There were no meaningful relationships between any of the factors and sex of participant, residency status, or service in the army. However, when compared to white participants, any persons of color reported higher importance for the Career/Education American Dream factor (t (153) = −2.30, p = 0.021). Also, compared to respondents who reported no religious affiliation or agnostic status, respondents associated with any religion reported higher levels of importance for

Table 11.2 Correlations between American Dream and student research variables

Student research variables	M	SD	Family	Power	Service	Carefree	Career
Pro-Republican identity	3.667	1.614	0.080	−0.086	0.096	−0.327***	−0.087
Economic focus	3.880	1.752	0.049	0.134+	−0.168*	−0.168*	−0.134+
Pol identity important	4.810	1.958	−0.049	−0.166*	−0.175*	0.119	0.027
Self-actualization	4.056	0.577	0.081	0.044	0.277***	0.130	0.043
Class VI[a]	3.54	1.348	−0.075	0.143	−0.171+	0.090	0.210*
Class VC[a]	3.94	0.994	−0.086	0.072	0.007	0.174*	0.295**
Class HC[a]	1.78	1.025	−0.059	0.008	0.144	−0.150+	−0.199*
Class HI[a]	4.24	1.024	−0.098	−0.141	0.015	0.253**	0.174*
Society_VI	3.11	1.198	0.008	−0.082	−0.114	0.075	0.121
Society_VC	2.96	1.205	0.013	−0.104	0.104	−0.142	0.108
Society_HC	3.03	1.224	−0.083	−0.131	−0.022	0.184*	0.037
Society_HI	3.98	1.176	−0.096	−0.010	−0.183*	0.317***	0.149
B_SocializeStress	4.34	1.002	−0.079	−0.023	0.063	0.282***	−0.144+
B_ClassNoHelp	2.90	1.308	−0.001	−0.014	−0.240**	0.001	−0.178*
B_Plagiarize	1.53	0.914	0.031	0.071	−0.159*	−0.124	−0.092
B_Disobeyimmoral	3.79	1.215	−0.071	−0.076	0.235**	0.301***	0.043
B_KeepBadJob	3.59	1.172	−0.017	−0.132	0.000	0.000	0.130
B FalsifyCredentials	1.28	0.762	0.120	0.057	−0.118	−0.102	−0.005

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

[a]Ns range from 126 to 147 on these items, but all other items had N=155

both the Family (t (153) = 4.173, $p < 0.001$) and Meaningful Existence (t (153) = 4.669, $p < 0.001$), but lower levels of the carefree/travel factor (t (153) = −3.568, $p < 0.001$), but no differences on the Power (t(153) = 0.249, $p = 0.804$) or Career/Education factor (t (153) = −1.180, $p = 0.240$).

Discussion

This study suggests that when considering the American Dream, there are five reliable and valid constructs that individuals idealize as important to their American Dream (Family, Power, Meaning, Choice, and Career). The PCA provides evidence of their distinct nature and shared variance. The meaningful correlations with existing scales provide evidence of concurrent validity. With the exception of the Family and Power factors, all other factors were logically related to variables on the survey. For instance, the Service to Others factor predicted focus on social rather than economic political issues and a negative correlation with political identity generally, but positively correlated with motivation to self-actualize. Respondents viewing this as important also reported being more likely to seek help when necessary, but would be less likely to plagiarize or disobey immoral orders. The Carefree and Travel factor was negatively related to Republican identity and economic issues and positively related to horizontal values in society, such that individuals and societies are equal. They also reported being likely to disobey an immoral act and a preference to socialize and relax with friends. The Career and Education factor was correlated with each education variable on the survey. There were positive correlations with the "ideal class" scenario for VI, VC, and HI and a negative correlation with HC. In other words, for these respondents, they wanted a class that allowed for educational achievement for the class and individual. They also reported being less likely to socialize and more likely to seek help when taking a class. While the Family and Power dimensions did not yield correlations, no survey measures specifically targeted these values.

Limitations and Future Directions

These data are not without their limitations. The sample attained reasonable size, but it was sampled via the Internet from family, friends, and other acquaintances from the researchers' social media contacts. This is likely to bias the sample toward students and higher-educated individuals. Further, while access to the Internet is increasingly common in the

modern era, this survey can only generalize toward those with such access. Additionally, there was no control over testing circumstances because the respondents completed the survey on their own without supervision. While there is no reason to expect directional bias from this, we would anticipate that the scales and constructs are not represented at their maximum reliability. Finally, the Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism (HVIC) scale measuring individualism and collectivism included only 2 of 18 scenarios and did not demonstrate interitem reliability as a result. Also, the Education and Career Behaviors were generated by students without a pretest and might have low validity when considering actual moral choices.

To address these limitations, a future study should be conducted to verify the five-factor structure and further validate the scale. For instance, scales measuring family, power, and career focus should be added to a future study since the current survey did not provide convergent evidence for these. Additionally, a larger sample from a broader population would yield more generalizable conclusions.

CONCLUSION

It is hardly necessary to repeat the findings of these two studies since the contrast between the views of respondents from the two different survey populations are striking. Every responsible report finds similar experiences and attitudes. Yee (2015:A1), writing in the August 29, 2015 edition of the *New York Times*, observes:

> Beyond the unlocked front doors of 60 Clarkson Avenue in Brooklyn, the lobby is a half-lit cavern, its ornate plaster moldings and patterned floor smeared with dirt. The windows gape onto a courtyard dense with weeds and trash. On the days when it comes at all, the elevator smells of urine.

The building is one of about 400 private apartment buildings across New York City that house 3000 families that city shelters cannot accommodate. The city pays nearly $2500 a month for housing and services for homeless families that city officials have described as expensive, wasteful, and ineffective (2015:A1). Summer 2015 was intended to be the end of 60 Clarkson Avenue's use for emergency cluster-site housing for homeless families but miscommunication, delay, political wrangling, and brinkmanship stalled the process (2015:A15). In the end, Yee characterized the experience of summer 2015 for residents living in the building as one of "purgatory" (2015:A15). Neither the residents nor Yee had much to say about the American Dream.

