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The Reciprocal Reshaping of the American Dream and American Religion

*A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Liberal Studies*

by

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The rousing ideal called the American Dream began to take root more than five hundred years ago. It serves as the foundation for the development of the most ascendant nation-state since ancient Rome, spawning great wealth, prosperity, innovation and ideas that have uplifted humanity across the globe. The American Dream motivated millions of the “poor and huddled masses” - and those who had great means - to leave their homeland, part with family, friends, and familiarity, and undertake perilous journeys to land on American shores. Today, the American Dream is used by politicians, advertisers, athletes and artists as a manifesto for their own purposes. Perhaps a thousand years from now, historians will examine the unique nature of the American Dream in developing America’s prominence in the world and conclude that it was an epic component of human history on par with the invention of tools, or the teachings of Jesus Christ, or the ancient Greek philosophers.

The American Dream was not the invention of a Puritan-era think tank. “Its contemporary familiarity leads people to take the source for granted and, therefore, not contemplate its meaning or derivation.”¹ Since the discovery of North America, the American Dream has been described as God’s new Israel, the new Eden, the Melting Pot, Manifest Destiny, a passage to India, ownership of land, farms, homes, baseball, apple pie, Chevrolet and Saturday night out.² The popular “Ask Marilyn” advice column recently itemized the American Dream as “a house in the suburbs with a backyard for kids to play in, a patio for barbeques, a shady street, bright and obedient children, camping trips, go fishing, family cars, seeing the kids taking part in school, and church

¹ James Cullen, Restless in the Promised Land: Catholics and the American Dream (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 2001) 4.

² Ann-Janine Morey-Gaines, Apples and Ashes – Culture, Metaphor and Morality in the American Dream, (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982) 2.

plays.”³ This article paints a splendid picture of the popular evolution of the American Dream.

The genesis of the American Dream can be traced to the discovery of North America in the fifteenth century. It has thematically evolved over the last five hundred years from the Return to Eden to freedom, then independence, opportunity and ultimately to the twentieth century American Dream of achievement. During each chapter, the Christian religion has had a significant influence in shaping and spreading the concept of the American Dream. An unintended consequence of Protestant contribution to this ideal has been a fundamental reshaping of the priorities and direction of the American Protestant faith.

The first appearance of the phrase “the American Dream” has been traced to James Truslow Adams’s best-selling treatise The Epic of America, written during the darkest years of the Great Depression and published in 1931.⁴ He defines the American Dream as “a richer happier life for all our citizens of every rank which promised Americans a new dynamic hope of rising and growing of hewing out for themselves, a life in which they would not only succeed as men but be recognized as men, a life not only of economic prosperity but of social and self-esteem.”⁵ Adams’ American Dream is about the future not the past. He believes that our destiny as Americans is about who we are in the process of becoming and the devotion to that journey.

³ Lendol Calder, Financing the American Dream (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999) 3.

⁴ Anthony Brandt, “The American Dream, a History of Clichés,” New York Times, 13 Apr. 1981: A12.

⁵ James Truslow Adams, The Epic of America (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1933) 405.

The prevailing idea for America is the art of the possible, where anything is attainable and limitless. The development and conveyance of the American Dream could be understood as an open-source program without constraints. “That dream was not the product of a solitary thinker. It evolved from the hearts and burdened souls of many millions, who have come to us from all nations.”⁶ Throughout history, the American Dream has been characterized in certain ways, depending on the prevailing thinking of the day.

The early descriptions of the Americas European explorers of the sixteenth century, paint a vivid portrayal of lush, pristine land, abundant wild game, and noble but savage inhabitants. These images were viewed by some European religious figures as an opportunity to Return to Eden. The first phase of the American Dream defined as a return to paradise, provides a prescient indication of the special covenant with God, “endowing America’s interests with cosmic significance.”⁷ The discovery of America was an opportunity for Western civilization to start over in the unspoiled wilderness while remedying the negative aspects of European society.

Freedom was the hallmark of the next chapter of the American Dream. A procession of religious groups, including the Puritans, came across in the ocean in the seventeenth century in search of a safe place to freely express their interpretation of Christianity. Independence best describes the eighteenth century phase, as the colonists yearned to flex their muscles of individual and national rights, culminating in the 1776 Declaration of Independence, the birth of the United States in 1783 and the passage of the

⁶ Adams 416.

⁷ James C. Juhnke, “One Nation Under God: Religion and The American Dream,” Mennonite Life 38:4 (1983): 26.

Bill of Rights in 1798. “With an ocean and revolution to separate it from its European roots, the United States was in a special position to embrace the Enlightenment principle of progress.”⁸ The success of the independence movement germinated “opportunity” for national and individual aspirations to expand and fulfill their ultimate potential. The nineteenth century was characterized by westward expansion and migration, significant immigration from Europe and Asia, and the growth of commercial and agricultural segments of America. Realization of the American Dream over the last ninety years has been about “achievement.” At first, achieving success was virtuously defined as being all one could, pulling oneself up from the bootstraps, and ensuring that the next generation had a broader and deeper array of opportunities than the current generation.

Though it had its roots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Industrial Revolution had evolved to the point in the early twentieth century that consumer goods of all stripes, from appliances to automobiles to homes, were affordable and abundant. The industrial sector grew rapidly, creating an excess of manufacturing capacity that translated into unsold inventory. In the early twentieth century, the nation’s burgeoning advertising industry colluded with manufacturers to recast the image of middle-class success to align with the needs of industry, developing a domestic market insatiable for their emergent supply of consumer goods. Success became measured by the acquisition and display of material wealth. Americans were convinced that “you deserve more, more than you have, more than you need, more than others, you are entitled to it.”⁹ Eventually

⁸ John Bruegmann, *Rich, Free, and Miserable: The Failure of Success in America*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010) 59.

⁹ Bruegmann 110.

the consumer culture outshined government, religion, and morality as the primary cultural influence for the nation.¹⁰

The United States entered the post-World War II era as the richest nation on the planet with a strong identity of moral idealism having led the coalition that defeated two evil foes, selflessly and without territorial demands.¹¹ The heightened economic output generated by World War II continued after the war's end, with defense manufacturing giving way to technologically advanced consumer goods. The race for home ownership with gleaming appliances and automobiles in the driveway picked up pace and appeared attainable as a result of the abundance of well-paying, private-sector, blue-collar jobs and those created by the government's investment in such infrastructure projects as the national interstate systems and the construction of public buildings, including new schools. The pursuit of formal education was revered as a ticket for the next generation to improve, achieve and acquire. The American Dream has moved beyond the stale domain of print culture into the glow of mass media, being invoked by jubilant athletes, aspiring businessmen and opportunistic politicians. Harvard University historian and noted American Dream scholar Jim Cullen called the "pilgrims, founding fathers, and illiterate immigrants a collection of creative imagination,"¹² as they each contributed to and benefited from the American Dream.

However, there was a small but growing body of scholars, such as C. Wright Mills and William Whyte, who discerned some alarming societal trends relative to the

¹⁰ Calder 8.

¹¹ James Hudnut-Beumler, Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and its Critics 1945-1965, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994) 18.

¹² James Cullen, The American Dream: A Short History of the Idea that Shaped the Nation (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 5.

role of big business, the growth of suburbia, the distribution of wealth and the marginalization of particular demographic groups. Mills writes in White Collar, The American Middle-Class that “the hundred years of American history leading up to the 1950s could be best seen as the story of the slow by inexorable expropriation of the wealth and holdings of the middle-class by big business, which fueled the success of the power elite.”¹³ This faction was well-poised to influence economic, industrial and social policy in order to further entrench their position of power and ensure the sustained growth of personal fortunes.

Now, a decade into the twenty-first century there is a prevailing sense of gloom as evidence grows that our best days as a nation may be in the rear-view mirror. There is mounting belief in the decay or even death of this once-great idea. James Truslow Adams’ definition of an American Dream, encompassing economic stability, social prosperity and a high degree of self-esteem, is feeling less attainable. Americans are distancing themselves from the long-held assumption that their children will have it better than they did. The demographic group called the Millennials is first generation of Americans projected to be less financially secure than their parents. “The jobs that created middle-class America during the middle of the twentieth century have been lost to countries that offer borderless corporations lower cost structures.”¹⁴ The Baby Boomers’ generation was raised to have faith that America was the greatest country in the history of the world and was destined to remain in that position. This worldview was inspired largely by the American Dream.

¹³ Hudnut- Beumler 97.

¹⁴ Fareed Zakaria, “Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?,” Time 3 Mar. 2011: 18.

Adams said in The Epic of America, “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, unrepressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human being of any and every class.”¹⁵ Immigrants continue to stream into the United States from all over the world, desiring a better life for themselves and future generations, despite the resurgence of anti-immigrant sentiments. The voice of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community continues to rise, demanding an opportunity to more fully realize life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness by safely expressing their lifestyle, marrying and adopting children. African-African wealth and influence had been rising prior to the Great Recession. The Hispanic community is growing rapidly as a percentage of the population through higher birth rates and increasing political influence at the local, state and federal level.

The country has begun to divide into distinct economic classes resulting from income disparity, asset ownership, the tax code, educational opportunity, and access to health care. Intergenerational elasticity, a measure of intergenerational mobility, increased from 1940 to 1980 but has declined sharply since, likely a result of deregulation.¹⁶ The data regarding socioeconomic mobility and the distribution of wealth demonstrate that the opportunity for upward mobility and stability are limited to the top ten to fifteen percent of the population. “Gross Domestic Product has been growing steadily since the 1940s, but the lower and middle classes have begun to experience degrees of downward mobility since the 1970s, even though the emergence of the Great

¹⁵ Adams 405.

¹⁶ Daniel Aaronson and Basker Mazumder, “Intergenerational Economic Mobility in the United States, 1940 to 2000,” Journal of Human Resources 43:1 (2008): 140.

Society programs in the 1960s, such as food stamps and Women, Infants and Children, as well as the desegregation of schools, should have fostered greater equality of opportunity.”¹⁷ Across a variety of measures, there is strong evidence that the intergenerational occupational status correlations have declined this century among Whites, but that such correlations have increased amongst Blacks.¹⁸

America redistributes less of its wealth than just about any other Western capitalist nation.¹⁹ In 2007, income inequality in the United States was at its highest level for the last 95 years. The top one-tenth percent of the population received six percent of all U.S. wages. This is double what it was seven years ago. In addition the top ten percent of the population earned nearly half of the country’s wages, the highest proportion since 1917.²⁰ The degree of income inequality can be compared across countries using the Gini coefficient. This is a mathematical ratio that economists use to put nations on a scale from zero, where everyone in the country has the same income, to 100, where one person has all the income. The United States ranked 95th out of 134 countries with a Gini index of 45. Sweden has the lowest with 23, indicating the greatest income distribution, while South Africa is near the top of the rankings with 65.0²¹

Despite a clear increase in prosperity since the Great Depression, the basic distribution of

¹⁷ Richard Hauser, “Intergenerational Economic Mobility in the United States – Measures, Differentials and Trends.” *EurAmerican* 40:3 1 (Sep. 2010): 635.

¹⁸ Hauser 639.

¹⁹ Lynne Layton, “American Dreams/Dream of America,” *Psychoanalytical Dialogues* 14:2 (2004): 248.

²⁰ Edgar Saez, “Striking It Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States,” Retrieved from <http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-UStopincomes-2007.pdf> 2009.

²¹ <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/161.html>

income and wealth in the United States is essentially the same now as it was in 1939, or even 1910.²² Furthermore, national statistics depict the increasing stresses on middle-income Americans. Real median household income declined three percentage points from 2000 to 2004. The percentage of households earning \$25,000 to \$99,999 also shrank in the time frame. The savings rate for Americans now is at its lowest point since the 1930s. The average credit-card debt per household continues the ascent to historical highs and currently stands at an average of \$8,475 per household.

During the past several years, America has experienced a decline in educational results, increasing incarceration rate, deteriorating health of the population, increased rage, resurgence of xenophobia, resurrection of fundamentalism, growth in arms and ammunition sales, weakening of the traditional family structure, and disappearance of American hope and optimism. The reality is that the American Dream has been fading for at least fifty years and is briskly approaching mythical status. The dream is waning as a source of inspiration. The vacuum is being filled with fear of the future.

Federal government statistics indicate that 14 million children in the United States live in poverty. This represents nearly one-fifth of all children in this country. These numbers are on the rise as there are 2.5 million more children living in poverty in America now than in 2000. The RAND Corporation has found that the most important factors associated with the educational achievement of children are not race, ethnicity, or immigrant status. Instead, the most critical factors appear to be socioeconomic factors

²² Gabriel Kolko. Wealth and Power in America (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1962) 3.

including parental education levels, neighborhood poverty, parental occupational status, and family income.²³

“American is the richest, most capitalistic society in human history. It is what draws a constant stream of immigrants and the discontented. Americans don’t leave. But greed, waste, poverty, inequality and corruption are creating regret, but no change.”²⁴

This has become more evident in recent years with the Great Recession and Federal debt crisis suggesting that the American Dream has been purchased on the installment plan with massive individual credit loads and an untenable level of government indebtedness.

“There exists an illusion that American capitalism was created for the middle-class, that America was a nation of and for that demographic segment and that the affluent life is within reach.”²⁵ This group has become easy prey to the illusion of the American Dream as they can see and feel the nearness of the opportunity to ascend. Therefore, they have largely bought into the belief that those who don’t have it all are just not trying hard enough. Further, they’re convinced that everyone should look out for their own interests, as everyone should be able to make it on their own without institutional intervention or assistance. Fabricators of the myth of America as a mass, nearly classless society in the consumption of goods have taken advantage of our too-busy-to-think, do-not-stop-to-ask-what-you-are-doing, hurry-and-get-it-done lifestyle. “The denim blue jean is a compelling symbol in which America has created a look-alike society wherein a wealthy executive and a homeless person can literally wear the same clothes.”²⁶

²³ Hauser 647.

²⁴ Brueggmann 83.

²⁵ Hudnut-Beumler 98.

²⁶ Layton 235.

It is a remarkable feat of marketing that with the deplorable inequalities in economic capital, social justice and opportunity, there is not more protest or radical activity in America. This statement will be met with the usual charges of Communism, anarchy, and anti-Americanism. “American ideology works so well as to convince people that their misfortunes are their fault and not due to structural inequalities.”²⁷ There is a strong messaging power in the haziness of the American Dream as “ambiguity is the source of mythic power.”²⁸

The prospect or even necessity for a new force to arise and craft the next chapter of the American Dream is here and now. Our country needs to return to the dream expressed during the Great Depression by James Truslow Adams. “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.”²⁹ The United States has accomplished extraordinary feats in offering its members unprecedented wealth and freedom. “Yet the collective conscience has deteriorated its ability to shape the choices of individuals to the greater good.”³⁰ All members of society can be lifted up by looking after those on the fringes. The entire boat will rise higher and enable the full possibilities of the dream for a greater percentage of the population.

²⁷ Layton 247.

²⁸ Cullen, Restless 7.

²⁹ Adams 404.

³⁰ Brueggmann 16.

Americans ignore the downsides of capitalism including the global exploitation of people and resources and the pervasive inequality of income. American capitalism has transformed society by transforming political freedom into the singular freedom to consume. Material wealth is the criterion of success and it serves the capitalist status quo to have people think that it is their fault if they do not have enough. The inspirational power of the American Dream has been usurped and blames those who do not make it as incompetent, incapable or unwilling to work hard enough. There is an important need for an institution to arise that could counteract the power of Madison Avenue's materialistic message. The theme of the next American Dream should bring about fair opportunity for all members of society through compassionate and structural means.

Religion has played an integral role in defining and advancing the meaning of America. The first explorers landed under the auspices of the Catholic Church and European kings and queens. The "Return to Eden" and "City on the Hill" aspects of the American Dream have Biblical origins. There were early visions of America as a new Israel and a land of rebirth.³¹ The Puritans and Quakers came across the ocean to create a greater, yet simple, society by fleeing institutional oppression to practice their faith without fear of persecution or death. The founding revolution was incited by questions of governance and grounded in the freedom sought by colonists supported in great part by the First Great Awakening. One of the most important components of the U.S. Constitution is the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights that the Founding Fathers passed to ensure that government would not interfere with the right to practice, or not, the religion of individual choice. The settlement of the West was greatly enabled by the tent revivals that took place during the nineteenth century. Today, the United States has the

³¹ Marjorie Greenbie, American Saga (New York: Whitelesey House, 1939) 65-66.

highest official rate of church attendance when compared with the countries of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).³² Almost three-quarters of the population self-identify as Christian compared with the fifteen percent identifying themselves as atheist. Foreign policy and domestic politics have been at least influenced, if not dominated by an evangelical Christian agenda over the last thirty years. The early settlers were unusually industrious, practical and ambitious. They were blessed with unlimited natural resources and once had a common goal to provide opportunity for wide assortment of society.³³ However, their initial efforts to renew and refresh Western civilization have fallen to the wayside.

The current American Dream has changed from the original Return to Eden and has now become individual, secular, and debt-ridden. Each chapter of the American Dream from Eden, freedom, independence, opportunity, and finally twentieth century materialism, enlarged the individual, secular and debt-ridden components of the dream. Organized religion in the United States has been supportive and complicit in the transformation of the American Dream into achievement as measured by material wealth. “Paradoxically most world religions reject the core tenet that one can find satisfaction and salvation in worldly pursuits.”³⁴ The American Dream has been transformed over time in a way that has both changed the dream and at the same time the American version of Christianity.

