

"The American Dream"

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Most of us in this country have grown up with a vision of what "the good life" in America is supposed to be like, and what each of us is supposed to do and be in order to achieve this dream. The following are beliefs that make up a very prevalent conception of "the American dream."

We hold some of these beliefs consciously and some unconsciously. How many of these beliefs do you recognize in yourself? Are there reasons to think that some of these beliefs may not make sense?

- You should go to college and graduate (so you can "make something of yourself"). The purpose of education is to prepare you for a career of paid employment.
- You should get a "good job" (good pay, respect, benefits, retirement package, job security). If you are female, your "dream" may not include a "good job" but may be to "land a good catch" (a man who has a "good job") and "be a home maker."
- Your job (paid employment) is who you are. It is your identity. When people ask you "What do you do?" you will respond by telling them what you do to earn money: "I am a lawyer, truck driver, computer programmer, etc."
- Your life will be dominated by paid employment. Your paid work will take up the vast majority of your time and energy from the time you start working until the time you are old and retire.
- You should get progressively "better" jobs/positions/pay ("work your way up" and "be a success") Over time you should get jobs with more responsibility, prestige, and pay.
- You should have a standard of living that is higher than what your parents had; you should have more and have it easier than they did.
- You should have children who will grow up to live out "the dream" and have a higher standard of living than what you had; each generation should "have it better" than the generation that went before.
- You should retire with a "good pension" at "retirement age" (usually around age 60-70). Once you are retired you should forget being productive and devote yourself to travel, eating out, recreational activities, and doing the things that you've always wanted to do when you were working at your job.