Few American cities are any different. The *New York Times* headlined its front-page coverage of the problem one month later as: "Los Angeles Declares a Homeless Emergency" (Medina, September 2, 2015:A1). The reporter portrayed Los Angeles as "flooded with homeless encampments from its highway underpasses to the chic sidewalks of Venice Beach" (2015:A1). In places with good weather, like Los Angeles, homeless living in public places is a particularly persistent and resistant problem. The official estimate is that 26,000 people live on the street in Los Angeles (2015:A1). The figure for the entire county, which includes the city of Los Angeles, is estimated at 44,000 (2015:A20).

The existence, and extent, of homelessness in the USA presents an obvious problem for any discussion of the American Dream. Interestingly, homelessness often garners little attention in studies directly devoted to assessing it. The term does not appear in the index to either Putnam's (2015) nor Rank et al.'s (2014) books. Mixed, affordable housing receives less than a page of treatment from Putnam (2015:251–52) and the impact of home foreclosures about one and a half pages of coverage in Rank et al. (2014:43–44). Neither does homelessness register on the American Dream horizon of middle-class college students who respond to online surveys. Apparently, OPP—other people's problems—don't figure very highly in Americans' individualistic focus on their own prospects for living the American Dream or the prospects of those in their immediate surround.

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Conclusion

Our nation's most familiar evocation of the American Dream is not among the sociological, or other, works I have discussed in detail in earlier chapters. It is rather a story about failure and death written in 1925 that has become one of the most widely read and critically examined American novels of the twentieth century. Nagel's (2013) recent analysis of the pursuit of the American Dream in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is instructive for our purpose here. Nagel contends that the central theme of the well-known novel is not that the American Dream is inherently destructive; rather, he argues that the novel's theme, correctly understood, is that Gatsby's (and perhaps Nick's) degraded and corrupted version of the Dream in which the avid pursuit of money has brushed aside all other values does not hew to Adams' original conception nor the view held by the early English colonists (2013:113). Harkening back to John Winthrop's 1630 sermon, Nagel rejects the Dream's reduction to the simple acquisition of money and status and reminds the reader of Winthrop's idealistic prescription for a society bound together by love, mutual respect, religious devotion, and a sense of community (2013:113). Gatsby's individualistic quest to reignite Daisy's love through the acquisition of wealth is a distortion—ultimately a destructive one—of this original vision in Nagel's view.

ASSESSING THE COMMON CONCEPTION
OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Regardless of the critical comments that have been leavened against materialism, however, it is undeniable that a strong theme of material prosperity, even wealth, pervades many versions of the American Dream. One of the arguments raised in this volume regarding research to date is that the focus on unequal access to material wealth—especially in economic periods of nonscarcity—misconceives the relative level of satisfaction humans experience from the acquisition of goods, money, and consumption generally (Lyubomirsky 2007:16–17). Just as individuals become obsessed with acquisitiveness in capitalist society, those who wish to analyze the American Dream seem to become equally besotted with the notion that the American Dream consists of little more than equal opportunity to become financially secure or successful. These commentators and social scientists then immerse themselves in the minutiae of assessing whether or not American society still provides "equal opportunity" (as though it ever did) and evaluating the relative influence of various factors on "making it"—that is, becoming monetarily successful in the USA.

Emotional Investment, Autonomy, Authenticity

In the preceding chapters, I've advanced a number of reasons that this over-emphasis on economic security as a factor in the American Dream is simply part of the self-fulfilling prophecy of talking about the American Dream. Still, perhaps a final anecdote is worth telling. E.Y. (Yip) Harburg became a popular song lyricist but only after his decision to go into business was thwarted by the Depression. As Harburg told Studs Terkel (1970:20–22), he went into business to make a living but then 1929 struck. At that point he told Terkel, "All I had was a pencil" (1970:21). Luckily, as Harburg reports, he had a friend named Ira Gershwin, who along with his younger brother George Gershwin, began writing (Ira) and composing (George) successful Broadway musicals in the mid-1920s. Gershwin told Harburg to take the pencil and a rhyming dictionary and get to work writing lyrics. Harburg, out of work, took his advice. Later, inspired by the misery of the Depression years, Harburg wrote the lyrics for "Brother, Can You Spare a

Dime" which became a national popular hit. The song's popularity was so great that many Republican supporters of President Hoover worried that it would influence people to vote for Franklin Roosevelt for president in the 1932 elections (and, perhaps, it did).

The essence of Harburg's story, however, is not that he became a successful popular song lyricist. Rather, it is what he had to say about his change from a business career to a creative musical career:

> I was relieved when the Crash came. I was released. Being in business was something I detested. When I found that I could sell a song or a poem, I became me, I became alive.

> Other people didn't see it that way....

> Someone who lost money [in the Depression] found that his life was gone. When I lost my possessions, I found my creativity. I felt I was being born for the first time. So for me the world became beautiful.

> With the Crash, I realized that the greatest fantasy of all was business....

> We thought American business was the Rock of Gibraltar. We were the prosperous nation, and nothing could stop us now. A brownstone house was forever…If you made it, it was there forever. Suddenly the big dream exploded. The impact was unbelievable [but for me, I was relieved]. (1970:21)

Harburg's story, in short, is that if one has emotionally invested in possessions and financial security then the loss of that attachment will be devastating. For Harburg, however, it was a liberating reprieve from his desultory enmeshment in business, which he intensely disliked. Thus, there may well be—and most certainly is—an American Dream that is focused on financial success and economic security. Neither economic security nor economic success is the exclusive or sole linchpin that anchors the American Dream. Definitions or formulations that make it appear as though either one does constitute the only vital center to the American Dream obscure, rather than clarify or broaden, our understanding of the entire phenomenon. As Pells (1998:99) reminds us, the collapse of the economy during the Depression struck most American writers and commentators as merely symptomatic of a more far-reaching deficiency in American life. These writers believed something was hollow and false at the very base of American society and sought some antidote to the

crisis beyond economic recovery. An American creed that largely embraced capitalism's profit mantra in the form of simply "making money" seemed to offer the nation little in the way of a sustainable national purpose. This was, it seems, a time to look for a reinvigorated, reconceptualized, non-economic American Dream since the Great Depression rendered that dream null for most of the nation.