³² Andrew Cherlin and W. Bradford Wilcox, “The Generation that Can’t Move Up,” Wall Street Journal 3 Sep. 2010: D12.

³³ Brueggmann 34.

³⁴ Cullen, Restless 13.

This individual, secular and debt-ridden American Dream represents a substantial alteration from the original aspiration of working together to create a great society and has changed the focus of religion in the United States from progressing the tenets of the Abrahamic Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ. The nation's true faith has changed to reflect the American way of life rather than the wishes of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The American Dream and Christianity exist side-by-side in America as a national religion that permeates our culture and touches every American, even the fifteen-percent who claim Atheist, or the ten-percent who practice a non-Christian faith.

“The power in the dream is that it aligns with the human tendency toward growth and individuation. Erikson and Loevinger theorize that human beings continue to grow throughout their lives by navigating through several distinct stages of identity development.”³⁵ The individual nature of the American Dream evolved from the eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophical thread of self-determination, but has drifted significantly from the perception of the Puritans' collective collaboration. Churches now regularly exalt that God meant for the strongest to succeed, if it meant climbing on the backs of the weakest, so be it. “Individualism as self, alone takes precedence in the American Dream over more universal religious idea of selfless love envisioned by Reinhold Niebuhr.”³⁶ This tenet is being vocally espoused by the megachurches as they preach the gospel of prosperity. The phenomenon referred to as “Everest Psychology,” where one pursues objectives with no tangible social payoff, is

³⁵ Helen Joy Policar, “The Shadow of the American Dream: Clash of Class Ascension and Shame” Revision 31:1 (Winter, 2010): 28.

³⁶ Robert Benne and Phillip Hefner, Defining America: A Christian Critique of the American Dream (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974): 17.

now prevalent in our society.³⁷ The old mission of keeping up with the Joneses has been enriched to beating the Jones. “The ethos of competitiveness may not lead to a solid moral foundation and basis for a better society, as there is little evidence to demonstrate that the winners invest in the public good.”³⁸ Moral guidance from the church is either silent or worse yet, misdirected.

The rise of installment credit is a key to understanding increases in the nation’s standard of living since World War II. Consumer credit represented less than four-percent of national personal income in 1929 and rose to ten percent by 1957. Since World War II, this instrument made possible an otherwise unrealizable standard of living for the majority of the American People.³⁹ The use of the installment plan to purchase the American Dream is inconsistent with Christian values. Debt becomes deeply embedded in the Dream.

Churches have also failed to take a stand and protect groups such as Native-Americans, African-Americans, women, immigrants, senior citizens, and those without health care.⁴⁰ These are people on whose back the American enterprise has been built by more privileged members of our society. At the same time, the attempts by these disparate groups to realize their dreams have been institutionally inhibited through law, policy and tax structure. The religious community has not historically taken a strong and organized stand in defense of these minority communities.

³⁷ Brueggmann 2.

³⁸ Benne and Hefner 112.

³⁹ Kolko 105.

⁴⁰ Benne and Hefner 44.

“The American Dream as an ideology has been a vehicle of goodness and holiness and a representation of God’s presence among us. That same dream has also become demonic because it has been pushed beyond itself and, in the hands of Americans, has become the God as the holy.”⁴¹ Minister Robert J. Lamont said, “America is still a land of hope, with a special mission. The only thing that can save the nation is a religious awakening. There is a dream of a larger life for every man that can be realized in America, and that the Christian faith has a part to play.”⁴² The institution of organized religion is positioned to return the American Dream to an ideal where there is viable mobility for the broadest assemblage of American society to achieve the great heights in social prosperity, economic stability and self-actualization. The original American Dream takes its roots from those who fled religious persecution and sought a new place to achieve an ancient Christian Dream.⁴³ That history provides both the credibility and expectation to provide the leadership and direction for our country to return to the purity of James Truslow Adams’ American Dream of the early twentieth century.

Scholar Robert Benne observes, “The power of the future and sacrificial dedication are central to Christian faith and the American Dream. They both point to a struggling ascent toward the future that requires sacrificial dedication.”⁴⁴ American Christianity’s role in crafting the next incarnation of the American Dream will become more evident through a detailed review of the historical role Christian religion has played

⁴¹ Benne and Hefner 115.

⁴² Morey-Gaines 51.

⁴³ Fredrick Sontag, “The Religious Origins of the American Dream,” Conference on the Comparative Study of the Chinese Ideal and the American Dream (October, 1978) 92.

⁴⁴ Benne and Hefner 124.

in defining and shaping the American Dream since the discovery of the Americas. It will also be unmistakable that the part Christianity played in shaping the American Dream significantly changed the nature of American Christianity.

The formation of the American Dream idea can be traced to the discovery of the North American continent as the notion of an earthly paradise has served as a fountain of hope and inspiration for humanity. The religious connection to the dream commences with Christianity's quest to Return to Eden, and desire to make amends for the fall of humanity. "Beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the saga provides a picture of humanity free of social and physical constraints. Adam and Eve's misuse of that freedom resulted in the proverbial fall of humanity."⁴⁵ The Apostle Paul further developed the Eden story in his Letter to the Romans. Although Paul directly addressed each of a number of issues, interestingly enough for the ongoing debate about the separation of church and state, he was all the while hammering away at the strict boundaries that must be drawn between those within the religious community and the society outside the community. Paul believed that questions of individual freedom, class conflicts, and the cultural differences dissolve in the overwhelming impact of the reality of the new religious age.⁴⁶ A virgin land could provide an existing civilization with a renewed prospect of withdrawing from their current lifestyle and constraints to begin again and repair the structural debilitating aspects of their society. Many sixteenth century Europeans sought a radical break with their past, and desired to restart civilization.

⁴⁵ Lester R. Kurtz, "Freedom and Domination: The Garden of Eden and the Social Order," Social Forces 58:2 (1979): 445.

⁴⁶ Kurtz 450.

“Not all early, modern, Europeans believed that the earthly paradise – if in fact existed – was located in the New World. But some did. Its location had always been the object of speculation. The author of Mandeville’s Travels located it east of the empire of Prester John and the islands where dog-sized ants busily gathered gold.”⁴⁷ The search for this earthly paradise was not however the objective of the seafaring journeys originated out of Western Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Rather, those were quests seeking the fabled material wealth of the Orient.

Early speculation was the earthly paradise would be located near the equator. The abundant flora and fauna and mild climate of America were reminiscent of the conditions believed to exist in Paradise.⁴⁸ As the early explorers returned, word spread of the bountiful land and innocent inhabitants. “For many Europeans of the time, finding a previously unknown culture without iron technology but nevertheless subsisting on bountiful food supplies must have seemed a re-encounter with Eden or the golden age of antiquity.”⁴⁹ The Eden imagery used to describe the Americas also provided a chance to break with past political institutions and no longer be bound by historical social barriers. There was hope in westward expansion as a place for the creation of a garden utopia. There are several accounts from the explorers, in sixteenth century literature and Elizabethan-era travelogues portraying the possibility of paradise found in the Americas.

Christopher Columbus made several trips to the Americas. On his first visit as his ships approached what is now the West Indies, he reports “the singing of nightingales in

⁴⁷ Michael Householder, “Eden’s Translations: Women and Temptation in Early America,” Huntington Library Quarterly 70/1 (2007): 11.

⁴⁸ Franklin T. McCann, English Discovery of America to 1585 (New York: Octagon Books, 1969) 184.

⁴⁹ Householder 15.

the air and mermaids in the water.”⁵⁰ Columbus believed that he was close to the Earthly Paradise during his third voyage in 1498 while he observed changes in the environment as they approached land. “The air became milder and the waters congested with a kind of vegetation, ‘full of fruit’”⁵¹ There is speculation that his disappointment at failing to produce the commercial riches of the Indies led him to claim a discovery with spiritual significance that outweighed any earthly measure.

English interest in America was minimal during the 1509-1547 reign of Henry the VIII as it became apparent that America did not hold the riches of Asia, but instead was a land of vast proportion through which there was no apparent route to Asia. Attention was directed toward Spanish and Portuguese America where reports of gold, silver and brazilwood were quite tantalizing.⁵² The English explorer Arthur Barlowe, a captain under the direction of Sir Walther Raleigh, presents the idea of a garden as a pervasive theme of his reports back to his benefactor. Barlowe praises coastal Carolina as “some delicate garden abounding with all kinds of odoriferous flowers.”⁵³ Then, upon his arrival in Virginia, Barlowe writes of a garden of incredible abundance, with a superiority of simplicity, and a geography which defines the culture of the Americas.⁵⁴

The raconteur of Columbus’s voyages, Peter Martyr paints a vivid picture of abundance, deficiency of European accouterments, and missing concept of property. He

⁵⁰ Harry Levin, Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1969) 59.

⁵¹ Householder 11.

⁵² McCann 56.

⁵³ Householder 12.

⁵⁴ Leo Marx, Machine in the Garden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) 37.

specifies that his comparisons “evoke a sense of freedom from the trammels of the Old World. He also admires the native inhabitants’ life:

...so that if we shall not bee ashamed to confesse the trueth, they seeme to live in that golden worlde of whiche olde writers speake so much, wherein menne lived simply and innocently without enforcement of laws, without quarrelling, judges and libelles, content onely to satisfie nature, without further vexation for knowledge of things to come.⁵⁵

This description was guided by the growing discontent with many aspects of European civilization during the sixteenth century that manifested through the Reformation, scientific discovery, questioning the prevailing social structure, as well as the transgressions of the Ottoman Empire into European lands.

Professor of Cultural History Leo Marx’s treatise called The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America, utilizes a historical review of American literature to reveal the abrupt appearance of technology in the American landscape. He presents the chronological convergence of science, technology and culture and devotes an entire chapter to the Return to Eden period of the American Dream. He says, “The new continent looked, or so they thought, the way the world might have been supposed to look before the beginning of civilization.”⁵⁶

Marx endeavors to connect Shakespeare’s The Tempest, written few years after the first permanent colony was established in Jamestown in 1607, with the challenges of the Garden of Eden theme of the American Dream. The play considers the dilemma of a civilized European in a remote wilderness as he attempts to reconcile the corruption of his own civilization with the chance for a fresh start. Marx calls it a “dramatic coming

⁵⁵ Levin 61.

⁵⁶ Marx 36.

together of civilization and nature.”⁵⁷ Even though he did not step foot in the Americas, it is widely believed that Shakespeare was well aware of the challenges and opportunities accorded in the New World.⁵⁸

Marx calls The Tempest a prefiguring of the classic American fable that infuses the idea of a redemptive journey away from society toward nature. He also cites the resurgence of the garden theme in Renaissance art, “fashionable tendencies in the arts which helped to popularize the image of a new earthly paradise,” as well as pastoral poetry such as Spenser’s “The Shepard’s Calendar” and Sidney’s “Arcadia” as poignantly emblematic artistic examples of this yearning for a Return to Eden. This chapter of the American Dream then provides humanity with an opportunity metaphorically return to the place where humankind first experienced their fall.

The discovery of the Americas also expedited a change in the themes of sixteenth-century English drama from the morality play to one of aspirational hope. John Rastell presents his view of the universe through Interlude of the Four Elements. He dedicated the most attention to the Americas, of all the regions on earth. A weighty aspect of his work was the concept of America as a place for a condemned man to make a new start. This is consistent with the ideas about returning to paradise to recover from the fall of the original sin.⁵⁹

Historically, utopias have been sought to fulfill the human desire to detach from an existing civilization and return to a primitive state where the social, political and

⁵⁷ Marx 36.

⁵⁸ Marx 35-36.

⁵⁹ McCann 94-97.

economic structure can be rebuilt from the ground up. “Communities with European roots embraced the equalizing demands and freedoms of the New World’s open frontier, even as the new country claimed the pursuit of happiness as an inalienable right. Though their inspirations varied, they all reflected the American dream of a better world, now.”⁶⁰

The English humanist Sir Thomas More published Utopia in 1516. This was the first recorded use of that term. “He imagined a place inspired by discovery of previously unknown hemisphere, opportunity to create a new society that would lead to religious freedom and a communitarian approach toward prosperity.”⁶¹ Humanity now had a captivating expression that described our yearning for perfection as well as a tangible geography. More's Utopia gained additional popularity in Europe as there was now a reachable, but previously unidentified, land mass that fit the spirit of his proposal.

More’s chief aim was to help Englishmen solve their grave social and economic challenges, by showing how the hypothetical Utopians would have handled them.⁶² Because the religious community believed that God directed all human activity, the discovery of the Americas was perceived as a sign in itself that God had finally relented in his punishment of humanity. All that was needed to return to paradise was to undertake a voyage over the open sea. This line of thinking further fueled the providential nature of the American lands. “America, the land of Europe’s futurity provided a fertile soil for the largest number of earnest endeavors to put utopian theory into practice.”⁶³

⁶¹ Marx 44.

⁶² McCann 82.

⁶³ Levin 190.

Clark Wissler further supports the opportunity to experience Utopia or Eden through a new beginning and the option to distance the new culture, from the European legacy in The Development of Anthropology in the United States: “The American continent is widely separated from the land area of the Old World, so that the geographical conditions are in favor of the presumption that in the New World culture developed uninfluenced by causes acting in the Old World.”⁶⁴

The thematic tension of nature and civilization will become an integral component throughout each phase of the American Dream. “The metaphysical rendering of the American experience of the land has been a major influence upon the collective idea of the American people.”⁶⁵ The attempt to create answers to American questions of meaning and purpose turned the Eden story into a paradigm of life in the American wilderness. A liturgical vision of this proposition is specifically defined in Deuteronomy 8:7-9,⁶⁶ and was referenced by early explorers:

⁷For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills;

⁸a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey;

⁹a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper.

The early British colonizers viewed the American landscape as their own asset.

This represented a conflicting class of cultural norms with the native population who viewed the land as air and water, not open for individual or group possession. This contrast presents an additionally prescient apparition of today’s materialistic American

⁶⁴ Ruth S. Freed and Stanley A. Freed, “Clark Wissler and the Development of Anthropology in the United States,” American Anthropologist 85:4 (December 1983): 809.

⁶⁵ Morey-Gaines 25.

⁶⁶ Cullen, Dream 137.

Dream. Possession and consumption of the forbidden apple caused the fall of humanity in the original Eden. There is evidence that the discovery of the Americas was viewed as a chance to Return to Eden and redress the original fall. Land the new world was open to consume with reverence. Yet the desire to possess and ultimately devour American land by these same Europeans was a portent of things to come and represents the tension between Western civilization and nature.

The depiction of America as the destination for the next golden age was used as propaganda as support for colonization since early exploration required political backing, capital investment, and willing immigrants. Here we begin to view early examples of the self-reliant hero. Individual achievement was to become an integral part of the American Dream. “The radical fusion of universalistic individualism by which the individual was freed from the bonds of tradition and family, and the intense social solidarity of the religious community, was a significant cultural development in Western civilization.”⁶⁷ The new Garden would come to become cultivated on the American frontier and the hero was the self-reliant individual, carving a personal niche out of the wilderness. The vastness of American land supported the belief in the supremacy of the rugged individual. If revolution and industrialization were uprooting individuals from corporate structures, the process of immigration produced a level of individualism even more radical.⁶⁸

The exploitation theme also begins in this first phase of the American Dream through the European conquest of the America. Europeans viewed the Americas both as a New World of possibilities and an older world inhabited by primitive peoples whose

⁶⁷ Kurtz 451.

⁶⁸ Kurtz 452-453.

purity inspires initiation and whose simplicity begs domination if not extermination. “In the European imagination, the newly discovered Americas constituted a gendered territory of mystery that required – and even desired – exposure, penetration and possession by European men.”⁶⁹

There was a continued hope in the Earthly Paradise discovery narrative in England as late as 1578. Paradise itself had been closed to mortal man since Adam and Eve were driven out.⁷⁰ Today, some historians stress what the sixteenth century voyager called, incredible abundance as perhaps the most single distinguishing characteristic of American life.⁷¹ Considering the evolution of the American Dream, Eldorado would have been a more germane image than Eden. “No one stays in Eden,” writes James Baldwin, “yet everyone goes back to the ancestral sources in his own fashion, reenacting the myth of our common progenitor Seth, retracing the footsteps of our ultimate parents down a green path to their proscribed abode, yearning for the days when man lived in primordial innocence with the beasts and near to God, close to the tree of life and uncontaminated by the tree of knowledge.”⁷²

Now that we have established that the discovery of North America by sixteenth century European explorers was once portrayed as the Return to Eden, it is evident that first chapter of the American Dream was replete with religiosity. “The American social revolution’s coat of arms bore and bears only one word – Freedom. Not the freedom of a particular religion, precise sect or specific point of view, just freedom. This is the

⁶⁹ Householder 13-14.

⁷⁰ McCann 183.

⁷¹ Morey-Gaines 29.

⁷² Levin 176.

condition in which a man feels like a human being, like himself. It is the purpose, the definition and consequence of rebirth. It is the Dream.”⁷³ These were the words of Eric Sevarid in The American Dream and represent the next thematic phase of the American Dream during the seventeenth century. This is the motivation that brought America’s first wave of immigrants, the Puritans, who defined the next phase of the American Dream, freedom.

