

The American Dream as the BIPOC Nightmare

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The (Literal) American Dream

Undeniably the ethos of America, it's what unites the original settlers of the 13 colonies to present-day immigrants taking the Oath of Allegiance to become a citizen. Common themes and notions that make up the Dream are:

- The desire to to have a fresh new start in hopes of a better life for themselves and their family
- That consistent hard work and perseverance is the key the success; "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality
- Personal fulfillment
- Financial stability; commonly represented through homeownership in a suburban neighborhood after WWII

The original term was coined by James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* during 1931 (The Great Depression). He states this:

- "But there has been also the American dream, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement." (Adams 404)
- "...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. And that dream has been realized more fully in actual life here than anywhere else, though very imperfectly even among ourselves. It has been a great epic and a great dream." (Adams 405)

The usage of the word "dream" is critical to understanding the Dream due to various definitions of the word "dream". (As seen in Figure 1). Each one has been used, even to this day, to both uphold and criticize notions of it.

Manifest Destiny: The Story of America

Manifest Destiny is considered by many to be the ideology that distinctly defined America. It's intrinsically correlated to the Dream in two ways, even to this day:

1. *Land/Private Property*
Manifest Destiny, in short, is Westward Expansion. However, this land (even before Manifest Destiny) was forcibly taken by the Indigenous communities and this land (from the original colonies and onwards) would continuously time and time again be barred from anyone who was deemed "Non-White"
2. *The purposeful erasure of certain voices to promote a dominant narrative*
Although for White Americans it's the story of triumph and overcoming of odds, for others it's a story of tragedy and loss. Capitalistic success has come at the cost of communities.

The Dreams VS Achievers: A comparison of the different ethnic groups in America

Several studies have been done in regard to the Dream. As seen in **Figure 2**, research by the Pew Research Center in 2017 shows that many Americans believed that they have either achieved or are currently on their way to achieving the American Dream.

However, as seen with **Figure 3**, there is still an immense wealth gap between the average White American and other racially marginalized groups, especially. Even though at first place, the average Asian-American median household income is significantly larger than other ethnic groups, **Figure 4** shows the specific breakdown of the "Asian-American category" and the disparities in income levels for different Asian ethnic groups.

The Dream as a Nightmare

In various critiques of the Dream, a common theme is that the Dream is non-existent; that it is a myth. However, I argue against this notion because the Dream itself does still exist. Rather, the Dream needs to be reframed as a nightmare especially for racially marginalized community because its existence a) historically denies their existence and b) further increases the divide between these groups. Success for everyone can only be done with unity and community rather than capitalistic notions of conquest.

Moving Forward

This presentation is only a brief sample and introduction to my material. As such, there is great room for expansion. Here are steps that I aim to take in to further this research:

- Adding more perspectives/voices in regard to the Dream through novels (both fictional and non-fictional), autobiographies, and interviews (preferably first-generation Americans who are also part of a racially marginalized community)
- Incorporating more data in regards to beliefs about the Dream from after the pandemic (2020 onwards)