Monetary Success Versus a Better Life

A substantial amount of the research we have examined has supported the notion that Americans—and those who seek to become Americans and live in the USA—do search for a "better life." This is a significant contribution to the restlessness that Tocqueville observed on our shores nearly 200 years ago. The result is a continual churn that Contreras (2013:38) captures nicely in his thumbnail account of 50 years of Bronx housing history:

> …The Bronx went downhill after the Second World War. Many, White, middle-class residents fled from newly arrived Puerto Ricans (who themselves had fled from a sad island economy) and from newly arrived poor Blacks (who themselves had fled from a tyrannical Jim Crow South).

Only when there appeared to be nowhere any better that one could flee (at least for a price one could afford) would the churn temporarily abate and restless Americans settle. Both Levittown and Crestwood Heights arose in sparsely inhabited woods and fields in their own variation of this search for the Dream home and community. Of course, it is relatively easier to envision a better life when one's economic circumstances are severely straightened like those of many immigrant groups. First-generation immigrants often get to live their Dream as life in the USA strikes them as indisputably better than the land they left. Second-generation immigrants sometimes struggle: it is more difficult to improve their economic standing and feel connected to a distant cultural heritage, while seeking full acceptance as "Americans." Here, issues of meaning and identity often dominate as second-generation immigrants must sort out for themselves the purpose of their lives. The immigrant American Dream was their parent's dream, after all. Just what is their dream?

The Dilemma of the Inequality Gap

It is very true, though, even in an era in which only artificial scarcity predominates for many, materialism remains a potent value among Americans. Although there has been a substantial amount of recent rhetoric about solving the "inequality gap," Americans for the most part remain divided, and self-absorbed, by their own economic destinies and not all that concerned about the have-nots. Gilbert (2011:253–54), summing up some of the messages of his book on American classes in an age of increased inequality, tells the story (based on *Wall Street Journal* reporting) of children's requests to Santa Claus for the 2009 Christmas season. Children who visited Santa at retail venues just outside or nearby middle- to low-income neighborhoods were lowering their expectations: they were not asking for expensive gifts like iPods. One 5-year-old in Ohio asked Santa to turn his father into an elf so he would have a job and the family would not lose its house. To the contrary, children who saw Santa at malls with upscale stores visited by the affluent upper middle class continued to ask for gifts as extravagant as ever. Clearly, in an age of inequality the lived experiences of those from different classes color nearly every aspect of one's life. These children from different classes envisioned different American Dreams just as they possess different prospects within our class structure. American Dreams are sundered when even those modest expectations of the middle and lower classes can't be met.

The inequality gap discussion is particularly germane with reference to the conventional, economic conception of the American Dream, of course. Recent analyses regarding how to address the inequality gap must face this dilemma squarely to earn credibility. Anthony Atkinson (2015) begins his densely argued tract *Inequality* by noting that both President Obama and Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund, "have declared rising inequality to be a priority" (2015:1). This is significant for a number of reasons. The most obvious is that the poor hardly need President Obama and Christine Lagarde to inform them of the urgency of the issue. Atkinson's curtsy in the direction of the politically powerful is no doubt intended to demonstrate that (1) his interest in inequality is shared at the highest levels and (2) we are approaching that political Neverland where "it is time something should be done." This raises two questions with regard to increased economic equality and equality of opportunity generally: will something be done about economic inequality? Will the

policy work? Atkinson (2015) notes the influence of power differentials between individuals and groups with respect to the decision-making that governs reward distribution issues. Even though Atkinson observes that politics, and hence political power, has an inordinate influence on income redistribution through taxation and social security, the entire balance of his lengthy book fails to take up the issue of how to induce political power to be wielded in favor of the lowest orders of society. Apparently, because Atkinson, President Obama, and Lagarde rhetorically favor some positive action to reduce inequality, Atkinson simply assumes that action will be forthcoming. Yet the truth of the matter is that many policy proposals regarding income redistribution, equal opportunity, poverty, homelessness, and other national issues falter with regard to either political will or simple efficacy. Far too many social analysts seem content to write books or position papers on inequality but shy away from attempting to influence legislation or actual events.

Will the landscape for the American Dream be adjusted to a level playing field? It seems unlikely given the past record of eradicating poverty in the USA, which is uneven at best. One area of study among public policy experts is dedicated to studying why scientific evidence loses out politically to decisions predicated on untested, nebulous, and frequently unsuccessful grounds. The answer seems to be that carefully designed science leading to sound public policy proposals simply do not articulate a rationale that resonates with the various publics whose support is needed for reform to be mobilized (Gottschalk 2015:261). Can Congress or the American people be mobilized to support new public policy proposals to narrow the inequality gap or redistribute wealth/income when advocates for those proposals, like Atkinson (2015:262) and Putnam (2015:253–54, 260), acknowledge the potential substantial costs involved? It is politically an open question. Equally to the point, many political and social programs to ameliorate the effects of inequality have had little success or, alternatively, support has evaporated, efforts have been redirected, or promising programs have simply been defunded and then abandoned.

In 1965, President Johnson sought to support a nationwide program of compensatory programs to improve the academic achievement of students from low-income families through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Johnson's skillful management of the legislative process from the White House produced a bill signed into law within 4 months (Goodwin 1976:227). Yet soon after the federal funds began to

be disbursed, it became evident that local districts in charge of using the funds were siphoning them off into regular school budgets that generally helped middle-class students. A 1977 study showed that nearly 2/3 of the students benefitting were not poor; half were not even low achievers; and 40 % were neither poor nor academically challenged (Matusow 1984:223–24). Moreover, even after some of these deviant implementation practices were modified, studies of school populations over a number of years failed to show evidence of any lasting impact of Title I participation on academic achievement (1984:225).