Europeans were preoccupied with an assortment of challenges that demanded their attention in early part of the seventeenth century. These included the building of nation-states, continued effects of the religious reformation unbridled by Martin Luther, unprecedented population growth in many nations, rising food prices, increasing economic differentiation of the classes, managing internal strife and the international friction that accompanied the re-centering of the European economy from Italy to northwestern Europe.⁷⁴

The religious pilgrims arrived in a new land to create and live out their ideal life frustrated by the collusive efforts of the European monarchy and papacy. America was just a settlement and little experience in many of these areas. This chapter of the American Dream is best described through the background, journey and early American life of the Puritans. Their dream was “to remake their world on a more spiritually satisfying basis in a place they could call their own.”⁷⁵ They embarked on an Abraham-like journey willing to assume a hazardous trek and risk leaving the mastered world in

⁷³ Benne and Hefner 14.

⁷⁴ Carville Earle, “Pioneers of Providence: The Anglo-American Experience, 1492-1792,” Annals of the Association of American Geographers 82:3 (1992): 479.

⁷⁵ Cullen, Restless 22.

order to find and create the New Jerusalem.⁷⁶ Expectations were high that they would find paradise or Eden, now debunked as a popularized misconception.

The Puritans represented a sect within Protestant Christianity's Church of England during the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries. The group was founded in 1559 after the ascent of Elizabeth I. They believed that even though the Anglican Church did attempt to implement reforms since its break with Catholicism in 1535, those changes were insufficient. They were a coherent product of the Protestant Reformation, as the Bible became increasingly disseminated, so did the emphasis grow of it as the basis of direct spiritual meaning. The absolute ground of religious understanding that the Biblical text represented for the Puritans cannot be understated. The Bible was the Lord's revealed word, and only through it does He directly communicate to human beings. The natural world could be studied to gain a sense of His power.

Second Corinthians provided the Puritans with their greatest source of inspiration. "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord."⁷⁷ It was approximately around the 1560s when the term Puritans began to emerge. They were eager reformers who sought to return the Church to its roots as it was practiced in the time of Christ. This reform included shedding ceremonial excess associated with the Pope, such as vestments, ceremony and the like. The Puritans believed that religious authority was grounded solely in Scripture. By substituting the King of England for the Pope as the head of the church, the Puritans believed that this only repeated an unnecessary, corrupt and idolatrous order.

⁷⁶ Benne and Hefner 3.

⁷⁷ <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~cap/puritan/purhist.html>

They had a chastely religious agenda with little interest in seeking political change. Where moral and theological ideologies were involved, there could be no compromise. In order to establish themselves as the austere interpreters of the Bible free from existing social, cultural and political constraint, they had to physically remove themselves from the reaches of the Anglican Church so they could practice Christianity as they believed it was destined be. This meant departing their homeland. So they sailed across the English Channel in 1608, landing in Holland. Twelve years later, they returned to England to seek the backing of the Virginia Company to sail across the Atlantic Ocean, to practice in freedom and establish a “City on the Hill.” Their grandiose objectives guaranteed by a covenant with God, included the regeneration of England and all Europe by the exemplary light of the Massachusetts.⁷⁸

One hundred and two Pilgrims departed for America in 1619 on the Mayflower. The reasons are suggested by William Bradford when he notes the “discouragements” of the hard life they had in Holland and the hope of attracting others by finding “a better and easier place of living”; the “children” of the group being “drawne away by evill examples into extravagance and dangerous courses”; the “great hope, for the propagating and advancing the gospell of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world.”⁷⁹ They believed in the broader myth of a new Israel, the fall, Adam, Abraham, Moses, an ascent to the Promised Land. They understood that they were elected by God and ordered out of the predictable world into the wilderness where the struggle for a new identity takes place.

⁷⁸ Juhnke 25.

⁷⁹ <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~cap/puritan/purhist.html>

Since they were descendants from Calvinism, the Puritans believed in predestination where an individual's fate is sealed at birth. Nothing could be done to impact salvation or damnation. But because you would not know for sure which path was intended for the individual, you lived life hoping for positive signs.⁸⁰ The canon of predestination provided comfort to the disruption and disarray caused by a wide array of sixteenth century upheavals: the growth of seafaring trade, commercialization of farms, inflation, and unemployment creating a great divide between the rich and poor, great but troubling scientific discoveries, the Protestant revolution, an increase in colonialism and the Ottomans banging on the gates of Vienna.

The power of predestination to reassure and soothe troubled souls arose from its broader goal that God had a plan for all of human history. Every event in human history was toward the ultimate triumph of good versus evil, order over disorder, Christ defeating Satan. The Puritans, taking the lead of their Calvinist forbearers saw history as an unfolding epic production in which every person had a predestined role to play. In the philosophy of predestination, humanity did not have free will. However, they knew their existence and every action would make a difference. Their sufferings and efforts during their predefined life would ultimately produce a future of perfect peace and security. This was the Puritan's heaven on earth. They compared God with "an indulgent landlord ready to forgive lapses on the rent - but not a cavalier attitude - from his spiritually impoverished tenants."⁸¹ Hard work was viewed as a penance to God. The comfortable confidence brought forth through the belief in predestination might have created a culture

⁸⁰ Cullen, Dream 18-27.

⁸¹ Cullen, Dream 19.

of apathy or anguish. On the contrary, it appears to have engendered Puritan ethics, discipline and a reputation for hard work.

As a support mechanism for predestination, the Puritans developed the doctrine of preparationism, which held that although individuals could not earn grace, they could prepare for it. Yearning for grace and virtuous actions provided hope that grace might come. Preparationism gave people something to do instead of sitting around paralyzed by fear or despondency. It also exercised a kind of social control by encouraging behaviors Puritans valued. Preparatory grace is a model that became part of the theology of the Puritans. Through predestination the Puritans asserted that humanity is unable to contribute anything to its salvation. Some English theologians began to propose that the sinner might find a way to dispose himself for saving grace. This meant that sinners could prepare themselves for the grace of regeneration by a serious consideration of their sins in the light of God's law. Through careful self-examination, the sinner would be able to rise to loathe their own sinfulness, desire mercy and attend the preaching of the gospel. Then they could be in the position of being a likely candidate for the new birth. The Puritans who promoted these views contended that is how God prepares the sinner. They did not wish to suggest that man can do this alone and unaided by the Spirit. "They also taught that preparatory grace was often more present in ne'er-do-wells so that preparation for regeneration did not necessarily lead to salvation in the end."⁸²

The importance of literacy for the masses grew, creating a new dawn of religious authority and individual enlightenment. Direct knowledge of scripture and divinity was essential for individual Puritans, requiring an obdurate importance placed on education as

⁸² Cullen, Dream 20.

the Puritans entered New England, contributing to the establishment of Harvard College. The entire community was willing to provide support for the founding of this larger-than-life institution. “Even the poor yeoman farmers ‘contributed their pecks of wheat’ for the continued promise of a “literate ministry.”⁸³ The Puritan leaders sought to both reinforce its ministry and to improve education among the congregation to ensure that righteous ideas and messages were held and expressed by a comprehending audience. “This desire for self-improvement and embrace of education led Colonial New England having one of the highest literacy rates in the world at that time.”⁸⁴

The Mayflower Compact was one of the earliest documents of governance in North America, originally signed November, 11, 1620 to bind together the members of the Plymouth Bay, Massachusetts colony. The Mayflower was initially destined for New York through a land grant in a patent from the English Crown. A decision was made to continue farther north to what is today the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. “This inspired some of the colonists who were not members of the congregation to proclaim that since the settlement would not be made in the agreed-upon Virginia territory, they would use their own liberty; for none had power to command them.”⁸⁵ To prevent this, many of the other colonists decided to establish a government and used the Mayflower Compact as their foundation. The forty-one signers agreed to connect their society in order to preserve order and to help further their original goals of the Puritans. They created offices, laws, and a constitution to support the common good. This is a

⁸³ Cullen, Restless 27.

⁸⁴ Cullen, Restless 27.

⁸⁵ William Bradford, "Book 2, Anno 1620," In Hildebrandt, Ted (PDF). Bradford's History "Of Plimoth Plantation" (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1898) 4.

characteristic incarnation of the Lockean government that would ultimately become embodied in the American Constitution.

In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwriten, by the loyall subjects of our dread soveraigne Lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britaine, Franc, and Ireland king, defender of the faith, etc.

Haveing undertaken, for the glorie of God, and advancemente of the Christian faith, and honour of our king and countrie, a voyage to plant the first colonie in the Northerne parts of Virginia, doe by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine our selves together into a civil body politick, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by vertue hereof to enacte, constitute and frame shuch just and equall lawes, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meete and convenient for the generall good of the Colonie, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witnes whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cap-Codd the .11. of November, in the year of the raigne of our soveraigne lord, King James, of England, France, and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fiftie-fourth. Anno Dom. 1620⁸⁶

“The Compact was created to maintain social and civic unity and to ensure that elected officials would have some legitimation against challenges to its legal authority.”⁸⁷ This guiding document for the Puritans defined the collective approach as working together, mutually to building their great society. It also indicated that pursuit of general good was an integral aspect of advancing the Christian faith.

John Winthrop’s formative 1630 sermon “A Model of Christian Charity” provides additional insight to the Puritans’ contribution to American culture and the American Dream. While sailing with the Massachusetts Puritans on the Arbella, Winthrop attempted to prepare the people for planting a new society in an unknown wilderness. In this sermon, which was believed to be a forerunner to the concept of American exceptionalism, there are several important messages that have become part of the

⁸⁶ <http://www.usconstitution.net/mayflower.html>

⁸⁷ <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~cap/puritan/purhist.html>

American Dream journey. In his opening salvo, Winthrop makes it clear that society needs to be delineated:

GOD ALMIGHTY in His most holy and wise providence, hath so disposed of the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in submission.⁸⁸

At the same time there is purpose in this delineation, as dictated through Winthrop's three rationales:

1st Reason. First to hold conformity with the rest of His world, being delighted to show forth the glory of his wisdom in the variety and difference of the creatures, and the glory of His power in ordering all these differences for the preservation and good of the whole, and the glory of His greatness, that as it is the glory of princes to have many officers, so this great king will have many stewards, counting himself more honored in dispensing his gifts to man by man, than if he did it by his own immediate hands.

2nd Reason. Secondly, that He might have the more occasion to manifest the work of his Spirit: first upon the wicked in moderating and restraining them, so that the rich and mighty should not eat up the poor, nor the poor and despised rise up against and shake off their yoke. Secondly, in the regenerate, in exercising His graces in them, as in the great ones, their love, mercy, gentleness, temperance etc., and in the poor and inferior sort, their faith, patience, obedience etc.

3rd Reason. Thirdly, that every man might have need of others, and from hence they might be all knit more nearly together in the bonds of brotherly affection. From hence it appears plainly that no man is made more honorable than another or more wealthy etc., out of any particular and singular respect to himself, but for the glory of his Creator and the common good of the creature, man. Therefore God still reserves the property of these gifts to Himself as Ezek. 16:17, He there calls wealth, His gold and His silver, and Prov. 3:9, He claims their service as His due, "Honor the Lord with thy riches," etc. --- All men being thus (by divine providence) ranked into two sorts, rich and poor; under the first are comprehended all such as are able to live comfortably by their own means duly improved; and all others are poor according to the former distribution.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html>

⁸⁹ <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html>

Embedded within these explanations for a demarcated society are poignant urgings about the greater good, the rich not taking advantage of the poor, supporting each other, brotherly love, and the glory of God as motivations for human behavior. These are a snapshot of the Puritans' guiding principles. Winthrop continues with his own twin towers of rules for them to live by in the New World that would ensure the grander vision of the New Jerusalem:

There are two rules whereby we are to walk one towards another: Justice and Mercy. These are always distinguished in their act and in their object, yet may they both concur in the same subject in each respect; as sometimes there may be an occasion of showing mercy to a rich man in some sudden danger or distress, and also doing of mere justice to a poor man in regard of some particular contract, etc.⁹⁰

He further reinforces the theme of mutuality and helping other pull themselves up from the bootstraps:

By the first of these laws, man as he was enabled so withal is commanded to love his neighbor as himself. Upon this ground stands all the precepts of the moral law, which concerns our dealings with men. To apply this to the works of mercy, this law requires two things. First, that every man afford his help to another in every want or distress.

Secondly, that he perform this out of the same affection which makes him careful of his own goods, according to the words of our Savior (from Matthew 7:12), whatsoever ye would that men should do to you.⁹¹

Near the conclusion he, also states support for the public good over private interests:

It is by a mutual consent, through a special overvaluing providence and a more than an ordinary approbation of the churches of Christ, to seek out a place of cohabitation and consortship under a due form of government both civil and

⁹⁰ <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html>

⁹¹ <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html>

ecclesiastical. In such cases as this, the care of the public must overweigh all private respects, by which, not only conscience, but mere civil policy, doth bind us. For it is a true rule that particular estates cannot subsist in the ruin of the public.⁹²

Winthrop extols the importance of sacrifice for those in the community:

This law of the Gospel propounds likewise a difference of seasons and occasions. There is a time when a Christian must sell all and give to the poor, as they did in the Apostles' times. There is a time also when Christians (though they give not all yet) must give beyond their ability, as they of Macedonia (2 Cor. 8). Likewise, community of perils calls for extraordinary liberality, and so doth community in some special service for the church.

Lastly, when there is no other means whereby our Christian brother may be relieved in his distress, we must help him beyond our ability rather than tempt God in putting him upon help by miraculous or extraordinary means.

If thy brother be in want and thou canst help him, thou needst not make doubt of what thou shouldst do; if thou lovest God thou must help him.⁹³

There is a glimpse of the acceptance of usury, previously prohibited in the Bible:

This duty of mercy is exercised in the kinds: giving, lending and forgiving (*of a debt*).⁹⁴

However, when he was asked for rules for lending money, Winthrop tasked the lender, not the borrower, with the responsibility for prudence. Had twenty-first century mortgage brokers heeded this advice, perhaps the Great Recession would not have occurred:

Thou must observe whether thy brother hath present or probable or possible means of repaying thee, if there be none of those, thou must give him according to his necessity, rather than lend him as he requires (*requests*).⁹⁵

He does support the biblical exhortation for debt forgiveness:

⁹² <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html>

⁹³ <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html>

⁹⁴ <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html>

⁹⁵ <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html>

Whether thou didst lend by way of commerce or in mercy, if he hath nothing to pay thee, thou must forgive, (except in cause where thou hast a surety or a lawful pledge). Deut. 15:1-2 --- Every seventh year the creditor was to quit that which he lent to his brother if he were poor, as appears in verse 4. "Save when there shall be no poor with thee." In all these and like cases, Christ gives a general rule (Matt. 7:12), "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye the same to them."⁹⁶

Finally, Winthrop encapsulates the essentialness of togetherness, of a collective approach for the establishment of a City on the Hill:

Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, "may the Lord make it like that of New England." For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.⁹⁷

The earliest Puritan dreams living out a fully Christian life were intended to establish a model social order as an inspiration for others by working together toward this common goal. They settled America in a time of social utopias so that the Christian ideal

⁹⁶ <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html>

⁹⁷ <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html>

was no longer monastic. The dreams of pilgrim communities as they sailed for the new wilderness were not necessarily the pure words of Jesus, but blended those teachings with a humanistic consciousness that a new civilization could be built on a religious model. It is evident from Winthrop's full sermon that the new society could not be built unless the religion controlled the political and economic structure of the idyllic community.⁹⁸

American Dream historian Jim Cullen described the Puritans as arrogant, hypocritical murderers who attempted to convert or destroy the native culture. Paradoxically he commended their "City on the Hill" motif, as an effort to make the world a better place through their "capacity for ideas, conceptions of community and morality, and success in pairing both intellectual and emotional life engagements."⁹⁹ Cullen perceived Puritan individualism as the root of the American spirit of individualism. His evidence included the status of a visible saint, preoccupation with objective measurements for saving faith, a perfectionist American soul and widespread self-absorption.¹⁰⁰

Individualism through greater personal awareness of the Lord's message was inherent in Puritan behavior. It led to a dispersion of authority that the monarchy feared and became the foundation of the American and subsequent democratic movements. The roots of the individual American Dream were sowed early in the American journey. This was contradictory to the collective approach articulated by Winthrop. The Puritans' experience of the Anne Hutchinson-led rebellion, whose group sought to allow every

⁹⁸ Sontag 92.

⁹⁹ Cullen, Dream 33.

¹⁰⁰ Cullen, Dream 33.

person direct access to God, was a further example of the dangerous individualism that threatened the foundation of their entire social order. The followers of Hutchinson were fired up by an anti-intellectualism fed by the Puritan contention that regenerate men were illuminated with divine truth that was in turn taken to indicate the irrelevance of scholarship and study of the Bible. The individualistic tendencies were embedded in the Pilgrim communities of the Puritans.¹⁰¹

Alexis de Tocqueville also noted the Puritan source of American individualism in volume II of Democracy in America. “The anti-traditionalism and de-ritualization of collective society that he named “Individualisme” had their sources in Puritan culture.” This Puritan individualism had survived especially in the habit of judging others by their characters of mind and will, rather than rank, sex, or race.”¹⁰² In Puritan Origins of the American Self by Sacvan Bercovitch, he concludes that the Puritan concept of “self” produced an unintended narcissism that paved the way for later versions of American individualism. He also purports that Puritan ideas about self and sainthood created the emphasis upon manifest and national destiny. Finally, Bercovitch states the Puritan saint was secularized without losing the intensity of high religious motive that originally defined the self.¹⁰³ Some scholars have identified the enormous scale of America — with its expansive frontier and wilderness — as the root of the American Dream evolving from establishing a great society or the New Jerusalem to one focused on the acquisition of material wealth.

¹⁰¹ J.I. Packer, Quest for Godliness. The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990) 36.

