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America: A Dream Forgotten

America, the land of opportunity, of equality, the land of freedom and of dreams come true. America has long been a land of hope, from the earliest immigrants who came here in search of freedom to practice their faith, or for economic opportunities. Then “between 1820 and 1930, some 4.5 million Irish migrated to the United States” (United States Immigration Before 1965) to escape famine. Then you add the draw of the California gold rush with brought even more individuals. Clearly America was the land of opportunity, of the good life, of freedom.

In Langston Hughes’ poem “Let America Be America Again” we read, “Let it be the dream it used to be.” (Hughes) and “America never was America to me.” (Hughes). Why would he say that, what has caused Hughes’ to believe that America has become a dream forgotten? Let us dive into and inspect the American Dream along with Langston Hughes.

Recently we have seen and heard the number 11 million. That right the government now estimates 11 million people supposedly living in the United States illegally. Obviously the American dream is still alive somewhere, apparently mostly outside of America. Those 11 million illegal immigrants or “undocumented workers” are part of what is draining the American Dream.

In 2007 the population of the United States was 301.3 million people (USA Statistics in Brief -- Population by Sex and Age). Of the population 12.5 percent of those individuals were below the poverty line (USA Statistic in Brief -- Income and Poverty) and 4.6 percent of the civilian labor force (16 years of age and older) were without employment (USA Statistics in Brief -- Employment). So much for the land of opportunity, nearly 38 million people living below the poverty line and nearly 14 million people looking to better their economic status unable to find employment. Even if we assume that the unemployed are included in the group below poverty that is still 38 million people for whom the dream is still just a dream. Where is their American Dream?

Further back in America's history we must remember the Native Americans, Hughes calls "the red man driven from the land" (Hughes). From early in our history we conquered more and more land and drove our countries native people from their homes. In 1830 congress passed the Indian Removal Act, "It gave the president power to negotiate removal treaties with Indian tribes living east of the Mississippi. Under these treaties, the Indians were to give up their lands east of the Mississippi in exchange for lands to the west. Those wishing to remain in the east would become citizens of their home state." (Indian Removal). America, land of the free, "Let it be the pioneer on the plain seeking a home where he himself is free." (Hughes) and yet our government actively was negotiating to push our native people from their homes. As if that were not enough many of the Native Americans have been given lands, or reservations, that consist of the most undesirable places to live. Where is their American Dream?

Coming forward again in history, we view the 1960's where the African American people were peacefully protesting for their rights, for their equality among such bodies as the KKK and other white supremacy groups. "But opportunity is real, and life is free, Equality is in the air we

breathe.” (Hughes). America was supposed to be a place of equality, and yet here we have, “the Negro, servant to you all.” (Hughes). If the dream was opportunity to be real and equality in our every breath why did and do we have discrimination of every kind, not just of race but of sex, age, religion, and disability as well. Where is their American Dream?

Perhaps in some ways the American Dream was flawed to begin with. After the entire dream was to have everything you ever wanted: to be free, to be economically successful, to be safe and to own land. This concept of ownership is interesting let me ask some questions. Your home, you own it, unless you are renting it, but you have a property tax you must pay or the government takes it away. So who owns your home do you or are you renting it from the government? Your car, you own it too right, unless you are leasing it. But you have to pay a property tax on that too and if you do not you cannot register your car to be driven on roads, so again do you own your car? The American life style is that of consumerism, but we are all slaves to the largest consumer of all, our government. In 2007 the federal government surplus/deficit was -161 billion dollars and the gross outstanding debt was 8,951 billion dollars. (USA Statistics in Brief -- Government, Social Welfare, and Law Enforcement)

As American Citizens it is our rights to claim the American Dream, which I declare today is still alive but is still very much a dream. “It is their right, it is their duty... to provide new Guards for their future security.” (Jefferson). As Thomas Jefferson stated, it is our duty as citizens of this country which holds such great potential to do all that we can to secure our future. “[We] must bring back our mighty dream again” (Hughes) Through peaceful means, demonstrations, through our civil responsibilities and electing officials who will not abdicate their own responsibilities as our chosen representatives. We can and we must “redeem...And make America again!” (Hughes)

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