The Illusory Lure of the American Dream

There are other shortcomings to standard conceptions of the American Dream. The illusory vision of the USA as a "land of opportunity" conveniently overlooks the many barriers to economic opportunity built into America's capitalist economy and its incrementally status-ranked social structure. Brooks (2013), in her disparaging analysis of the etymology of the term and shorthand history of its use in the USA, zeroes in on a speech given by Charles Schwab, the steel magnate, to a businessmen's convention in August 1907 as the actual historic starting point for wider adoption of the phrase. Schwab, appropriately enough speaking at the Pier Restaurant in Dreamland, Coney Island, New York, conveyed his optimistic estimate of virtually unlimited potential for American industrial expansion. He boldly predicted that US steel production would grow so large in another 50 years the nation's transportation facilities would not be able to accommodate it, let alone all the other goods that would need carting. Building on this theme he declared, "There can be no financial depression of long or serious duration. Whenever there is a serious crisis someone always steps into the breach and relieves the situation" (2013:8). Schwab was proven wrong almost immediately when a failed attempt to corner the copper market by acquiring the United Copper Company failed and Knickerbocker Trust Company, a major underwriter of the deal, experienced a run and went bankrupt. The stock market fell 50 % from the previous year's high, many other smaller banks failed, and only the fact that J.P. Morgan assembled a group of major bankers and financiers to stem the losses ended the immediate crisis (Pak 2013; Strouse 1999:575–86). While the panic was averted in the short term, the panic of 1907 was so severe it led to the establishment of the Federal Reserve System (which, of course, still didn't prevent the onset of

the Great Depression in 1929). Through panics and cyclical downturns like this one, the lure of possible opportunity has perhaps destroyed more American dreams than it has supported; given that it would be rather difficult to empirically document either proposition it is enough to say that the phrase does not describe a reality that is as simple and alluring as it sounds. As Brooks (2013:8) comments, though, the expression continues to dominate national conversations about immigration and resonates in surveys of public opinion. Regardless of accuracy, then, ours remains a rhetorical "land of opportunity" even if the words constitute nothing more than a colorful fable. They are, it seems, part of the myth of the American Dream

Although the goal of monetary success or financial security may be overemphasized as the central feature of the American Dream, it is undeniable that visions of economic opportunity can be a powerful lure for those whose legitimate opportunities are limited or, simply, those whose imaginations are captured by it. Robert Peace, who grew up poor in Newark-East Orange, NJ (Hobbs 2014), dreamed both real estate money dreams and drug dealing money dreams, the latter of which killed him, even though he had a Yale University degree and a secure job as a teacher. As Randol Contreras, growing up poor in the devastated Bronx of the 1980s, recounts years later:

> On the streets the cold capitalist rationalizations had returned, those justifications for making money no matter the human costs. Beatings, burnings, mutilation—*Man, you gotta do what you gotta do to get that loot*. Sometimes I even felt that certain magic moment again, that time during the late 1980's when I believed that the drug market was my only way to financial success. This is when I saw the world as my [drug stick-up] study participants did, when I felt their lofty desires and emotional pain. I was damned tired of being penniless, broke. I was desperate to earn tons of money and prestige. Drug robberies were the only way out of poverty, out of misery, out of the damn South Bronx… (2013:20)

Although not rising from the straightened circumstances Robert Peace or Randol Contreras experienced, one of the franchisees Peter Birkeland (2002:97) interviewed for *Franchising Dreams* echoed their motivation when asked about his interest in owning a business: "[T]o make a lot of money." Thus, while the monetized American Dream may not have been part of Adams' original notion it has secured a firm place within the minds of many Americans.

The catch in this version of the American Dream, of course, is that it is not an easy matter to make a lot of money for most people. Rhetorical clichés—like "land of opportunity"—often suggest to the unsophisticated that achieving the monetary dream will not be all that difficult. Remarkably, and contrary to popular belief, it is apparently a challenge for both drug dealers and businessmen to make money. Robert Peace, the reader will recall, planned on purchasing marijuana "large" at a good price and then selling subdivided ounces for a $400,000 profit (Hobbs 2014). His investors (who were friends of his) balked at doing retail distribution, however, and he was left largely on his own to both process product and move it. In the end, he hired three youths to sell his processed marijuana. The likelihood is that one of the three told stories about his major stash which lead to his death by other drug dealers. Randol Contreras, who ended up becoming a sociologist, explained that his own occupational choice was due in part to the fact that he was a failed drug dealer who couldn't sell enough drugs to make it worth his while (2013:xxvi–xxviii, 21).

Birkeland's franchisees, who fancied themselves independent entrepreneurs who ran their own businesses and, hence, "took orders from no one," often struggled to pay their service contract costs to the franchisor and otherwise sustain a profit. Birkeland (2002:31) quotes generic estimates that suggest 65 % of business start-ups fail within 5 years and cites a 1996 study of franchises across a broad range of industries that estimates only 25 % survived over a 10-year period. These works seem to suggest that the monetary success version of the American Dream is an illusory trail littered with the shards of broken businesses and broken lives.

Indeed, the franchise business is an excellent illustration of perhaps the most significant weakness attributable to the monetized American Dream: the fact that it is used to oversell the likelihood of success and undersell the potential for failure. Birkeland (2002:103–12) recounts at some length the patterned complaints of disillusioned franchisees, all of which focused on the gap between entering expectations—which were often inflated—and the actual experience of owning a franchise and working within the terms of a franchise contract. In thumbnail form, these common narratives mentioned: being convinced to buy the franchise by a representative of the franchisor and overpaying for the store; being persuaded by the franchisor or his representative to pursue a business strategy that was good for the franchisor but not the franchisee; being sold the franchisor's line of "superior" products although the products were the same, or even poorer, than comparable products on the market; believing the rhetoric about

achieving success in the franchise business as compared to the reality just quoted; and believing the franchisor's claims that they provided support and guidance for operating the business which, in many cases, turned out to be quite false. Moreover, virtually all franchisees believed in the rhetorical value of being independent and "one's own boss," although these traits were actually antithetical to working within the narrow parameters of a franchise contract system and would not, in any event, necessarily lead to sustainable profitability. For these franchisees, the American Dream of owning one's own business, being independent and making money at their franchise left them embittered and unhappy when the exaggerated dreams they held were not realized. These franchisees' lives traced an emotional trajectory that started high but ended ultimately in disappointment, not unlike the lives of the drug dealers Contreras (2013:21) had known: lured by the flashy lifestyle and potential to "make a killing" all (save one) eventually ended up in jail or prison, many serving lengthy sentences.