¹⁰² Cullen, Dream 69, 71.

¹⁰³ Packer 38.

The Puritans expected a garden, abundant with material and spiritual blessings of God, but instead found a wilderness that needed to be tamed and developed. There has always been an intimate connection between the American identity and involvement in the land. The first settlers endowed the American Dream with a religiously inspired admiration for the land. Land symbolizes the potential for freedom and creative expression, both key components in the advance of American destiny. The trials of the wild reinforced the Puritan belief that they were chosen by God to find the New Jerusalem. The wilderness was a trial to strengthen their destiny and chastise the wayward. P.N. Carroll in Puritanism and the Wilderness identified three variations of the Puritan view. First, that it was a sanctuary from England, the land of religious decadence. Second, that it was a garden paradise, transformed by the efforts of God's people. Finally, it would involve the building of an enclosed garden to create an island of paradise and a fortress of defiant purity. He believes their view evolved from a sanctuary to a fortress to serve as a reproach to prevailing European civilization.¹⁰⁴

In 1620 Jamestown, Virginia had established the common citizen's right to own private property, the principle of common law, civilian control of the military, elected and representative legislature, a free enterprise system, English as the common language and the American can-do spirit. "The founding of Jamestowne...was the seminal incident that introduced the opportunities for the economic and political innovations and enterprise that became our American Dream."¹⁰⁵ This was accomplished by both the original, educated religious elite, as well as the poor, uneducated young men fleeing

¹⁰⁴ Morey-Gaines 29.

¹⁰⁵ James H. McCall, "The American Dream Begins," Washington Times, 23 May, 2007: B03.

desperate societal conditions of the streets of London willing to risk affliction, famine and strife in the New World to get relief from rigid class systems, economic deprivation and dislocation.

The Puritan colonies of New England and Virginia played a fundamental role in shaping the American Dream. Theirs began as a journey for religious freedom. The necessity to survive by building a civilization from the ground up with only the most basic tools developed the distinctive component of American culture, a persistent striving for freedom to do better ourselves with property, innovation and enterprise. It was this requirement to subsist that began the steady decline of the early American Dream from a Return to Eden to one of Manifest Destiny. “Less so with historians than popularizes of the Puritan mythos, the evocation of a ‘golden age’ comes to dominate the sense of Puritan tradition. Bercovitch indicates that this at the heart of explaining America, with all its promise as a New World, with its idea of Manifest Destiny, with the kind of self-idealization of National Purpose that Henry Nash Smith describes in Virgin Land.”¹⁰⁶

James Truslow Adams describes the impact of the seventeenth century on the American Dream. “America was not to be merely an old Europe in a cruder and less finished setting. Something new had come into being, the belief that something fine and moral, something higher than the world had ever seen, would be harvested from plowing up in earnest the interminable average fallows of humanity.”¹⁰⁷ There was hope and belief across Europe that America was the place for the common man to become uncommon. The Puritans came to North America to practice the wholesome, unpolluted

¹⁰⁶ Packer 64.

¹⁰⁷ Adams 326.

version of Christianity where the group took great precedence over the individual and each and every member of society was cared for by the faith. Cracks in the dream began to appear in the seventeenth century and thus the drift to an individual, materialistic and debt-ridden version begins.

The quest for freedom was different for America's founding fathers than for the Puritans. The eighteenth century American Dream motif evolved from freedom to independence, which became the unequivocal theme that culminated in the founding of the American nation and creation of the most comprehensive provision of independent individual civil liberties in the world, the Bill of Rights, or the first ten amendments to the federal Constitution. The causes of and events culminating in the Declaration of Independence and American Revolution are a recognized and familiar part of the American culture. "Religion affected the American Revolution, but religion did not cause the Revolution."¹⁰⁸ It did however play an important role in attempting to return the honorable Puritan Dream for America back to its original intent. The First Great Awakening was a religious reaction to the wandering dream and played a supporting role for the American independence movement.

By 1776, British America was unified by the English language and Protestant religion. Americans were the most lightly governed people on earth. The desire of the eighteenth century colonists was to prevent the English from taking too much control. The founding fathers defined freedom in terms of its opposite, slavery which was how they felt treated by their British rulers.¹⁰⁹ The increasing interference, pressure and

¹⁰⁸ Jon Butler, Religion in American life: a Short History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 143.

¹⁰⁹ Cullen, Dream 41.

exploitation by the English monarchy led to the next chapter of the American Dream, the transition from freedom to independence.

Author Jon Altermann, writing in a twenty-first century foreign policy journal provides a vivid description the eighteenth century America that led to the First Great Awakening:

Imagine a rapidly growing city with young people from the countryside, looking for work and shirking the strict codes of their rural communities. Imagine them crowding into uniformly poor urban quarter, as the wealthy fell downtown for newly created housing in new developments. Imagine as well, a growing piety taking root. Religious charities spring up, and religious networks provide economic capital to young strivers. Alcohol stocks are destroyed as liquor emerges as a symbol of moral decay. The young leaders in the community are notably pious, especially compared to their elders, and they seek to connect their piety with a notion of being civilized. Most dramatically there is a surge in personal proselytization, especially among women, as one by one family members become more engaged in a life of faith and observance. Religious politics do not follow far behind, as the newly faithful seek to make their votes align with their faith, and politicians embrace religious language, imagery and outward piety.¹¹⁰

The Great Awakening has appeared to historians as an important intervention for kindling a new religious spirit in the colonies, providing a unifying force that transcended provincialism of ever-expanding colonial life, inspired the American Revolution and provided further discernment of religion's growing role in crafting the American Dream. "Indeed, the ultimate impact of the revival was the disintegration of the Calvinist religion and its domination of all aspects of the political, social and religious life in New England."¹¹¹ The Great Awakening was a revolt from the middle to establish order and meaning in a rapidly changing society as a reaction to the drifting American Dream.

¹¹⁰ Jon B. Altermann, "The Great Awakening," *Jordan Journal of International Affairs* 1:1 (Summer, 2007): 38.

¹¹¹ Robert D. Rosell, "The Great Awakening: An Historical Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology* 75:6 (1970): 911.

The first half of the eighteenth century formed a period in which wars, international and civil, were numerous, and were nearly all based upon religious differences. Men also sought freedom for the exercise of their own beliefs by emigration from one European country to another or from Europe itself to the New World. Religion played a vital part in human affairs and in which religious convictions were often the ruling force in the shaping of men's lives.¹¹² By 1700, the population of the British colonies on the Eastern seaboard numbered more than 250,000 and by the time of the American Revolution that had grown more than ten-fold to 2,750,000.¹¹³

“The Puritans’ glory was their theocratic errand into the wilderness. The designs of the errand may have been in Winthrop’s terms to improve their lives to do more service to the Lord, to increase the body of Christ and to preserve their posterity from the corruptions of this evil world.”¹¹⁴ The reality of the wilderness is that they had to clear rocky pastures, build homes and towns and ensure a food supply. This in turn led to a growth of commercial enterprise in the new colonies. Much of the growth was channeled into unbounded frontier expansion. The rapid pace of growth — demographic, economic and frontier — soon exceeded the capacities of immature provincial administration.¹¹⁵ They tried to dampen the pace of expansion by artificially raising land prices and facilitating the establishment of towns and cities. The governing class began to take an active role in the development of the economy. “Indeed, for many years such medieval

¹¹² Leonard Labree, “The Conservative Attitude Toward the Great Awakening,” The William and Mary Quarterly 1:4 (1944): 332.

¹¹³ Earle 478.

¹¹⁴ Cullen, Dream 23.

¹¹⁵ Earle 485.

practices as fixing just prices, preventing usury, and prescribing wearing apparel according to social status were perpetuated by the spiritual and governing elite.”¹¹⁶

The Puritans did not aspire to attain great wealth or material goods. Preachers and magistrates became less influential and merchants and businessmen grew theirs. “God Almighty in his most holy and wise providence hath so disposed of the Condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich.”¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, along the new continent’s eastern seaboard, economic growth climbed sharply as their ventures became more attuned with the reality of the North American environs. Virginia switched to tobacco, which they grew in the streets of Jamestown. New England converted from grains to foreland trade and commerce. In the North, there was a split personality of self-sufficient Puritan interior and the commercial Yankee coast. Charleston developed rice plantations using indentured and subsequently slave labor. Philadelphia and New York City developed as commercial centers. During that century, rural Puritans were still attempting to cultivate souls, while their urban brethren focused their energies on the development of markets for dependable sources of shipping, commercial services and providing molasses for rum production in the Caribbean.¹¹⁸

The prospect of moving up for Europeans in the Americas became known to the apprentices, indentured servants, and urchins from the streets of London. Manifestation of spiritual deadness, materialistic greed, shameless pleasure seeking and religious diversions plagued the colony decade after decade.¹¹⁹ The Great Awakening was a

¹¹⁶ Rosell 912.

¹¹⁷ John B. Judis, “The Great Awakening,” *The New Republic* 208:5 (1993): 41.

¹¹⁸ Earle 486.

¹¹⁹ Juhnke 25.

religious renaissance that flourished in the American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s leaving a perpetual impact on American religion and continuing to inform the American Dream. It was heavily influenced by a few moving preachers who could convince vast audiences of their need of salvation by Christ. “After years of comparative calm, a revival took place which aroused thousands from a state of religious lethargy and self-complacency and led them to a new, more intense, more emotional religious experience than they had ever known before.”¹²⁰

This movement was a mechanism for social change in Puritan New England. Prior to revival, there were strains in American religion, as the incongruence between the dominant religious-political order and the emerging, differentiated economic and social substructure increased. Their attempts to maintain a religious-political order with the material conditions of colonial frontier environment were being severely tested. This revival was to pave the way for a new moral and social order in keeping with burgeoning material conditions.¹²¹ “During the 1720s, the Dutch Reformed Church of New York began to respond to the appeal of an ardent young preacher, Theodore Frelinghuysen, who summoned his people to a deeper spiritual experience.”¹²²

Jonathan Edwards and Clayton Chauncy were chief spokesmen for the two wings into which the New England Way divided during the fateful 1740s.¹²³ Edwards, after studying the philosophy of John Locke, was content to surrender the political covenant to

¹²⁰ Labree 331.

¹²¹ Rosell 911.

¹²² Labree 333.

¹²³ Perry Miller, “Jonathan Edwards’ Sociology of the Great Awakening,” The New England Quarterly 21:1 (1948): 50.

nature and reason, so that it no longer was relevant to theology. “On July 7, 1731, Edwards preached in Boston the “Public Lecture,” afterward published under the title ‘God Glorified — in Man’s Dependence.’ The emphasis of this lecture was God’s utter sovereignty in the work of salvation: that while it behooved God to create man pure and without sin, it was of his “good pleasure” and “mere and arbitrary grace” for him to grant any person the faith necessary to incline him or her toward holiness; and that God might deny this grace without any disparagement to any of his character.”¹²⁴ His sermons encapsulate the task at hand for the resurrection of religious focus:

We ought wholly to subordinate all our other business, and all temporal enjoyments to this affair of travelling to heaven. Journeying toward heaven ought to be our only work and business, so that all we have to do, should be in order to do that. When we have worldly enjoyments and possessions, it should be with such a view and in such manner as to further us in our way heavenward. Thus we should eat, and drink and clothe ourselves. And thus we should improve the conversation and enjoyment of friends.¹²⁵

Edwards castigated the prevailing business practices of New England:

He who gets his neighbors money by falsely commanding what he hath to sell, above what he knows to be the true quality of it

Those who use some advantages which they have over their neighbor in their dealings with him to constrain him to yield to their gaining unreasonably of him¹²⁶

Rebuked colonial culture:

The prodigious prevalence of infidelity and heresy in this nation at this day

This is why deism and heresies have made inroads

They threaten to swallow up the nation and root out Christianity

¹²⁴ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Edwards_\(theologian\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Edwards_(theologian))

¹²⁵ Miller 52.

¹²⁶ Miller 55.

Very common thing for Christ to be openly blasphemed and mocked and scoffed and laughed at in the streets of the nation¹²⁷

Addressing the youth's opportunity to use their remaining wisely:

Let the time past of your life suffice that you have served your lusts, and served Satan. Now give up all the remaining part of your life to an earnest striving in religion. Do not think now for a little while to be serious and religious, and by and by to turn again to frolicking and vain mirth.¹²⁸

Then, speaking to the middle-aged of the population, he points out impact of worldly affairs preventing development of the soul:

Do not you find now that you are much more encumbered with the business and concerns of the world than when you were young, your heart more and more charged with those things, and less and less at liberty, and less and less disposed to mind the affairs of your soul?¹²⁹

If you have more land than some of your neighbors, a larger stock, and more comfortable and plentiful accommodations, yet none of those things can make you another than a miserable creature if you are not of Christ

When you look upon your buildings, your cattle, your stores that you have laid up, you may consider that brimstone is scattered upon them all

Men are apt to rely much on their worldly possessions and advantages, and to be much pleased to be themselves so much higher in the world than others, and to be greatly taken with it that they have so much more than they... Men's worldly possessions and worldly honor with which they are so taken very commonly prove their undoing; setting their hearts so much upon them occasions them to neglect God, and so they have their portion in this life, and when they have enjoyed all that comfort that they have to enjoy in those things, they have ruined their souls' salvation, there remains nothing else for them.¹³⁰

Edwards explains how it is easier for men to be swayed toward secular life:

¹²⁷ Miller 55.

¹²⁸ Miller 56.

¹²⁹ Miller 56.

¹³⁰ Miller 58.

Also the circumstances of the affairs and business of the males sex does in some respects expose them to many more temptations than those of the female. Their business leads them more into the world, to be concerned abroad with more persons and to be concerned extensively with the affairs and business of the world, when they have more worldly objects in their view to tempt them.¹³¹

He also reminds women that since it was their gender's fault humanity fell, their sex has a subordinated role to play in society:

Though in the fall of man, the female sex falls under peculiar dishonor in that woman first eat of the forbidden fruit and tempted the man, yet this sex has peculiar honour in the affair of the redemption of the second

Through their weakness they are in some respects more easily prevailed upon by the temptations of the devil

Your adorning shall not be that outward adorning of the wearing of gold and putting on fine and rich apparel, but is shall be the ornamentation of a meek and quiet spirit that is in the sight of God of great price.¹³²

The most active phase of the Great Awakening from 1739 began with George Whitefield's American evangelistic journeys in New Haven, Connecticut. The success of the Northampton revival under Edwards' leadership spread to England. This caused Edwards to be sought out by George Whitefield who was traveling the on a revival tour in New England. The men may not have agreed on every aspect of the revival movement, but they were both passionate about preaching the Gospel, and returning society to what the Puritans had attempted to establish. Together they organized Whitefield's trip through Boston and then on to Northampton. Whitefield preached at Edwards' church in Northampton and reminded the congregation of the revival they had experienced just a few years before. This touched Edwards and caused him to weep throughout the service. The revival began to spring up again, and it was at this time that Edwards preached his

¹³¹ Miller 59.

¹³² Miller 60.

most famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” in Enfield, Connecticut in 1741.¹³³

There was an impressive public response to his revivals by preaching first to a sense of sin and then after a period of despair and searching to a realization of God’s grace and an experience of spiritual rebirth.¹³⁴ To the evangelical imperatives of Reformation Protestantism, eighteenth century American Christians added emphases on divine outpourings of the Holy Spirit and conversions that implanted within new believers an intense love for God. Revivals encapsulated those hallmarks and forwarded the newly created evangelicalism into the early republic.

The movement met with opposition from conservative Congregationalist ministers. The charges of the conservatives against the Great Awakening were broad. Conservatives believed that the stated creed and doctrine ignored the fundamental tenants of the faith. “The itinerant evangelism of the new ministries caused preachers to travel to other locales, forgetting their own flocks and interfering with other congregations. These new evangelists assumed themselves to be the prerogatives of God by judging and condemning others.”¹³⁵ Most were untrained with no formal biblical education and thus a low attainment of biblical knowledge. The increase in extempore and lay-preaching created to potential for distracted laity who would neglect their secular responsibilities. There was also concern about the higher degree of emotionalism that depended too much

¹³³ George M. Marsden. Jonathan Edwards: A Life (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) 211.

¹³⁴ Labree 334.

¹³⁵ Miller 52.

on the appeal to emotion.¹³⁶ There was a need to protect the church from the fatal consequences of ministerial ignorance.

By 1740 flagrant sights of emotional religion were observed in Boston as an uprising of the common people who declared that what Harvard and Yale graduates were teaching was too academic. Historian Perry Miller sets the Great Awakening against a background of church polity, political factors such as the imposition of a royal governor in 1691 and increasing governmental intervention in economic policy. The Great Awakening marked the end of European ideas of authority. This was to have enduring implications on American society through its rejection of the European notion of society. The spirit of American democracy was awakened. American independence was born of the new light imparted to the American mind by the Awakening and the evangelical clergy of colonial America.

Some historians view events of the early eighteenth century as a prelude to the American Revolution. They saw the stirrings of democracy and independence in the Great Awakening. The events of the 1730s and 1740s are referred to as a revival, which includes a return to the past and a resurrection of religion. The Great Awakening could have been the last shudder of a Puritanism that refused to see itself as an anachronism and as boundary redefinition arising from the increasing incompatibility of capitalism with the Great Society. There was increased diversity and individualism that would require greater religious freedom and tolerance. Individual action became increasingly bound with the notion of an ideal society and the role of the individual in defining and creating the perfect New World.

¹³⁶ Labree 338.