Infographics

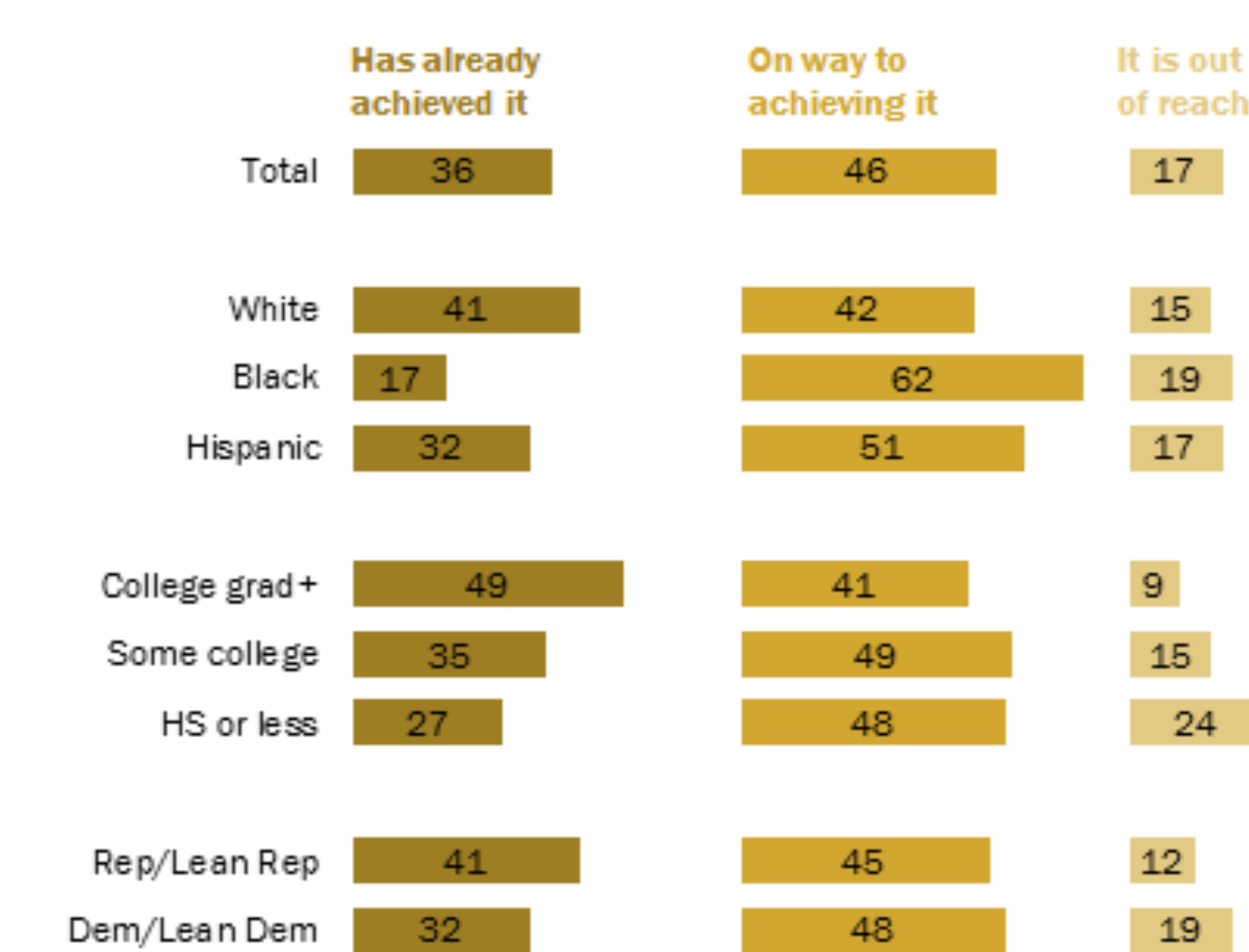
Figure 1:
Various Definitions of the word "dream" from the Oxford English Dictionary

1. [a] A series of images, thoughts, and emotions, often with a story-like quality, generated by mental activity during sleep; the state in which this occurs. Also: a prophetic or supernatural vision experienced when either awake or asleep.
2. Something imagined or invented; a false idea or belief; an illusion, a delusion; (in early use also) a sham, a pretence (obsolete).
3. [a] A vision or hope for the future; (in early use chiefly) a vain hope or idle fantasy; (now also) an ideal, goal, ambition, or aspiration
[b]. spec. With the. A national aspiration or ambition; (now esp.) a way of life considered to be ideal by a particular nation or (in extended use) other group of people (usually specified in a modifying adjective).

Figure 2:

Most people say they have achieved the American dream - or are on their way to achieving it

Do you believe your family has achieved the American dream? (%)



Note: Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Don't know responses not shown. Source: Survey conducted Aug. 15-21, 2017.

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Figure 3 + 4:

Race and Ethnicity	Alone			Alone or in Combination with Other Races		
	Code	Population	Median household income (US\$)	Code	Population	Median household income (US\$)
Asian Americans	012	19,157,288	100,572	031	23,545,238	97,626
White Americans	002	202,981,791	74,932	003	241,836,150	73,594
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	050	612,448	69,973	060	1,541,118	72,131
United States (general population)	001	331,893,745	69,717			
Some other race	070	23,902,781	57,671	071	53,866,002	61,042
American Indian and Alaska Native	006	3,158,694	53,148	009	8,750,904	56,990
African Americans (Black American)	004	40,194,304	46,774	005	47,234,227	47,597

In the 2021 American Community Survey, the following figures regarding detailed Asian ethnicities are reported.^[1]

Detailed Race	Alone			Alone or in Combination with Other Races		
	Code	Population	Median household income (US\$)	Code	Population	Median household income (US\$)
Indian	013	4,402,223	141,906	032	4,787,210	138,418
Taiwanese	018	257,430	119,022	037	310,503	117,652
Filipino	019	2,960,811	101,157	038	4,428,904	96,883
Pakistani	026	555,917	100,730	045	629,946	95,747
Sri Lankan	027	72,271	96,790	046	86,690	94,034
Chinese	017	4,360,468	93,007	036	5,549,293	93,431
Japanese	022	742,549	87,789	041	1,636,634	90,566
Indonesian	021	85,957	87,377	040	161,807	86,751
Korean	023	1,445,315	82,946	042	1,982,184	83,354
Hmong	020	345,338	80,702	039	368,609	80,175
Thai	028	180,364	78,616	047	319,617	78,434
Nepalese	076	217,150	78,375	048	229,325	78,043
Vietnamese	029	1,896,690	77,884	044	2,288,062	78,845
Laotian	024	181,458	75,241	043	248,920	75,962
Cambodian	015	272,408	73,819	034	369,562	75,424
Bangladeshi	014	245,131	67,187	033	261,885	66,641
Burmese	073	233,347	60,376	081	248,822	62,352