Birkeland's (2002) investigation of franchising reinforces Hatton's (2011) research on the temp industry in this regard. Both of these sectors of the economy rely on the potential targets of their business strategy to "buy into" the carefully calculated lure fashioned around one or more elements of the American Dream. Neither industry designs its strategies passively. Instead, both sectors actively shape their messages to focus their appeal toward a narrowly identified audience. They do so by using language honed to address dreams that the industry has nurtured in their targets as the process unfolds. The American Dream, whatever else it may be, offers an alluring but vaguely defined vessel for selling some manufactured vision of the "good life" to a targeted group whose economic behavior is the object of the strategy. By using the American Dream to fashion a suitable narrative, many a business plan has been implemented successfully as Sternheimer (2011) demonstrates in her carefully documented investigation of Hollywood's use of American Dream stories.

Briefly, Sternheimer (2011) documents how celebrity stories offered to fan magazines by Hollywood studios were used to reinforce the prevailing popular notion of monetary success as an achievable American Dream during Tinseltown's heyday from the 1930s to 1960s. Celebrity profiles and biographies were carefully edited so they would appear as real-life exemplars of the rags-to-riches story (2011:xiv). The popularity of the Dream narrative induced Americans to connect with celebrities, thereby selling movie tickets. Moreover, the amorphous nature of the American Dream fantasy permits it to be adjusted as circumstances dictate. As Sternheimer

(2011) shows, the shifting nature of the Hollywood fantasy about the American dream responded to real-world conditions (the Jazz Age; the Great Depression; World War II; postwar suburbia). Hollywood repackaged the Dream to suit the times. In short, Hollywood used the American Dream to induce Americans to buy its product. All in all, selling the American Dream seems like a great business.

CHARACTER AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Riesman et al. (1961), Mills (1971), and Henry (1965), among others, discuss the manner in which American character has been formed and its impact on the formation of our American Dreams. While one can identify many differences among these portraits of the American character, each of the analyses attests to the fact that the intersection of character and culture influences the content of our aspirations and their pursuit more than some independent, abstract notion of the American Dream. Both Mills (1971) and Henry (1965), for example, describe the alternately inflating and narcotizing effects produced by enmeshment in the lower echelon white-collar world of post-World War II bureaucratic capitalism. Cloistered in a worker pool or buried in a sea of look-alike cubicles, the middle-class white-collar worker spins out his or her days in an isolated, specialized, bureaucratically confining role with limited prospects for change, personal fulfillment, advancement, or real success. Rather, the worker becomes tied to the daily clock, the weekly paycheck, and the distant dream of a possible promotion. Hatton (2011) sketches out a similar, if not identical, fate for the temporary worker, especially the middle-class women who were drawn into the sector by the industry's artful delineation of the convergence between the target women's desire for extra income and their commitment to a homemaker role. In these analyses, and others, Americans do not mold their destiny by the quality of their character but rather have their prospects for character expression shrunken to fit the contours of late bureaucratic capitalism. Trapped by the unforgiving boundaries of their allotted space within the white-collar bureaucracy, the workers' American Dreams typically are constrained by the possibilities inherent in the social space they occupy. In Merton's (1938) terms, these workers' lives have become ritualized: while their dreams may revolve around more money—as Mills (1971:259–63, 282) suggests they do—the reality is that they have relinquished any real hope for monetary success by system conformity at a minimum level so complete that the conventional

American Dream has little likelihood of arrival. For Mills, middle-class Americans are largely adrift, at the whim of larger social forces that they cannot control. Contrary to the mythical narrative where one can "pull oneself up by one's bootstraps" through hard work and achieve a liberating success, "character" recedes in importance in contemporary America as neither the strength of one's personality nor the shape of one's values has much influence on the barren landscape of opportunity that the heavily in debt, middle class inhabits.

The American Dream and the Disenchanted

Some Americans, however, refuse to be sold, and thus decline to buy into, the American Dream. The theme of illusion in the American Dream has been pursued most vigorously by those on the margins of society— or buried in its fetid underbelly. Norman Mailer, writing in 1959 of the Americans who rejected the American Dream, described them thus:

> But the presence of Hip as a working philosophy in the sub-worlds of American life is probably due to jazz,…, its subtle but so penetrating influence on an avant-garde generation—that postwar generation of adventurers who (some consciously, some by osmosis) had absorbed the lessons of disillusionment and disgust of the twenties, the depression and the war. Sharing a collective disbelief in the words of men who had too much money and controlled too many things, they knew almost as powerful a disbelief in the socially monolithic ideas of the single mate, the solid family and the respectable love life….
>
> …
>
> …For jazz is orgasm, it is the music of orgasm, good orgasm and bad, and so it spoke across a nation, it had the communication of art even where it was watered, perverted, corrupted, and almost killed, it spoke in no matter what laundered popular way of instantaneous existential states to which [men] could respond…
>
> So there was a new breed of adventurers, urban adventurers who drifted out at night looking for action with a black man's code to fit their facts. (Mailer in Bellah et al. 1987:90–91)

Mailer reminds us that the American Dream as it is most often defined will never be the dream of the truly disaffected, the disaffiliated, or any outsider in American life. Those who are beyond the reach of the

traditional American Dream are still out there, dreaming some perhaps unknown—or even unknowable—dream. Theirs is a Dream not being sought out by analysts of the middling middle and one that, perhaps, could not be understood by them even if they were to seek it out. Any attempt at fleshing out our understanding of the American Dream further must encompass investigations of these Americans' dreams.