The New England Puritan theocracy attempted to maintain its medieval conception of authority and was obstinate in their solidarity. The geographic isolation of America combined with the struggles to survive initially enabled this authority to function. The original Calvinist, now Puritan, work ethic spurred the challenges of building a civilization from a blank slate to be met and exceeded. New England and Virginia both developed viable commercial economies built upon the abundant free natural resources and surplus productivity. This rendered the theocratic system unviable as capitalism's allure trumped the liturgical purpose of the Puritan settlement. The Great Awakening was a direct response to "destroy the old order, thus making it possible for a sectarian and denominational pattern more commensurate with democratic pluralism to emerge."¹³⁷ Psychologically, the Great Awakening is a manifestation of the integrative needs of isolated and confused individuals who have turned their thoughts back to the dreadful God of their forefathers in a desperate search for new direction in life.

Benjamin Franklin's fall from Puritanism was a precursor to the secularization of the American Dream.¹³⁸ Franklin was born 1706 in Boston. Early in his career, he apprenticed with his brother James learning the printing trade. He wrote columns under the name Silence Dogwood. Franklin articulated a more self-serving spiritual vision than the Puritans, for whom works were more important than faith. "He was the patron saint of doing well by doing good."¹³⁹ Franklin's American Dream was trust in the basic

¹³⁷ Rosell 921.

¹³⁸ Cullen, Restless 35.

¹³⁹ Cullen, Dream 63.

decency of human beings, belief that earthly and heavenly rewards are broadly consonant and a serene confidence that birth status can be overcome.

This evangelical movement played a crucial part in the growth of democratic concepts during the period of the American Revolution. “The Enlightenment imparted an ideal of republican government based on hierarchical social orders of king, aristocracy, and commoners. It was widely believed by secular Enlightenment writers that English liberties relied on the balance of power divided between king, elite, and commoners, and that social stability required hierarchical deference to the privileged class.”¹⁴⁰ Puritanism and the rampant evangelism of the mid-eighteenth century challenged historical notions of social stratification through their Biblical interpretation that all men are equal, that the true value of a man lies in his moral behavior and that all men can be saved. The evangelical revivalists were the greatest advocates of religious freedom. The greatest weapon in the preservation of the American Dream was political religion.¹⁴¹ This was codified in the Declaration of Independence through the often repeated phrase, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” now the anchoring rallying-cry for American independence. Contemporary advertising invokes this catchphrase on a frequent basis.¹⁴²

By the end of the Revolutionary War, the city of New York was virtually destroyed. Philadelphia and Boston had emerged from the Revolution largely intact.

New York, by contrast, lay in ruins; its economy shattered, its leadership depleted; its population scattered and demoralized. And yet somehow, in the next century or less, the devastated colonial trading post would arise from the ashes of the American Revolution to become the most important metropolis in the Western

¹⁴⁰ Cullen, Dream 44.

¹⁴¹ Cullen, Restless 87.

¹⁴² Cullen, Dream 39.

Hemisphere — on its way to becoming the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth... And what is that dream — the dream of New York? It is nothing less than the American dream — the restless dream of capitalism and democracy, of opportunity and possibility, or transformation and rising — a dream that to a remarkable degree was born on the banks of the Hudson, 400 years ago, years before America itself began.¹⁴³

The eighteenth century Great Awakening represented a gallant attempt to return to the earliest Puritan dream of recreating the “City on the Hill” in this pristine land. The Return to Eden for Western civilization appeared increasingly elusive. Freedom and independence had been achieved and infused into American law and culture. But the collective approach to a society that cared for all its members by living well and right with each other was becoming increasingly a competition for pieces of a pie that could not sustain its rate of growth for perpetuity. Individualism with a secular, material focus, funded by borrowing was becoming a powerful thread for the new nation. The momentum of the dream to earn and acquire plowed the fertile frontier and helped define the next chapter of the American Dream: opportunity.

The borders of the United States would eventually stretch from coast to coast including the acquisition of Alaskan territories. Westward migration and development of the frontier, waves of immigrants arriving on the Pacific and Atlantic shores from Asian and European sources and the growth of small business and commercialized agriculture, reflect unparalleled opportunity in nineteenth century America. Jim Cullen described this period of American history as “the acceleration of industrial capitalism, application of survival of the fittest, freedom to dominate, and freedom from regulation.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ William R. Wineke, “The American Dream,” Wisconsin State Journal 23 Sep. 2001: F3.

¹⁴⁴ Cullen, Dream 107.

The founding fathers understood that their vision of a free and prosperous society required rules of the road for the fresh nation. This began with the carefully crafted Constitution and Bill of Rights. Individuals were enabled through these rights to be responsible for their own moral development and economic opportunities. “

They were to prepare themselves, through education and preparation for a job or career, to be useful members of their society. Then they were expected to work hard, save, invest, persevere, and with a little luck, to succeed and perhaps to prosper. But no matter how well they prepared, how hard they were willing to work, society and the economy had to be well organized and vibrant enough to provide the opportunities over which they might compete.¹⁴⁵

Many of these individuals were immigrants, single men, and young boys, or entire families fleeing famine, natural disaster, and hierarchal persecution to begin a new life in the land of opportunity, where your position at birth could be dramatically uplifted. “In the 1820s, some 140,000 immigrants, almost all European streamed into the young republic. In the 1830s that number rose to 600,000; in the 1840s, 1.7 million; and in the 1850s, 2.6 million.¹⁴⁶ An immigrant from Germany in 1858 states:

The German emigrant comes into a country free from the despotism, privileged orders and monopolies, intolerable taxes, and constraints in matters of belief and conscience. Everyone can travel and settle wherever he pleases. No passport is demanded, no police mingles in his affairs or hinders his movements....Fidelity and merit are the only sources of honor here. The rich stand on the same footing as the poor; the scholar is not a mug above the most humble mechanics; no German ought to be ashamed to pursue any occupation....[In America] wealth and possession of real estate confer not the least political right on its owner above what the poorest citizen has. Nor are there nobility, privileged orders, or standing armies to weaken the physical and moral power of the people, nor are there swarms of public functionaries to devour in idleness credit for. Above all, there are no princes and corrupt courts representing the so-called divine 'right of birth.'

¹⁴⁵ Cal Jillson, Pursuing the American Dream (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2004) 289.

¹⁴⁶ Butler 263.

In such a country the *talents, energy and perseverance* of a person...have far greater opportunity to display than in monarchies.¹⁴⁷

The themes we have been tracing from the Puritan times - individualism, materialism, and utilization of debt to buy the dream - all gain noteworthy strength during the nineteenth century. There was more of a clear sense and destiny for the individual and the nation. American Dream-like language begins to appear during this century. Henry Clay's speech of 1832 was replete with messaging about America as a country of self-made men. The French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville wrote extensively about upward mobility and individualism in his treatise Democracy in America. Ralph Waldo Emerson developed poetic themes of self-reliance. Thoreau's commentary regarding differing viewpoints of the sight of a woodpile was interpreted as reflective of the forthcoming American conundrum.¹⁴⁸

The most poignant and inspiring example of nineteenth century American Dream's individualism is the rise of Abraham Lincoln to become the sixteenth president of the United States. Lincoln was raised in a poor family in what was then the rugged American frontier in Kentucky, Indiana, and Southern Illinois. Since his father was illiterate, Lincoln educated himself. Through his hard work and personal initiative, he rose to become a country lawyer, state legislator and member of Congress, prior to being elected to the presidency in 1861. Lincoln achieved the ultimate height of success but his climb was not out of the ordinary. Opening of the frontier, an increased availability of

¹⁴⁷ F. W. Bogen, The German in America (Boston: Press, 1851), quoted in Stephen Ozment, A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People (2004): 170-71.

¹⁴⁸ Cullen, Dream 69.

books and growth of schools accorded unprecedented opportunity for individual achievement, improvement and betterment.

Lincoln's own success in ascending from hardscrabble roots has been cited as one of his primary motivations in fighting the Civil War. "The Civil War reaffirms America's commitment to upward mobility. Protection of the American Dream for Lincoln was even more important than protecting the Union due to his belief in the American Dream's ability to shape one's destiny, or the difference between human agency and God's hand."¹⁴⁹ He believed that slavery would destroy the American Dream. Economically it would impede upward mobility as his free labor ideology described. Lincoln was also concerned about the possible return of an aristocratic class system and the psychological impact on society if the basis of slavery changed from color to intellect to birth status.¹⁵⁰ Truslow Adams claimed that Lincoln reflected the uniquely American character trait of opportunity. "Lincoln was not great because he was born in a log cabin, but because he got out of it, that is because he rose above poverty, ignorance, lack of ambition, shiftlessness of character, contentment with mean things and low aims which kept so many thousands in the huts where they were born."¹⁵¹

The Wild West hero archetype is another example of nineteenth century individualism. Characters like James Fennimore Cooper's Leatherstocking were visible emblems of the success and reward of individuals. The cowboys rise to prominence in American culture began during this time period as they defined a code of the West, which

¹⁴⁹ Cullen, Dream 94.

¹⁵⁰ Cullen, Dream 81.

¹⁵¹ Adams 242.

was to become a central theme for the developing American culture. This code is described by Morley-Gaines as “the primacy of males, sanctity of his house, his land and his women.”¹⁵² The individual American Dream was also exemplified by immigration patterns of this time period that included a higher proportion of single emigrants than the continent’s earliest experiences. James Truslow Adams in the Epic of America attributes the inspirational aspects of the Dream to the individual immigrant experience and journey because the emigrant was generally an oppressed individual or made to accept an inferior position in the society from which he came as they were likely religiously persecuted, political protesters, or economic failures. Adams believes that deep within the immigrant roots lies a powerful desire to prove we were unjustly held back because of birth. The oppressed or discarded members of other societies who suddenly rise to power or success are more likely to believe that it was their individual effort that produced achievement.¹⁵³

The themes of materialism and debt that appeared since the seventeenth century of began to accelerate during this time period. The American people found themselves confronting a whole array of new goods, differentiated through advertising, technology, and the advent of the door-to-door salesman. Complex farm equipment was infiltrating the emergent family farms of the Great Plains and Upper Midwest. Household appliances began to permeate the developed East Coast and embryonic developments in the frontier.¹⁵⁴ The Sears and Roebuck catalog made its debut in 1895.¹⁵⁵ “The Puritan

¹⁵² Morley-Gaines 97.

¹⁵³ Adams 217.

¹⁵⁴ Calder 158-162.

¹⁵⁵ <http://www.searsarchives.com/catalogs/history/htm>

ethos was not abandoned...it was merely overwhelmed by the power of modern merchandising.”¹⁵⁶

The commercialization of the sewing machine was believed to be responsible for popularizing the installment plan on a national scale.¹⁵⁷ The increasing volume of debt commenced with working-class families with small incomes and the pressure of economic emergence, satisfying their own foundational needs life needs such as housing, food, and tuition. Further increases in American leverage were caused by the growing middle-class desire to improve its standard of living and satisfy social and psychological needs.¹⁵⁸ The use of installment credit lost its class-related stigma by the end of the nineteenth century and became the standard method of financing household purchases. “The driving forces behind the expansion of installment credit were the same developments remaking American society in the late nineteenth century, especially immigration, urbanization, and industrialization.”¹⁵⁹ America’s descent into debt was instigated more by the native-born than the thrifty immigrants. Men were initially more to blame than women as they were the decision makers for even household purchases. The currently held stereotype of the female frivolously shopping and running up credit card debt began after the Civil War with the “feminization of credit criticism,” due to women’s new role as consumers and the prevailing and still lingering belief that women cannot resist temptation and suffer from a lack of knowledge and application of value.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Calder 25.

¹⁵⁷ Calder 162.

¹⁵⁸ Calder 58.

¹⁵⁹ Calder 167.

¹⁶⁰ Calder 217.

Lurking behind this growing use of credit was the creation of a class of men who were using this instrument to become unproductive consumers, a departure from the traditional male identity.

The Puritan development of the wilderness was cited earlier as a forerunner to the materialistic American Dream because of the creation of a commercial economy that was a result of surplus yield in the conquering of the frontier. The expanding borders of America were finalized by the end of the nineteenth century through a blend of hardy exploration by individual Americans, shrewd treaty negotiation at the culmination of American war victories, and timely purchases by the government. Settlers began to strike out past the original thirteen colonies as early as the early eighteenth century. Great Britain ceded the land as far west as the Mississippi River as part of the treaty that ended the American Revolution. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 from France under President Thomas Jefferson essentially doubled the size of the country at that time. Texas and most of modern-day New Mexico was annexed in 1845. Shortly after that the United States fought the Mexican-American war from 1846 to 1848 and through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo acquired present day California, Arizona, Utah, and Nevada. The remaining northwest corner of the continental United States followed shortly thereafter. The United States was made complete with the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867 and the coup and subsequent annexation of Hawaii in 1898. The future was wide open for any and all Americans. “The limitless geographical space offered inexhaustible social space. There was room for all comers at the top and middle of the social ladder and ample room at the bottom. The channels of economic mobility were wide open.”¹⁶¹ The

¹⁶¹ Benne and Hefner 13.

opportunity to stake out one's fortune in these undeveloped lands was to become a vital component of the rise of American Dream hopes.

Other than a handful of settlements in the former territories of the Mexican empire, all that was acquired during the nineteenth century was wide open frontier. There were significant populations of different Native American tribes scattered about, but their culture could still not conceptualize the idea of land ownership, a phenomena that the settlers took full advantage of, supported by the American government and religious leaders. "The process and place of the frontier experience is a dominant root metaphor of the American Dream."¹⁶² Truslow Adams believed that "frontier life was the most important molding influence in American life as it bred independence, initiative, and opinions."¹⁶³ The frontier mentality was future focused and optimistic, just like the destiny for the nation. "Americans on the frontier became adept at taming wilderness, while at the same time fashioning an economic system, establishing social order and conquering the mind and spirit."¹⁶⁴ There was abundant availability of inexpensive and free land during this century supported by the Homestead Act of 1862.

"As the last visible token of the frontier of place and progress, land ownership becomes a crucial element of the American Dream."¹⁶⁵ Those who failed to possess their own land failed to participate in the dream. "To be without property meant you were

¹⁶² Morey-Gaines 141.

¹⁶³ Adams 122.

¹⁶⁴ Benne and Hefner 94.

¹⁶⁵ Morey-Gaines 151.

lacking in the virtues of hard work, piety, family life, and self-reliance.”¹⁶⁶ Land became a moral category that embodied the virtues of opportunity, progress, freedom, and equality. The open space of the West was an important element of the democratic soul implying progress, realization of potential, acquisition of treasures, and extension toward transcendent righteousness. Americans were risk takers, from the Puritans to the Revolutionaries, Immigrants, and western settlers. The frontier was closed by the Chicago exposition of 1893. “The Indian gave way to explorer and hunter who gave way to the trader, who gave way to the rancher, then farmer, then urban development. The hunter, trapper, cowboy, and farmer would be replaced by the engineer, bureaucrat, and consumer.”¹⁶⁷ An early twentieth century editorial in the New Republic found a correlation between the end of frontier land and the passing of frontier morality.¹⁶⁸ The closing of the frontier was the beginning of the contraction of moral sympathy and constriction of American spirit.

“Nineteenth century America contained a bewildering array of Protestant sects and denominations, with different doctrines, practices, and organizational forms.”¹⁶⁹ From the end of the American Revolution came the advent of what Benjamin Franklin called “Publick Religion” or in contemporary terms, political or civil religion. Since the ratification of the First Amendment in 1791 we have seen the convergent manifestation of political and religious ideology through the pledge of allegiance, the Thanksgiving,

¹⁶⁶ Morey-Gaines 151.

¹⁶⁷ Cullen, Dreams 143.

¹⁶⁸ Morey-Gaines 108.

¹⁶⁹ <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/nevanrev.htm>

Memorial Day, and July 4th national holidays, the memorials to Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. “This civil religion was enhanced by the mixture of biblical themes and classical motifs that range from the Great Seal of the United States to the monumental architecture of Washington, D.C.”¹⁷⁰

By the 1830s most factions of American religion had an evangelical emphasis. “Protestantism has always contained an important evangelical strain, but it was in the nineteenth century that a particular style of evangelicalism became the dominant form of spiritual expression.”¹⁷¹ The evangelical passion created a notable doctrinal shift from the Calvinist orientation that categorized eighteenth century American Christianity. Even though the leading preachers of this movement expounded hellfire and damnation, they also harbored hopefulness in the capacity of Americans for moral action. These religious denominations arose to meet the special societal and identity needs of people who needed to cushion the shocks of immigration and the transition from peasant village to industrial metropolis.¹⁷²

A distinctive feature of this evangelical strain was the utilization of religious revivals. “The phrase religious revival was originally coined in the eighteenth century to describe a new phenomenon in which churches experienced an unexpected awakening of spiritual concern, occasioned by a special and mysterious outpouring of God's saving grace, which led to unprecedented numbers of intense and surprising conversions that

¹⁷⁰ Clifford Bendau, Still Worlds Collide (San Bernadino CA: Victory Press, 1980) 36.

¹⁷¹ <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/nevanrev.htm>

¹⁷² Juhnke 25.

"revived" the piety and power of the churches."¹⁷³ An intriguing outcome of this revivalist approach was the erosion of Calvinist predestination as this became discordant with the American Dream theme of opportunity. The possibilities to transform one's life through American opportunity became woven together with Protestant doctrine in the United States during this time frame. These religious leaders considered themselves participants in a broader spiritual movement to evangelize the nation and world.