African Americans, among others, continue to be dissatisfied with their fate inside the American Dream. Writing recently, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) felt compelled to offer his 15-year-old son sound advice about living in the USA, much as James Baldwin wrote a letter to his 14-year-old nephew about the African American experience in *The Fire Next Time* (1963). Coates, reflecting on recent deaths of young black men at the hands of the police, points out to his son that police departments in the USA are "endowed with the authority to destroy your body" (Coates 2015:2). Much of Coates' book is in the form of this unsettling bluntness. He tells his son, "The entire narrative of this country argues against the truth of who you are" (2015:99). Toward the end of the book, hearing that Michael Brown's assailant, Officer Wilson, will go free, his son cries. Coates, speculating about the nature of his son's reaction, writes "Perhaps that is why you were crying, because in that moment you understood that even your relatively privileged security can never match a sustained assault launched in the name of the Dream" (2015:130). Coates, unlike Putnam (2015), holds out little hope that "policy" or "anti-discrimination laws" will save him or his son. Driving away from an urban ghetto, Coates remarks on the last page of his reflections, "I felt the old fear" (2015:152). While some might argue that the African American upper middle and middle classes have safely made it in America, Coates does not feel safe for himself or his son. The economic inequality gap has closed for he and his family; the distance between himself and the world hasn't narrowed quite as much.

Our interviews in a mid-size city in western Washington also unearthed a reservoir of dissatisfaction with the American Dream among a disaffected group—the near homeless (or formerly homeless) adherents of urban street culture and the near-permanently homeless. Asked to say what the American Dream meant, our respondents routinely offered negative images. Warren, an extremely dirty and bedraggled 20-year-old Caucasian male, replied, "It is an idea created as propaganda to make people poor." Sandy, a 30-year-old Caucasian female, stated: "I think it's a lie, a false hope." She paused and then continued, "Privilege, immigration; it's all

a set up in America that doesn't work for everybody." The marginalized see few prospects for themselves and in the rare instances they do, some of their visions are so highly discrepant with their circumstances that their aspirations seem mildly delusional and highly improbable.

Those disconnected from, and essentially prevented from participating in, the monetary, symbolic, and mythic pathways of the American Dream are actually critical to its sustenance. At the most elementary level, the unemployed are surplus people, the residue that Marx identified as the reserve army of the unemployed in industrial society (Tucker 1972:308–11). As Marx made clear, capitalist economies only employ workers where profit seems likely and probable as a result of the particular form of productive industry pursued. This means that there is a permanent, although relative, surplus population of workers, who may only be partially employed or wholly unemployed. This is the permanent condition in the USA where unemployment generally hovers around 5–6 %, while cyclically much higher, although economists widely recognize that these figures are an underestimate of those actually not working at any given time. As Marx understood, this means that there always exists as a "condition of capitalist production" what he termed "the lowest sediment" of the surplus labor population, which he labeled "the sphere of pauperism" (Tucker 1972:309). In Marx's words, this group includes:

> …,The demoralized and ragged, and those unable to work, chiefly people who succumb to their incapacity for adaptation, due to the division of labour… (1972:309)

When the capitalist economy has no use for those who constitute only surplus labor, then the unneeded worker has no position or role to perform within the economy; as Marx pointed out, the unemployed worker then cannot "produce his necessaries" nor will he or she be able to obtain them through exchange for those outside the economy have no access to the essential medium of exchange (i.e., money) (Marx 1973:604). Then "it is only because alms are thrown to him [or her] from revenue" that those in the surplus labor pool have access to any means whatsoever (1973:604). This, then, is the circumstance our interviewees among the homeless and street people find themselves in—surplus people hanging on to the ravaged fringe of the American Dream. While they are able to extract only a bare sustenance from the withered teat society extends to them, today's lumpenproletariat still serve multiple functions for other

people's American Dream: they serve as a reserve low-wage labor pool to do the dirtiest of work, thereby freeing up others to prosper in better conditions; act as consumers of used, damaged, and substandard goods and food that others don't want; and support many middle-class professionals in the helping and control professions (social work; religious organizations; policing; corrections; and emergency medicine, among others) whose management of the extreme poor is their predominant reason for being (Gans 1998, 1971).

Ignoring Class Status Barriers to the American Dream

Some studies of the American Dream, including recent ones, also seem to minimize, or neglect, investigation of the barriers that remain, built right into American social structure. Karabel (2006) in *The Chosen* lays bare many of the partially hidden barriers to admission among elite American colleges. One consequence is that among the most selective colleges and universities, only 3 % of students come from the bottom quartile of the income scale; only 10 % come from families in the bottom half of the income range (2006:538). The explanation for this lack of access to opportunity may be found in the cost of an education at selective private colleges and universities; admission and financial aid policies that favor the better off; and the preference for legacy admissions, applicants with athletic talent, and historically underrepresented minorities. These latter groups constitute "tagged categories" at Princeton, as one example, and fill roughly 40 % of the seats available in the entering freshman class (2006:544). At Harvard, in 2002, about 40 % of legacy applicants gained admission; the rate for "everyone else" was 11 % that year (2006:550).

Equally as important as the invidious barriers to opportunity that remain entrenched in our society are the legitimized, ostensibly meritocratic requirements built into the entire notion of bureaucratic credentialism. Collins (1979), for example, has persuasively demonstrated how educational institutions have supported professionalization through the proliferation of programs, degrees, and certification schemes that have been used by government, business, and other organizations to increase for formal credential and licensure requirements for many positions. In effect, those already in positions of influence and status have quietly agreed to raise the minimum requirements for employment. Although swathed in the language of competence, certification, and professionalism, the inflation effect of routinely upgraded credentialism simply makes it

harder for those of a lower status to gain entry into any particular level of higher-status employment. The contemporary rhetoric directed at reducing the inequality gap rather blithely disregards the multiple, ranked-status closure methods built into our educational systems that foster unequal opportunity through legitimized exclusion by the means Collins describes.