This revivalism gave prominence to a new set of church groups such as the Baptists, Methodists, and the Disciples of Christ. Revivalism in the backwater and on the frontier brought emotion in religion, enhancing the significance of the individual, and manifesting a personal, but public change of heart through emotional pressure.

"Nostalgic petrification in early twentieth century connects frontier location and religious individualism."¹⁷⁴ Billy Sunday was a representative example of revivalism and the American Dream, going from farm boy to famous preacher. He delivered a message replete with the Puritan work ethic, patriotism, and the power of the white race. His sermons are cited as one of the earliest confusions of Christianity and democracy and the creation of an exclusive brand of Christian Americanism.¹⁷⁵

The nineteenth century also included the resurrection of America's special destiny, manifested in two different forms with religion playing a supporting role in one and a leading role in the other. An 1845 essay in The Democratic Review issued a definitive appeal for American expansionism. The initial purpose was to rally support to

¹⁷³ <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/nevanrev.htm>

¹⁷⁴ Morey-Gaines 40.

¹⁷⁵ Morey-Gaines 41.

bring the Republic of Texas into the United States. It declared that “the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”¹⁷⁶ The slogan “Manifest Destiny” was first uttered in this medium, justifying and defining the American version of imperialism by proclaiming goals for the Mexican-American War. It claimed that America had a “destiny, manifest, i.e., self-evident, from God to occupy the North American continent south of Canada.” It also demanded the right to the Oregon territory including the Canadian portion. Later, it was employed to justify American ventures to possess Hawaii and the Philippines.

There was also a religious aspect of Manifest Destiny originating in the earliest colonial times as settlers always assumed that it was their mission to spread the message of Christianity to this heathen continent. “The first Puritans settled in New England had a sense that they were destined by God to establish a religiously, morally, and politically pure nation. Many regarded this unbelieving land as an abode of Satan which needed to be subdued, both religiously and politically.” The first Colonists viewed it as their duty to create the “New Israel.” The United States was Canaan, the homeland promised by God to the chosen people. America becomes a new chapter of Biblical history. Agents of the government routinely spread a religious message while missionaries for churches routinely spread the message of the American political and economic systems.

The idea that God had chosen America for a special destiny was also proposed by a farmer named Joseph Smith. Previously, theologian Jonathan Edwards wrote that the millennium would bring the second coming of Christ to Earth and that this would begin

¹⁷⁶ Butler 338.

in America. The Mormons brought forth full expression of America as the site of the new millennium during the nineteenth century. “The prophecies and Book of Mormon delivered to Joseph Smith and his subsequent organization of the Mormon Church marked the beginning of the end times as the formal name of the new religion, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, makes unmistakably clear.”¹⁷⁷ The doctrine of Manifest Destiny may have finally passed into history as America struggles to redefine its role in today’s world. But this sense of divine purpose has continued in the concept of American civil religion and it remains an inspirational part of the American Dream.

Great care was taken to ensure that fair and free opportunity continued to characterize American society throughout the nineteenth century. This necessitates that balance be established and preserved between capitalist opportunities and the morals of social responsibility. When property and money become overpowering motivations, they foreclose on opportunity for the immigrant, and the next generation.

A fairly run race does not demand that each runner be equally likely to win, some may be stronger, some may be better trained and prepared, but putting the demonstrably ill-prepared, the injured, sick, and crippled, in a race against the strong and swift offends the common sense of justice. To be fair, the strong must forebear while the society nourishes and strengthens the weak before the results of any race in which they are to compete can be given credence.¹⁷⁸

The facade of a fairly run race was used to soften the competitive nature of the American Dream since the time of the Puritans, the idea of the “City on the Hill” with golden doors. Purporting a balance between wealth, principled achievement, and fair competition have been used throughout the nation’s history to sharpen and clarify the

¹⁷⁷ Butler 216-218.

¹⁷⁸ Benne and Hefner 288.

fundamental meaning of the American Dream. “The shining ‘City on the Hill’ was both an example to the world and a destination for all who would be free. The city belonged not just to her defenders within, but to kindred spirits without who would stand with them against the darkness of tyranny, poverty, and injustice in the world.”¹⁷⁹

The American Dream of land in the woods remained open to each new generation and to a constantly increasing flow of immigrants. Over the course of the nineteenth century the balance of the dream began to slip and the American heart started to harden. The migration westward, the slow eradication of the Indians, a lawless struggle for wealth from the gold mines, and the horrors of the Civil War, eroded the American character of much of its sense of decorum and equilibrium. Individualism and competition displaced community and cooperation as men fought to tame the continent, seize its wealth, and control the course of its development. In “Dreams of America/American Dreams,” author Lynne Layton observes that the turn into the twentieth century provides evidence that the American Dream is for white, heterosexual males, at the expense of African Americans, Native Americans and women.¹⁸⁰

“Thoreau called America a spiritual molting season. The snake sheds its old skin and wriggles out with a new one. The past should be cast off like dead skin, just like the American experiment with new lands. Although the egalitarian goal has never been challenged as an American ideal, the economic revolution that followed the Civil War brought the economy largely under the control of a small number of individuals who

¹⁷⁹ Jillson 277.

¹⁸⁰ Layton 236.

acquired vast fortunes and economic power.”¹⁸¹ America accorded an unfettered opportunity to improve and be better than one’s birth status. There was a pervasive belief that through toil and effort, any individual could create a superior life for themselves and their progeny, regardless of social class or formal education. “With all trails to the Promised Land fenced across with barbed wire, with no dramatic hopes and faiths on which to mount and ride away, the Americans began to take stock of themselves.”¹⁸²

The theme of opportunity accurately describes the nineteenth century American Dream. It was revealed through immigration, westward migration and the growth of commerce. The intensification of the individual, material, and leveraged dream occurred while religion began its fusion with American Manifest Destiny and the gospel of prosperity. In 1873 Chief Justice of the State of Wisconsin Edward G. Ryan presciently observed:

There is looming up a new and dark power. I cannot dwell upon he the signs and shocking omens of its advent. The accumulation of individual wealth seems to be greater than it ever has been since the downfall of the Roman Empire. The enterprises of the country are aggregating, vast corporate combinations of unexampled capital, boldly marching, not for economic conquests only, but for political power. For the first time really in our politica, money is taking the field as an organized power ... the question will arise, and arise in your day, though perhaps not fully in mine, ‘which shall rule, wealth or man, which shall lead money or intellect, who shall fill public stations, educated and patriotic free men or the feudal serfs or corporate capital?’¹⁸³

The idea of the American Dream originating in the sixteenth century desire to Return to Eden ultimately became usurped by economic interests in the early twentieth century and reframed so that the acquisition of wealth and display of possessions became

¹⁸¹ Kolko 7.

¹⁸² Greenbie 589-590.

¹⁸³ Adams 297.

the modern objective. The measurement of an American's success had once been defined as pulling oneself up by the bootstraps to create more opportunity for the next generation. Attainment of the twentieth century American Dream meant procurement and consumption. American religion, especially the most dominant denomination, Protestantism, stood idly by and did not provide sufficient moral guidance to the populace regarding the valuation of time and money. After experiencing a noteworthy decline in influence, several strains of Protestantism reinvented and repackaged their proposition using the most potent success factors that enabled the modern American Dream - a vision of tangible prosperity, government policy and the law.

The Industrial Revolution created the availability of inexpensive consumer goods and therefore spawned a nascent advertising industry. This sector was dedicated to generating demand for these goods and colluded with manufacturers to craft the Dream into the pursuit of material wealth. The advertising of a consumption-driven American Dream exposed our anxieties and promised solace through the acquisition of material comfort. "An early grand vision of the American Dream – The right of all citizens to live larger lives...the right to live more fully and engage more expansively the elemental possibilities of human existence gave way to the incredible power of advertising."¹⁸⁴

The ad creators of the early twentieth century proclaimed themselves missionaries of modernity championing the new against the old. Advertising spending grew from \$682 million in 1908 to \$1,409 million in 1914 and then \$2,987 million by 1919.¹⁸⁵ By

¹⁸⁴ William Greider, "The Future of the American Dream," The Nation 25 May, 2009: 10.

¹⁸⁵ Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985) 6.

2001, \$230 billion was being spent on consumer advertising in the United States.¹⁸⁶ The dreamer now aspired to rise from rags to riches by accumulating things such as status, wealth and power. The principled concepts of freedom, independence, and opportunity were forgotten. The gathering and presentation of goods became the ultimate quest for Americans. “It’s a Wonderful Life, a virtual compendium of the American Dream – home ownership, upward mobility and a quest for the good life.”¹⁸⁷ As an expression of patriotism, buying a home and filling it with more things was central to the new suburban middle-class lifestyle. There was a growing desire for luxury with indulgence as the motivation. Although luxury is a relative standard, as at one time socks were a luxury good in western culture.¹⁸⁸ “The influence of the market had become substantially more authoritative than the most powerful elements of either the polity or civil society.”¹⁸⁹

The desire to own a home in the suburbs, with a few automobiles, the latest home appliances, and access to higher education, all became marketed as the American Dream. The objective of the Housing Act of 1949 was the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and suitable living environment for every American family.¹⁹⁰ Suburbanization increased as a result of swelling post-war demand, low cost of materials, and the availability of large tracts of farmland around most major cities.¹⁹¹ The appeal of home ownership was marketed as a continuation of the hunt for the frontier. “The

¹⁸⁶ Bruegmann 55.

¹⁸⁷ Cullen, Restless 2.

¹⁸⁸ Calder 253.

¹⁸⁹ Bruegmann 65.

¹⁹⁰ Paul Adamson, Eichler Rebuilds the American Dream (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2002) 10.

¹⁹¹ Hudnut-Beumler 2.

suburban idyll was not simply an escape from the city but also a longing, an aspiration for something elusive.”¹⁹² The fantasies of the dream life concocted during the war found an antidote to the age of anxiety through suburban development.

The number of television in the home expanded from 940,000 in 1949 to 44,000,000 in 1959.¹⁹³ The original promise of industrialization was to bring people more time for leisure. Instead the mantra, “I owe, I owe, it’s off to work I go,” became the rallying cry for the American worker.¹⁹⁴ “The installment plan re-directed this quest from abundance to experience.”¹⁹⁵ Installment credit added to the psychology of affluence, which contributed to the spirit of material achievement, financed middle-class consumer society and softened the sharp boundaries of class identity. The mass-market era for American cars didn’t begin when Henry Ford rolled out the Model T, it originated when automobile dealers experimented with installment credit.¹⁹⁶

It was during this time period that the early components of the American Dream appeared closest to satisfaction, but was paradoxically also when the contradictions of the materialistic approach became apparent. “Large scale impersonal bureaucracies, meaningless corporate work, stereotypic suburban family roles, the commodification of leisure, sexuality and even meaningful experience are all social contributions to the individually experienced malaise that increasingly pervades bestselling novels and

¹⁹² Adamson 11.

¹⁹³ Hudnut-Beumler 15.

¹⁹⁴ Calder 302.

¹⁹⁵ Calder 302.

¹⁹⁶ Calder 186.

sociological disruptions of modern America.”¹⁹⁷ The growing importance of affluence and conditions that enabled the attainment of wealth increasingly set the idealized of the past American Dream at odds with the realities of the current definition of a successful life.

A cultural implication of the twentieth century American Dreams was the creation of an “organization man” who was goal-oriented and work-minded. The independent, formerly inner-directed individual became more self-conscious and consumer minded. Social conformity became the norm at work and at home. Individualism lost its original intent. “Compromise became implicit in the burgeoning suburban ethos.”¹⁹⁸ The fallacy of recommending greater individual independence as the cure for every malady of the day became that much more apparent. The eternal tension between needs of the society and the individual intensified.

Describing the plight of immigrant farmworkers in “People of the Lake,”

Professor Joseph Siry of Rollins College writes,

They are a story of paradox for on the road to abundance and prosperity. They are a microcosm of all farm workers poisoned by the very chemicals meant to sustain a cornucopia of affordable food they cannot afford to feed themselves. They were told that money grows on trees and were attracted by the lure of orange and grapefruit picking that could bring in good money when compared to the sugar and tomato fields of South Florida. There should be disgrace of people enslaved working in the field of the richest nation on earth.¹⁹⁹

The apocalyptic criticism of the American Dream did not come from religion but in twentieth century novels such as Death of a Salesmen, A Cool Million, and The Day of

¹⁹⁷ Long 192.

¹⁹⁸ Cullen, Dreams 152.

¹⁹⁹ Joseph Siry, “People of the Lake,” Rollins College Working Paper May 2010: 1.

the Locust, American Tragedy, Babbitt, Reagan Dick and The Great Gatsby.²⁰⁰ Authors of modern literature took up the cause and began to challenge the prevailing forces of the American economic machine. Robert Wiebe observes “As powerful external forces seemed to gain increasing power over their lives, people groped for some personal connection with that broader environment, some way of mediating between their everyday life and its impersonal setting.” Critics believe that F. Scott Fitzgerald was the leader in challenging the fallacious nature of American Dream and hypothesized that it was primary focus of his writing. “In Gatsby, Fitzgerald understands the bright possibilities of American life and the restrictions Catholicism impresses, but Nick Caraway suggests American life has its limits.”²⁰¹

At the turn of the nineteenth century, evangelical consensus ruled America. By the end of World War I, people were tired of fundamentalism. Religious decline began in the 1920s. Society ignored or defied Protestantism, whose contribution to national morality was the passing of Prohibition in 1919. The roaring twenties were bursting with jazz, card playing, public dancing, short skirts, swimwear, motion pictures, road trips on Sundays, and unsupervised dating.²⁰² The return to religion began after the Second World War during the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower as people sought meaning for the global death and destruction that took place during this tragic period. “While the population of the United States grew at a nineteen percent during the 1950s, the number of people attending a church or synagogue grew by more than thirty percent.”²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Morey-Gaines 88.

²⁰¹ Cullen, Restless 61.

²⁰² Hudnut-Beumler 29.

²⁰³ Hudnut-Beumler 33.

Eisenhower added God to the pledge of allegiance in 1954, “In God we Trust” to the currency in 1955 and opened his cabinet meetings with a silent prayer. “Ike served as the high priest of popular return to religion.”²⁰⁴

The turmoil of the 1960s and early 1970s beginning with the Vietnam War, continuing through the civil rights movement and culminating in the women’s rights efforts, brought diminished credibility of all institutional authority including religion, government and big business. The previous balance between civil society, the state and the market dramatically weakened. The gap between stated ideals of equality and democracy and reality of injustice and exclusion were magnified by protest movements. “Moral authority took several years to become restored to the core institutions confronted by the protest movement of the 60s.”²⁰⁵

The American economy, relatively stagnant for two decades, began more rapid growth during the Reagan presidency. Milton Friedman’s faith that “The one and only social responsibility for business is to improve profits,”²⁰⁶ had a deteriorating effect on the middle-class American Dream as thousands of jobs were shed, outsourced or offshored. That did not prevent our hedonistic consumer society from increasing its pursuit of the materialistic life. “Capitalist societies make more noticeable the radical disjunction between the economic and cultural realm of life.”²⁰⁷ Society’s shared moral purpose evaporates and social decline rises. The persistent dooms of the working-class

²⁰⁴ Hudnut-Beumler 51.

²⁰⁵ Bruegmann 49.

²⁰⁶ Bruegmann 27.

²⁰⁷ Calder 299.

such as insufficient planning, need for immediate gratification, limited desire for education, and inability to save for the future culminated in the fading dream.²⁰⁸

Since John F. Kennedy's presidency there has been an increase in violent crime, incarceration, and out of wedlock births. There are three times as many single parents. The divorce rate has doubled. The engagement of the American workforce continues to decline.²⁰⁹ "He like the rest of us thus appears to be getting into a treadmill in which he earns, not that he may enjoy, but that he may spend in order that the owners of the factories may grow richer."²¹⁰ Life on the frontier bred independence, initiative, and informed opinions but pragmatic descriptions of today's society would be antonyms of those adjectives. The backbone of democracy has always had some religious influence in ethics, morals, and code. "The evidence is inescapable that the best way to make people succumb to dictatorship is to denounce and take away their religion. America would do well to revive the dream of their forefathers."²¹¹

We have been able to establish that the American Dream has existed as a beacon of hope and anticipation for the world since the discovery of North America in the fifteenth century. Since that time, clear themes can be used to characterize the evolution of the broad idea now called the American Dream. In the sixteenth century an appropriate description would have been the Return to Eden. Then in the next century freedom would have been the designation for the dream. The eighteenth century American Dream was independence for the nation and the individual. After that was

²⁰⁸ Benne and Hefner 47.

²⁰⁹ David Yount, Faith Under Fire (New York: Sterling House, 2004) 3-4.

²¹⁰ Adams 408.

²¹¹ Morey-Gaines 27.

attained, this country provided unfettered opportunity for Americans and hopeful immigrants from all corners of the globe. The twentieth century began with a theme of achieving more, and attaining greater heights than you were born into. The collusive effect of the Industrial Revolution and creation of the advertising sector recast the measurement of achievement into the acquisition of wealth as manifested through the accumulation and display of material possessions. The dream is often sought after for the purpose of demonstrating to others that it has been achieved. Unfortunately it has become implied in the modern American Dream that wealth or recognition gained are for the individual, not the betterment of society.