More important than the tangible, transparent barriers are the intangible ones. As Karabel (2006) observes, perhaps one of the most insidious threats to equality of opportunity is placing one's belief in a meritocratic system where the definition of "merit" includes amorphous terms such as "character" or "leadership potential." Such practices further advantage the already advantaged for two reasons. First, amorphous standards permit decision-makers to exercise their discretion in any manner they wish—which is often in the direction of powerfully advantaged constituent groups. Second, such a definition will systematically favor the already privileged because their families will generally be able to endow them with the type of cultural capital that admission committees wish to see. These applicants have already shown they have accumulated a record of achievement and a breadth of experience that makes them a good candidate; they have typically used their advantages to acquire further advantages (called "cumulative advantage") and the mythical "level playing field" of meritocracy will again yield to those from advantaged groups first. Finally, the advantaged commonly benefit from access to better information resources, both through human connections and through advanced knowledge. This, too, will put the advantaged in a superior position with respect to successfully navigating the application process to the final goal—a favorable admission decision. While the American Dream promises equality of opportunity for all, most of the studies of the American way of life we have examined—including Karabel's—suggest a more accurate appraisal might be that the USA offers "equality of opportunity to be unequal."

Prospects for Reducing the Inequality Gap

There is more that can be said, perhaps, but the future prospects of the American Dream are tethered to stark reality by the unrelieved depth and range of the inequality gap in the USA. As Oliver and Shapiro (2006) and others have shown, there are significant wealth differences between American families that, to date, seem impervious to reduction, more so due to the fact that the cost of the common good is more and more often a burden imposed on individuals and families rather than

borne collectively. As Marx recognized as early as the mid-nineteenth century, "capital knows how to throw these [cost burdens of the poor], for the most part, from its own shoulders on to those of the working class and the lower middle class" (Tucker 1972:309). This is a political problem that the USA has yet to surmount. As notable a source as President Obama (2006) has both acknowledged the continuing influence of wealth on politics in this country and the inability of politicians to effectively influence the nation to adopt and maintain democratic practices that deeply engage Americans in programs that have the potential to close, or minimize, the inequality gap that remains.

One of the most recent empirical studies of how the poorest of the poor in the USA are doing applied the World Bank's metric for global poverty in the developing world—$2.00 a day—to Americans. Edin and Shaefer (2015:xvii) estimate that in early 2011, 1.5 million American households—with roughly 3 million children living in them—were surviving on cash incomes of no more than $2.00 per person per day in any given month. Since the passage of landmark welfare reform in 1996, the researchers noted that by 2011 the number of families living in $2.00 a day poverty had more than doubled (2015:xvii). Searching for confirmation or disconfirmation of their findings, Edin and Shaefer found that reports from the nation's food banks showed a substantial rise in the number of households seeking emergency food assistance since the 1990s. Government data on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) revealed another large increase in the number of families possessing no other source of income. Likewise, public school reports over the time period showed many more students facing homelessness throughout the nation (2015:xviii).

The magnitude of these numbers inspired Edin and Shaefer to look at the lives being lived beneath the statistics. In summer 2012, the authors launched an ethnographic study in four American locales: a rural area that had been deeply poor for half a century; a city that had—up until the 1970s—been somewhat affluent but more recently experienced economic decline; a place that had been very poor for decades but had recently experienced recovery to a degree; and just a "typical" American community (2015:xix–xx). The field sites they chose included a collection of small, rural hamlets in the Mississippi Delta; Cleveland, OH; Johnson City, TN; and Chicago, IL (2015:xx). Sadly, when the authors began their research they thought that families living on $2.00 per person per day might be hard to find but this turned out not to be true at all (2015:xxi).

In each place they looked for families with children who had spent at least 3 months living on cash income of less than $2.00 per person per day. In most cases, the families they found had lived at this level for much longer. In the end, the authors followed 18 families closely, 8 of whom are featured in their book (2015:xxii).

The families' stories are predicable ones of low-wage work, unemployment, family tragedy, dysfunctional marriages, illness, and privation. Modonna Harris, found standing in line at an Illinois Department of Human Services office in Chicago, is visibly uncomfortable being there, although she and her 15-year-old daughter need help. Living in a shelter for the past several months, Modonna and her daughter are provided dinner during the week. Her daughter gets breakfast and lunch through a local nonprofit recreation program, but both often go hungry on weekends. Modonna's parents worked steadily when she was growing up. Although middle class, her parents divorced when she was young. She lived primarily with her mother, who suffered from depression, but it was better than with her father, who was controlling and demeaning. She graduated from high school, attended a private university specializing in the arts for 2 years, but exhausted her student loan eligibility and dropped out "with a boatload of student debt" and no degree (2015:2–3).

Before Modonna could return to school, she fell in love, married Brian, and a year later had Brianna, her 15-year-old. Brian had energy and plans to make it in the music production business. After a few years, however, it became clear he was a pathological liar. At one point he stopped paying the rent and didn't tell Modonna. Brian cheated first but then Modonna became involved in an affair and the marriage broke up as Brianna entered first grade. The best job Modonna could find with her spotty work record was as a cashier at a music store. The job paid $9 per hour. She held on to it for the next 8 years. Things were tight but she and her daughter did well until her apartment building began to deteriorate. In the midst of her efforts to break her lease, her cash drawer came up $10 short. Regardless of the small amount and her years of good service, she was summarily fired. She qualified for modest unemployment but couldn't pay the rent. Her landlord, angry about her complains about the building, gave her an eviction notice after six days of missed rent (2015:3–5).

Out of a place to live, Modonna and Brianna tried short-term living with various relatives—her father (whose new wife didn't want them), her sister (where they lasted only a few days before being asked to leave), and her mother (where her new boyfriend began coming on to Modonna

and their foster daughter bullied Brianna). Meanwhile she was submitting dozens of applications for jobs, none of which materialized. A week at a church day camp went unpaid when the church said they did not receive the grant they expected. The next stop was a homeless shelter—followed by a succession of different shelters throughout Chicago. Now, she is seeking government assistance—which she doesn't want to do and that she doesn't believe she will receive. She has exhausted the small amount of unemployment she was receiving, can't get help for housing costs, and receives only $367 a month from SNAP with a total annual cap of $4400 for Modonna and her daughter (2015:6–10). Isn't there a source of government assistance available for someone in Modonna's plight?