The new century was inaugurated with the juxtaposition of the seamless passing of the proposed year 2000 technology bug and briskly disputed American presidential election. The terror attacks of September 11, 2001 followed shortly thereafter, thus has changing the way Americans live at home and deploy policy and resources abroad. The cost of two wars caused federal spending to balloon. These expenditures combined with a politically-motivated tax cut led to the obliteration of the sound fiscal position for the country that was achieved after eight years under the Clinton administration. At the individual level, the quest for even more and even bigger led to dreadful judgment by consumers in acquiring unaffordable homes, enabled by lecherous lending practices and the inexplicable financial instruments that provided the financing of sub-prime mortgages. “The relationship of household debt to income has proven unsustainable, the ratio is normally established somewhere below one hundred percent, in 2007 was one hundred and thirty-one percent.”²¹²

²¹²Mortimer Zuckerman, “The End of American Optimism,” Wall Street Journal 16 Aug. 2010: A15.

The Great Recession that began in 2007 was officially declared resolved by a body of esteemed economists. However the impact of this economic debacle continues and has led many around the world to pronounce the death of the American Dream and the commencement of the decline of the American empire. There is also a growing division between rich and poor. The ability of the wealthiest members of society has actually been able to grow even wealthier through one of the most agonizing periods of American history by using their position of power and influence to shape government policy and law in their favor. The undercurrents identified throughout this analysis of the American Dream phases - individualism, materialism, and debt, are at their crowning glory at this moment.

“Paul Fussell and others who have researched class identity in American culture find that American society is a highly stratified society in which the professional and upper classes enjoy a myriad of unearned tangible and intangible privileges such as personal contacts with employers, good childhood health care and superior educational opportunities.”²¹³ As economic power in the United States comes from savings and income, it is dominated by a small, dominant, class whose interests and lifestyle set them off from the rest of American society. There is an elite element of this economic class who control capital allocation and corporate structure. They make basic price and investment decisions that directly affect the entire nation.²¹⁴ “The middle-class family fell thousands of dollars in debt, as it struggles to keep up with the Joneses. American consumer debt is larger than the combined GDP of several foreign countries [due to]

²¹³ Policar 19.

²¹⁴ Kolko 127.

overbuying and the deceptive nature of installment credit. We are a nation of bankrupts, of pleasure loving hedonists with no discipline to postpone gratification.”²¹⁵

Futurist and author Richard Florida believes that the Great Recession represents a reset that will deliver a “shift, similar in scope to the transition to the Industrial Economy, crisis of 1873 and the Great Depression.”²¹⁶ He also states that “people without purpose or meaning are buying an identity ‘off the rack.’ This is becoming increasingly more challenging as more than seventy-five percent of the average income goes for the basic necessities of food, shelter, transportation and health-care.”²¹⁷ In “How to Restore the American Dream” award-winning journalist Fareed Zakaria points out that “the real American Dream is different from Dallas.”²¹⁸ After arriving in the United States from India to pursue higher education, Zakaria was surprised by the “spacious suburban homes and gleaming appliances of his American friends, even when the parents had relatively modest jobs.”²¹⁹ His early belief was that the modern American Dream was “general prosperity and well-being for the average person.”²²⁰ Zakaria was impressed by the optimistic Americans’ “sunny attitude toward life that was utterly refreshing.”²²¹ He concludes by citing a September 2010 Newsweek poll indicating that sixty-three percent of Americans believe they would not be able to maintain their current standard of living.

²¹⁵ Calder 293.

²¹⁶ Matt Carmichael, “Why the Economy May be Poised for a Great Reset and What it Means,” Advertising Age 26 Jul. 2010: 4.

²¹⁷ Carmichael 4.

²¹⁸ Fareed Zakaria, “Restoring the American Dream,” Time 1 Nov. 2010: 31

²¹⁹ Zakaria “Restoring” 31.

²²⁰ Zakaria, “Restoring” 31.

²²¹ Zakaria, “Restoring” 31.

Zakaria also believes that forthcoming economic and societal changes will become a structural shift.²²² “American society has become a lonely crowd of white-collar workers, housed in look-alike suburban homes, dominated by mass culture and the power elites who are redefining the rules of opportunity.”²²³

It has now been established through our analysis that religion, specifically the Protestant branch of Christianity has played a seminal role in the definition and dissemination of the American Dream. We began with the presentation of North America as an opportunity to Return to Eden where fall of humanity occurred, in order to recapture lost innocence. Then the Puritans arrived to colonize the wilderness under the banner of freedom of religion. The first Great Awakening of the early eighteenth century attempted to reclaim the Puritan dream of creating a fair and focused society in the face of emergent materialism and individual achievement. During the opportunity chapter of the American Dream, the fracturing branches of Protestantism advanced the evangelism that began during the first Great Awakening and added revivals to their repertoire in support of Manifest Destiny. In the first half of the twentieth century, religion took a back seat to the consumerism that propagated an unsustainable level of buying, underwritten by installment credit. American religion reinvented itself and reappeared toward the end of the twentieth century by adopting the methods and messaging of the materialistic dream. Now we will examine how religious involvement in the American Dream journey altered the Protestant branch of American Christianity creating an institutional vacuum of moral guidance to the nation and individuals that could have prevented the most destructive aspects American Dream. A critical review of the

²²² Zakaria 33.

²²³ Zakaria 35.

country's national goals should include a clear and aligned understanding of the religious connections to the original and prospective dream.

The American Dream has been reshaped from a once-noble endeavor intended to refute and repair the harms fashioned on humankind by the sixteenth and seventeenth century European ruling elite to individual pursuit of material success, funded by borrowing from greedy money lenders. This disturbing statement represents a pragmatic appraisal of the twentieth century American Dream. American religion, specifically the Protestant branch has participated in this journey through acts of omission and acts of commission. "Religion gives meaning and significance to the start and continuation of culture. It intensifies whatever it touches, provides rigidity of existing institutions and quickens the question of ontological reason."²²⁴ By partaking in this journey, American religion has dramatically transformed itself, and now has a mission, strategy and tactics greatly different than the religious tenets purported by Martin Luther or its modern-day variants anywhere else in the world.

The religious American Dream has faded into the sunset. The energy directed toward today's materialistic society is disorienting our conscious and unconscious life. "Many religious groups transferred their hopes from theological to civilization's progress without really checking this against the original biblical notion."²²⁵ One of the most powerful ideas of the American Dream is a promise of success through hard work, which since the twentieth century has commonly been measured by the accumulation of wealth. Once these material goals become disconnected from their religious roots, they lose their

²²⁴ Morey-Gaines 24.

²²⁵ Sontag 95.

meaning.²²⁶ “This ideology of success prevalent in the American Dream has become divorced from the meta-narrative rooted in the Puritan vision of a new commonwealth where everyone works for the glory of God, good of others and for the demonstration of virtue through the attainment of success.”²²⁷

There are signs that the twenty-first century economic catastrophe is retuning the way Americans think about the future of the American Dream. Findings from a 2010 survey by Hanson and Zogby suggest that a majority of Americans consistently reported that the American Dream for themselves and their family is more about spiritual happiness than material goods.²²⁸ The Protestant concept of independence of the individual that emerged from the Reformation provided the courage to revolt against British power. Today we need to re-examine how Protestant Christianity worked to form the early American Dream. Our utopian thinking led us to think of America as beginning the emancipation of the world. At the moment, avowed materialism in America appears stronger than the spiritual dream that has now degenerated into a material obsession.

The early colonizers of the Americas were motivated by the promise of religious freedom. Even during the Puritan period, economic opportunity came to be rationalized by a sense of divine mandate.²²⁹ However the extensive use of debt to achieve the economic prize appears out of touch with Biblical notions and Christian goals. While the Bible does not explicitly proscribe all forms of debt, it warns about the dangers of debt

²²⁶ Sontag 96.

²²⁷ Corbin 343.

²²⁸ Sandra L. Hanson and John Zogby, “The Polls-Trends: Attitudes about the American Dream,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 74:3 (Fall, 2010): 570.

²²⁹ Corbin 344.

and extols the virtue of not becoming a debtor. It does not specifically forbid borrowing money. The Bible does employ harsh words of condemnation for lenders who abuse those who are bound to them in debt, but also elects to not condemn the debtor as sinners.

Paul uses Romans 13:8 to challenge the Christian to avoid borrowing and serves as a reminder of God's revulsion for debt. The laws of ancient Israel that prohibited charging of interest on loans made to the poor were extracted from Leviticus 25:35-38. They had significant social, financial, and spiritual implications. The intent was to genuinely help the poor by not making their situation worse. It was bad enough to have fallen into poverty and it could be humiliating to have to seek assistance. Then if in addition to repaying the debt, the individual had to also make devastating interest payments, the obligation would be spiritually debilitating. The law also taught an important lesson of compassion. If a lender would forego the interest on a loan to a poor person, this would be an act of mercy. He would be losing the use of that money while it was loaned out. But this could be a tangible way of expressing gratitude to God for his mercy by not charging his people interest for the grace he has extended to them.²³⁰

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ were intended to pay for humanity's sins. The debt of humankind is then to Christ and his Father. Borrowing money makes one a servant or slave to the lender and distracts from devotion to God and service to humanity. Christians are told to serve only one master. The debtor also has another master, their lender. Christians can take on the burden of financial debt if it is absolutely necessary as long as the money is being used wisely and the debt payments are

²³⁰ Everett Ferguson, Doctrines of Human Nature, Sin and Salvation in the Early Church (New York: Taylor and Ferguson, 1993) 111.

manageable. Money and debt are not necessarily evil unless one becomes obsessed with material things over Christianity.

Debt is both an economic concept and a moral state. There are matters of trust, fidelity to promises and the ability to balance desires with prudence related to choices regarding debt.²³¹ Throughout American history, Christian preachers purported virtue in borrowing money to make money. This was presented as a moral duty to develop the nation.²³² The acceptance of the principles of laissez-faire capitalism as either value-free or morally good were professed by evangelical social ethicists as a result of the American Dream as a Christian story.²³³ “Most white evangelicals benefit from laissez-faire capitalism because of class location. They seemed hard pressed to apply an ethical critique even though laissez-faire capitalism is inimical to the Christian faith cautions against competition, usury, excessive profit and the exploitation and oppression of the poor.”²³⁴

Americans sought a future where they could spiritually justify their intense preoccupation with the material. Truslow Adams writes, “The American did not believe he was selling his soul to Mammon, but that he was merely pledging it for the moment, as he was ready to pledge anything he owned, with the hope of ultimate gain.”²³⁵ Traditionally Christianity characterized money as a temptation to evil and a physical manifestation of Mammon. Organized religion attempted to cage Mammon by preaching

²³¹ Calder 74.

²³² Adams 346.

²³³ Corbin 342.

²³⁴ Corbin 346.

²³⁵ Adams 219.

a rigorous adherence to the moral laws of money management. These included nineteenth century sermons about the ethics of debt that challenged the Christian to live within their means, avoid debt and owe no man anything.²³⁶ Protestant asceticism attempted to convey that debt undermined Christian self-control by the sheer force of multiplied temptation, a greater likelihood of dishonest means being used to put off creditors and the prideful purpose in borrowing money because the individual was not satisfied by the conditions in life assigned by God.²³⁷ These feeble attempts were not able to outdo the power of commercial interests, big banks and small loan lenders who characterized themselves as the upholders of the American Dream.

The deviation from the Puritan's collective pursuit of freedom to the modern story of individuals climbing the ladder of success, often on the backs of other members of society represents the second example of an act of omission, which diverted the collective approach to achieving the American Dream. The concept of rugged individualism infuses aspects of divinity from Adamic individualism while also incorporating the tough outlook of social Darwinism. However the precedence of individualism as a self-alone in the American Dream journey is inconsistent with the universally religious idea of love and care for the common humanity according to Reinhold Niebuhr.²³⁸

This idea of Adamic individualism has supporters within theological Christianity as it combines the Puritan work ethic and goals of infinite progress and perfection. "The American Adam is the carrier of American character and the pioneer for the vision of

²³⁶ Calder 83, 91.

²³⁷ Calder 94.

²³⁸ Morey-Gaines 147.

America as a New Israel and land of rebirth.”²³⁹ He is expected to be solitary, resourceful, self-reliant, the master and maker of the world and captain of his own soul. His individualism represents sanctity, masculinity and material reward.²⁴⁰

American society’s convergence with religion confronts a paradox as the community of Christianity was supposed to include something larger and grander such as participation in a common enterprise, while the historical American culture has emphasized the language of individualism, laissez faire and private property. The bonds that can unify will also become oppressive. The fellowship of humanity is especially intrusive when there are differing world views. An emphasis on anything “collective” emphasis conjures up claims of socialism, communism, and survival of the weakest.

Protestant religion bifurcated from Catholicism in part because of the desired emphasis for a more direct relationship between the individual and God. But as far as their faith is concerned, Christians should be united with fellow believers. Jesus asked his Father to keep his disciples so that they might be one. “Koinonia is the Greek word translated in the English language New Testaments as communion, association, fellowship, sharing, common, contribution, and partnership. Not one of these words, however, adequately captures what the early Christians meant when they spoke of the koinonia they had with each other and with Christ. The implications of this word when used to express the nature of the bond with Christ and between the brethren are especially profound.”²⁴¹

²³⁹ Rile B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955) 88.

²⁴⁰ Morey Gaines 63.

²⁴¹ Jordan Bajis, Common Ground (Minneapolis MN: Light and Life Publishing, 1991) 162.

Individualism was particularly emphasized in American revivalism, especially as it was presented by the Reverend Dwight L. Moody, a renowned preacher who continually underscored religious individualism in during his mass evangelistic crusades. He believed that salvation was solely an individual matter. Moody did not view that the individual was actually redeemed in and by the body of Christ, nor did he ask the disciple to view their commitment to Christ as an equal commitment to their brethren in the community. The convert was taught that the primary concern was to win and maintain his own private holiness.²⁴² The Church was intended to be both a family and a community. Although the individual success story may be popular in our culture, that idea is incompatible with Christ's view of the Church. "The church provides the context for spiritual growth by sharing together a fellowship which is at once the gift of the Spirit and the environment in which he may operate."²⁴³

American was built on gambling and competition. Columbus, Cortez, Drake, de Leon, and Hudson each gambled with their own lives, that of their crew, and their patron's money. Raffle tickets were sold in 1566 to raise funds for expeditions and colonizing. Lotteries can be traced in North America to the seventeenth century. Revolution, frontier expansion, immigration, settling the west, the development of industry, entrepreneurialism, stock market investment, the often repeated mantra of "greed is good," derivatives, and collateralized debt obligations were all titanic gambles upon which America was built.²⁴⁴ The underlying motivation of a race for wealth was a

²⁴² George Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) 37.

²⁴³ Howard A. Snyder, The Problem of Wine Skins (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1975) 105.

²⁴⁴ Cullen, Dream 161.

free-for-all enduring fierce and often unfair competition. “Religious duty and patriotic virtue were presented as a moral condition. Money making was ranked with virtue.”²⁴⁵ Religious leadership became increasingly silent through this journey of gambling and competition. “Once we allowed the disintegration of our own moral hardware, of the once vital countervailing institution, our ability as individuals to make hard, wise decisions for the greater good that our moral hardware became largely unworkable. We lost the context in which the language of virtue could be grasped and spoken. As a consequence American values and ideology of the market have become one and the same.”²⁴⁶ In a Wall Street Journal editorial by Robert Bartley, writing about the failure of the American financial system during the 2002 economic collapse, he stated. “The failure of the entire system is one example of the societal collapse of standards and morality over the last three decades or so.”²⁴⁷ The nation is currently experiencing one of the worst periods of economic malaise since the Great Depression caused by reckless and selfish gambling by both lenders and borrowers. Dinesh D’Souza’s statement that “anything that inhibits business is a moral problem,”²⁴⁸ awaits a powerful religious response.

Competition as the key to success can erode any conception of a common good and responsibility for the well-being of others. These are crucial aspects of ethics and

²⁴⁵ Adams 191.

²⁴⁶ Brueggmann 80.

²⁴⁷ Richard Chessick, “Psychoanalytic Peregrination VI: The Effect of Countertransference of the Collapse of Civilization,” Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry 31:3 (Fall, 2003): 547.

²⁴⁸ Brueggmann 19.

living a moral life. However, the church has not stridently held the winners of the American Dream accountable for their moral responsibility to those who continue the journey and desire to strive to improve their situation. “Instead those in lower or working classes who do not attain the enhanced class status and material wealth connected to achievement of this dream are called unsuccessful because of their own weaknesses and character flaws.”²⁴⁹ An evil contemporary, characteristic of America life is social Darwinism. The voice of organized religion has been silent in criticizing this sinful behavior. Thus it becomes an enabler for this phenomenon, and has led their flocks to conclude that God meant for the strongest to succeed even if it meant climbing on the backs of others.²⁵⁰

“One of the most troubling flaws of religious complicity in the destruction of the American Dream, according the Hochschild is the connection between failure and sin, which enables dominant groups to claim virtue for themselves and legitimize their right to rule based on an illusion that success is a product of moral goodness.”²⁵¹ Reinhold Niebuhr believed that the biggest hazard of American idealism typified by the Social Gospel was not that the messianic dreams served to legitimize American power, but the generation of an uncompromising moral pride. “The real point of contact between democracy and profound religion is the spirit of humility which democracy requires and which must be one of the fruits of religion.”²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Policar 20.

²⁵⁰ Benne and Hefner 112.

²⁵¹ Corbin 345.

²⁵² Morey-Gaines 45.

Religion in America failed to take a sufficiently strong position since the Puritan era that might have prevented the American Dream from becoming an individual drive toward material success, paid for by borrowing, and lacking the type of moral guidance that could have elevated more boats with the rising tide of success. These can be considered acts of omission by American Protestantism. There have also been acts of commission such as the gospel of prosperity and a prioritization of legislating morality, which has created a veritable “Church of the America,” that is meaningfully different from their contemporary or historical European counterparts. These efforts have led to a vacuum in systemic, individual moral guidance relative to how to think about the difference between right and wrong, the importance of living the golden rule, and cosmic significance of the greater good.

Evangelical spirit is an inward, passionate and zealous personal commitment to the Christian faith. It is born out of a deep personal conviction that faith in Jesus Christ produces life changing effects in man and his culture.²⁵³ The evangelism of late twentieth century engaged more actively in public battles for the soul of the nation. A mission-critical objective from evangelical social ethics is to reclaim America as a Christian nation. The strategy is to ideologically associate the American Dream with Christian roots as many evangelicals vehemently believe that they are synonymous. “The history of evangelism has roots in the American Dream, democracy, capitalism and personal freedom.”²⁵⁴ The prosperity gospel has centered upon the belief that God will provide material success for those he favors. It began to hit the proverbial airwaves, shortly after

²⁵³ Corbin 341.

²⁵⁴ Corbin 343.

World War II and was advocated by the late preacher Oral Roberts. This vision presented for Christians and potential converts gained momentum during the 1990s after the Reagan's presidency. The teaching is based on interpretations of certain Biblical verses such as:

Malachi 3:10 - Bring the whole tith into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,' says the LORD of hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.

Deuteronomy 8:18 - But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

John 10: 10 - I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

3 John 2 - Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.²⁵⁵

Prosperity theology was an attempt to stem the twentieth century decline in religious influence on American society. Working-class men were not attending religious services as often as they were start of the nineteenth century. Later, in the twentieth century the decline in church attendance was greatest amongst working-class whites. In 1970 thirty-five percent of working-class whites, ages 25-44 attended religious services every week. This was the same for college-educated whites. By 2010, only college-educated whites are attending at the same frequency. Working-class interest has been waning.²⁵⁶ The gospel of prosperity resonated with the middle and upper-middle class who were already reveling in their relative material successes. They were also able to see more clearly the further riches and goods over the horizon. "The power of the future and

²⁵⁵ Butler 433.

²⁵⁶ Cherlin and Wilcox D12.

sacrificial dedication are both central to the Christian faith and American Dream. The Dream points to a struggling ascent toward the future, and ascent that requires sacrificial dedication.²⁵⁷ Preachers were able to correlate a sacrificial dedication to Jesus Christ and God as a path to greater prosperity and accumulation of even more material wealth. The motto of the Praise-the-Lord (PTL) television network was that “we preach prosperity.”²⁵⁸

According to Dr. Robert Franklin, President of Morehouse College, there are two fallacies brought upon Christians by the gospel of prosperity. “One is a personal ethic of sacrifice and of sharing and renunciation and of suspicion toward material things, and second, a holding of our economy and of our entire market sector accountable for the well-being of the poorest of the poor in our nation.”²⁵⁹ Personal ethical failings of its individual and institutional proponents, as well as the role of the gospel of prosperity in developing untenable levels of greed that caused the Great Recession of 2007 have cast doubt in the message of secular rewards preached by prosperity theologians.

The Christian idea of sacrificial dedication was a central paradigm of Jesus Christ and this sacrifice was intended to extend to his followers. This idea includes the description of human actions identified and confessed that God acts through human deeds. It has to be undertaken within a network of consciously acknowledged interrelationships. The “Church of America,” according to Ronald Reagan, has emerged as the American national religion alongside the other churches and church

²⁵⁷ Benne and Hefner 124.

²⁵⁸ Butler 430.

²⁵⁹ <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week1051/feature.html>

denominations.²⁶⁰ This movement gained prominence after the turbulent 1960's and grew to play an influential role in domestic and foreign policy. This ideology does not have a specific brick and mortar home, a designated or elected leader or official registry with the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt entity. The doctrine of the Church of America encompassed the fight against communist expansion, protection of Israel as the birthplace of Jesus and Christianity from Islamic incursion, advancement of the anti-abortion movement, and prevention of the LGBT community's full right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This Church of America has employed the American Dream technique of marketing aspiration in order to greatly enhance their appeal to upper-middle class and middle-class Americans. These distracting forays precluded a powerful enough force to forestall the negative American Dream aspects of individualism, materialism, debt, and debauched morality from becoming integral parts of today's American culture.

The number of Protestant denominations on American soil demonstrated uninhibited, unprecedented growth. An explanation of this phenomenon may be found in the country's pioneer psychology. The American people have traditionally lived on a frontier. New regions had to be explored, new territory cultivated, new homes and institutions established. As was discussed during the nineteenth century section on opportunity, these included the creation of several denominations of churches. "The European Right was appalled at the fissiparous character of American Protestantism. The proliferation of wild and wooly religious "sects" seemed to undercut the unifying and

²⁶⁰ Juhnke 26.

sanctifying functions that the traditionalists of Europe expected religion to play.”²⁶¹ The rise of this Church of America phenomenon was a response to the waning influence of religion in America due to its inability to resonate with the increasingly materially-focused and spiritually-empty society and represented the newest frontier for Americans.

Since the 1930s, American religious leaders raised the notion of returning to the purity of a Judeo-Christian tradition, to the exclusion of religious groups whom they regarded as beyond the bounds of American patriotism. Then after the genocide of World War II, and the unwillingness of Americans to accept the Jews who attempted to flee Nazi persecution, the movement evolved to proclaim an existential solidarity between Christians and Jews. This led to widespread support for the formation of the state of Israel in 1948 and led to continuing collaboration between these two religious traditions.²⁶² This marked the beginning of the Church of America’s role to influence American foreign policy.

“American religion and American society are like a double-stranded helix spiraling through time. Christianity and civil government were now both freed from the European dialectic of yes or no, unity or chaos, and became two maybes, moving together, each affecting the other.”²⁶³ Will Herzberg a Drew University theologian, describes the twentieth century Judeo-Christian notion during a 1955 speech. “American religion and American society would seem to be so closely interrelated as to make it virtually impossible to understand each other without reference to each to the other.”²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/nevanrev.html>

²⁶² Butler 366-367.

²⁶³ Thomas A. Howard, God and the Atlantic (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2011) 197.

²⁶⁴ Butler 387.

The convergence of religion and foreign policy gained momentum through the sermons of preachers Billy Graham and Charles B. Templeton. They were backed by publisher William Randolph Hearst who was attracted by Graham's strong condemnation of Communism. "Hearst instructed his newspapers to give the young evangelist lots of favorable publicity."²⁶⁵

A more poignant illustration of the Church of America's attempt to more critically influence American polity transpired during the 1960 presidential election when it appeared that a young Irish-American, John F. Kennedy, would become the first Catholic elected to serve as president of the United States. At that point, Protestant leaders from all over America gathered in Switzerland to discuss methods to deny Kennedy the presidency. These preachers threw the full weight of their marketing and messaging to ensure a victory for his opponent Richard M. Nixon.²⁶⁶

Since the mid-twentieth century there have been less critical discussions of the Bible in the United States.²⁶⁷ This has led to the growth of more fundamentalist interpretations of Scripture leading to a resurgence of more traditional, conservative expressions of Christianity. The main participants are composed of what sociologist Wade Clark Roof calls the new "generation of seekers." These seekers are baby boomers who came of age in the 1960's and 1970's and are now in their thirties, forties, and fifties. Composing a third of the total population, this generation, because of its vitality and sheer size, is shaping contemporary culture in a profoundly new fashion.²⁶⁸ This

²⁶⁵ Butler 373.

²⁶⁶ Butler 385.

²⁶⁷ Butler 416.

²⁶⁸ <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/trelww2.htm>

demographic group was a ripe audience for the efforts of the Church of America to influence domestic policy, beginning shortly after the election of the country's first evangelical President Jimmy Carter in 1976.

For the religious right, the 1973 Supreme Court decision to legalize abortion was their catalyst for their political activity.²⁶⁹ Jerry Falwell formed the Moral Majority in 1979 to organize this voting bloc. They viewed their group as a defensive not offensive movement.²⁷⁰ Falwell stated that "I would find it impossible to stop preaching the pure saving gospel of Jesus Christ and find it today as the solution for communism, gay rights, and abortion."²⁷¹ Ralph Reed's Christian Coalition became another significant force in American politics and shaping the cultural agenda for the country.

As early as 1961, Pat Robertson was broadcasting three hours of religious television every night on the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN).²⁷² He hired Jim and Tammy Faye Baker in 1965 to support the growing demand for their programming. Baker became a tireless proponent of the prosperity gospel saying that the "health and wealth doctrine that God was eager to bestow worldly goods on anyone who contributed generously to God's work."²⁷³ Reed and Robertson also developed the ideology of Christian Reconstructionism, which sought to replace American civil and criminal codes

²⁶⁹ Butler 418.

²⁷⁰ Butler 420.

²⁷¹ Stephen A. Sharot, A Comparative Sociology of World Religions (New York: New York University Press, 2001) 354.

²⁷² Butler 428.

²⁷³ Cathleen Falsani, "The Prosperity Gospel," The Washington Post 20 Dec. 2009: B05.

with the laws of Moses and ancient Israel.²⁷⁴ The Church of America's preachers used the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requirement that all television stations provide public service time, to convey their message. This has become a "ghetto of Sunday morning programming."²⁷⁵

There are undoubtedly countless individuals and congregations across the nation who through both actions and words, have made meaningful differences in people's lives by pronouncing and acting upon more responsible goals and methods to achieve a noble, societally responsible American Dream. These efforts have not been sufficient to prevent an unsustainable level of debt, prioritization of individual achievement over the greater good, materialism rather than holiness, and prevalence of competition and unrepressed greed because Christian leaders controlling the share of national voice, have elected to focus on gospel of prosperity and doctrine of the Church of America - restricting gay marriage, adoption, women's reproductive rights, continuing the war on drugs, and sustaining the death penalty – over providing moral guidance against individualism, materialism and debt. These acts of omission and acts of commission perpetrated by the most politically and societally influential parts of American Protestantism contributed to the drifting and debilitating American Dream.

We are now over a decade into the twenty-first century. The American identity has always promised and produced a renewable future. America can still claim to be a nation that made less of class than any other and still offers current and prospective

²⁷⁴ Butler 436.

²⁷⁵ Butler 427.

residents the greatest likelihood to improve their situation. Immigrants and residents were both motivated by their humble ancestries:

America was born. Gamblers, bounders, ne'er do-wells, third sons in primogeniture cultures – most of us came here to escape something! Our people came here not only for a new chance but to disappear, hide out, tend their wounds, and summon the energy in time, to impress the dopes back home. America has many anthems, but one of them, is 'I'll show them.'²⁷⁶

The country has existed for over two hundred years where everyone thought that their children would have better lives than they did, regardless of the circumstances of their ancestry. In the proverbial old country, only luck or genius would ascend a man from nothing to something. In America it has always been character and hard work. The prizes went beyond the imaginations of the preceding generation or of European magnates. The American Dream was once a shared quest, for a common good, that prioritized caring for all members of society, with equal opportunity to be health, wealthy and wise. Ever-hopeful presidential candidate Barack Obama said on the campaign trail, "What is unique about America is that we want these dreams for more than ourselves - we want them for each other. That's why we call it the American dream."²⁷⁷ However, it does not appear that the financial community, who "obscenely enriched itself by playing casino games with obscure, unregulated products like credit default swaps,"²⁷⁸ adhered to any semblance of a shared vision. Wall Street is not the only guilty institution. Many Americans feel entitled to a national agenda and standard of living that is beyond our

²⁷⁶ Peggy Noonan, "The Eyes Have It," Wall Street Journal 22 May, 2010: D22.

²⁷⁷ Barack Obama, Speech on 7 Nov. 2007.

²⁷⁸ Joe Klein, "America from the Road," Time 18 Nov. 2010: 39.

current income. “A nation in an agony of self-searching, wondering whether its goals have been mistaken and whether it has been deceiving itself and the world.”²⁷⁹

The American Dream began with the arrival of European explorers on North American shores in the late fifteenth century. It was originally portrayed as a chance Return to Eden that might restore humankind’s place in the world order by revitalizing Western civilization. The next aspect of the American Dream can be characterized as seeking the freedom to speak, worship, and live without the restraints defined by ruling elite. The nation’s and individual’s independence movement reflected the next version of the American Dream. Once independence was realized, residents and immigrants craved the opportunity to rise and attain a place in society through hard work and good character. Achievement, as measured by the acquisition of wealth and material goods represents the most recent phase of the dream.

Throughout the development of the American Dream, religion has played an integral role in shaping, disseminating, and questioning the direction of the Dream. However the influence of religion weakened as the American Dream drifted toward individual, materialistic, and debt-ridden. American Protestantism eventually was complicit in enabling the material dream through acts of omission and acts of commission. They have been supportive of the myth that modern-day America is a land of opportunity where all are able to succeed through hard work and determination and success is measured by professional achievement, material wealth and accumulation.

²⁷⁹ Lefferts A. Loetscher, “Christian Duty and the American Dream,” Princeton Seminary Bulletin 63:2 (1970): 38.

The vocal leaders of the religious right have not heeded John Stuart Mill's sound advice when he said "act in a way that produces the greatest happiness for all people."²⁸⁰

"Today the American Dream may be unraveling as there is a growing wealth gap, ongoing race and gender inequality, and expanding poor immigrant populations."²⁸¹

Class identity is becoming more delineated based upon status of family origin, interests, tastes, education, mannerism, speech patterns, professional status, income level and material possessions. During his 1976 presidential campaign, Gerald Ford observed:

For two centuries, America has stood for freedom and opportunity - a land where every boy and girl could advance in life as far as their talents carried them. Despite this proud national heritage, skin colour, language barriers, poverty or other factors beyond their control have denied many of our fellow citizens the chance to share fully in the American dream.²⁸²

Streaks of pessimism are replete in the television networks prime-time lineup with sitcoms such as "Raising Hope," "My Generation," "Outsourced," and "Mike and Molly" depicting a depressed mood that is not just about money, but signifies the lowered expectations for life, and a systemic fear of failure.²⁸³ "The intergenerational dispute over what a good life is reflects a fundamental shift in American culture."²⁸⁴ Anne Mariucci, chairwoman of the Arizona Board of Regents said, "We all believed that if you followed the basic compact, worked hard and played by the rules, that we'd have the highest standard of living in the world. And we were always on the front edge of the next new technology. But we are not anymore. We seemed to be mired in mediocrity, while China

²⁸⁰ Bruegmann 14.

²⁸¹ Hanson and Zogby 571.

²⁸² Gerald Ford, Speech 1975.

²⁸³ Alessandra Stanley, "Embracing Malaise at Plot Point," New York Times 9 Sep. 2010: C7.

²⁸⁴ Bruegmann 82.

is steaming ahead.”²⁸⁵ The cumulative federal, state, and local government debt is nearly five times the size of the American economy. Public infrastructure, the education system, and ability to innovate are deteriorating. America’s geopolitical influence is waning. There are divided and obstinate visions for the country in Washington D.C. and state capitals around the country. “The present time could become a turning point in American history, as we try to see ourselves as other nations see us, to debunk our hypocrisies and to restudy priorities and national purpose.”²⁸⁶

What will be the theme of the next phase of the American Dream? Is there an institution that will influence this definition as the advertising sector did for the twentieth century version? The nation’s greatest principle is that the things we have in common as human beings are more important than the things that divide us.²⁸⁷ “The growing gulf between America’s thought leaders and those living normal lives on the ground appear to be cosmic. There is a desperate need for a voice to help them understand the American Dream itself needs a boost, encouragement, and protection.”²⁸⁸ There is potentially a powerful role for twenty-first century religion in America and an obvious platform for the majority religion to influence a more shared objective for the next phase of the American Dream.

Religious leaders must play a persuasive role in reversing the course of the individual, material, debt-ridden dream, currently infused with competition and greed. Lee Atwater, the late Republican Political Strategist made the following observation

²⁸⁵ Zakaria 34.

²⁸⁶ Loetscher 40.

²⁸⁷ Zakaria 35.

²⁸⁸ Noonan D7.

while dying of a brain tumor. “My illness helped me see that what was missing in society is what was missing in me: a little heart, a little brotherhood...the 80s were about acquiring wealth, power and prestige. I know I acquired more than most. But you can acquire all you want and still feel empty.”²⁸⁹ There are sufficient examples of these types of death-bed epiphanies, to fill up the Sunday morning airwaves. James Truslow Adams concluded the Epic of America as follows:

The point is that if we are to have a rich and full life in which all are to share and play their parts, if the American Dream is to be a reality, our communal, spiritual, and intellectual life must be distinctly higher than elsewhere, where classes and groups have their separate interests, habits, markets, arts and lives.²⁹⁰

Organized religion has a crucial opportunity and moral responsibility to forestall the declining American Dream by reshaping the objective and message so that it is unequivocally evident that we all win together or we lose together. Their influence can return the American Dream to where raising the tide of hope and opportunity ensures all individual boats, large and small, have the same chance to be lifted higher, that the measurement of achieving the American Dream is being the best individual you have the capability to can, and that helpfulness, care, and compassion for all fellow Americans is paramount. “The dream like all living things will die someday. The task before us is an obligation to improve the quality of its life for ourselves and our children.”²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Bruegmann 53.

²⁹⁰ Adams 411.

²⁹¹ Cullen, Restless 141.

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