There is a program—TANF—but, remarkably, Edin and Shaefer found that the work to welfare rolls had been cut to such a degree that many poor, or newly poor, people had no knowledge of the program and did not believe assistance was available. A destitute out-of-work couple the researchers found in Johnson City, Tennessee, asked "What's that?" when the researchers mentioned TANF. Modonna Harris had heard "they just don't give out that kind of assistance anymore." Even many among the poverty advocacy community seldom refer people since the TANF payouts are so seldom approved and so small (2015:170–71). Thus, even though the 1996 "welfare to work" reform legislation is premised on the idea that work will be available to all, Modonna's story—and those of most of the truly poor—seldom work out that way. As Edin and Shaefer (2015) found, many Americans are still forced to live on $2.00 a day per person.

ASKING THE AMERICAN DREAM TO TELL US WHY WE LIVE

There remains for most Americans, finally, the question of what men and women want over and beyond our present technological mastery and broadly, if not fully, achieved economic welfare. The history of human society has been an increasing ability to extract a comfortable living from the earth coupled with the inability to stifle human aggression and recurrent failures to offer many a satisfying way of living. American society, in particular, has suffered regular, periodic bouts of ennui, skepticism, and apathy well past the point where economic sustenance was a major concern for most. Sigmund Freud's work, often relegated to a historical footnote in the contemporary science of society, has been proposed as one means of addressing mankind's plight beyond the economic (Brown

1985). Published originally in 1959, Norman O. Brown's exegesis of Freud in *Life Against Death* emphasizes repression as the critical psychological mechanism that impels humankind to keep its metaphorical shoulder to the wheel, aided and abetted by the social forces Henry (1965) and Slater (1990) identified. Brown (1985:11–39) argues that beyond more sophisticated productive forces that disgorge ever more largesse, and thereby tie mankind more intimately than ever to laboring on even if that labor is within the velvet confines of advanced postindustrial capitalism, humankind must rekindle some sense of pleasure, delight, play, purpose, and optimism. In short, the aim must be to free Eros from the shackles of civilization so that mankind can live in a new way grounded in life enjoyment. The goal is nothing less than to give men and women a reason to want to go on living. Conventional definitions of the American Dream have no place for discussions of the need, or means of achieving, mankind's psychic satisfaction. Yet, one can argue, it is perhaps the most vital, if unexpressed, need within American Dream studies. As Slater (1990) and others have asked: What is it all for? If the American Dream and those who write about it cannot entertain the question, there is very little hope for its future.

This remains the ideological challenge that perhaps threatens the American Dream most: the disenchantment and delegitimation of the conventional American Dream by means that cannot be cured by more equal distribution of resources, by broadening inclusiveness in American politics, by rhetorical paeans to progress, brotherhood and a better future, or by any other of those means commonly proposed. Some Americans, whether among the privileged or the poor, have simply had enough of the American Dream fantasy. These Americans are angry that other Americans, as well as perhaps themselves, must still live on $2.00 a day per person even as the wealthiest Americans live secure, comfortable lives. Estranged from the institutionalized political system that would let this happen, these Americans have metaphorically, and in some cases literally, walked away from American society. Some are among the former privileged, others are the dispossessed, and others simply the disillusioned and distrustful. Yet those who have walked away from the conventional American Dream can find nowhere else within American society that offers solace and refuge from its demanding processes. Despairing of any surcease from the daily competitive round that is bureaucratically organized American society, few of the alienated can envision a realm outside of the twenty-first-century

version of Weber's iron cage of rationality (Eitzen and Zinn 2004:37) that would permit the free play of the senses and support a reinvigorated purpose in living. Weber (Gerth and Mills 1946:347), like Brown (1985), proposed that love could unite humankind's dual nature of the physical and the spiritual, and thereby escape the domination that modern, rationalized society holds over everyone. Yet those who have been severely disillusioned by their pursuit of the American Dream—like our homeless interview subjects in western Washington—appear unable to conceive of this possibility in the context of contemporary historical forces. Like Keniston's (1965) alienated students, the disenchanted in our society cannot envision a better future and often find only a despoiled, empty landscape in their quest for positive values in American society.

Charles Bukowski, American poet, novelist, and short story writer, a member of the working class, is likely the voice for many who find the American Dream's buoyant, but empty, optimism so tedious and tired in the face of American reality that nothing anyone can say or do will revive their belief in its promises, however defined. Indeed, Bukowski has been characterized as "the only major post-war American writer who [denies] the efficacy of the American Dream" by "his unrelenting assault on deadening, routinized work as it exists for the majority of Americans" and his rejection of the "clothes, gadgets and a new car every other year" ethos (Harrison 2001:13). Bukowski, critic of alienated labor, poet of human loneliness and separation, narrator of the contemporary American tragedy, has little positive to say about the potential for the American way of life. In other words, he speaks for many of those who feel they have been sold a bill of goods under by the American Dream, especially those who do the dirty work, live roughly day by day, and just try to get by. Bukowski's attitude regarding what Americans have to look forward to, after all the policy recommendations to end poverty, aid programs, and tax credits to offset crummy wages and childcare expenses, the endless round of emergency room visits because one doesn't have health care, the lack of jobs, and on and on, may be gleaned from his poem "retired" (Bukowski 1986). There, the unnamed father of the writer, never having missed a day of work in his life, talks of nothing but the food he likes to eat ("pork chops, said my father, I love pork chops!") and the day he will retire from his low-level job. It is, apparently, the only thing he has to look forward to in his miserable life, until:

he never made it to retirement, he died one day while

standing at the sink

filling a glass of water.

he straightened like he'd been

shot.

the glass fell from his hand

and he dropped backwards

landing flat

his necktie slipping to the left. (1986:18)

Afterward, as the poet reports, people said they couldn't believe it: he looked *great*—just like the American Dream.

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