

## CHAPTER III

### EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

#### 3.1. History of *American Dream*

The origins of the *American Dream* can be traced to the initial period of American colonization in the 17th and 18th centuries. European settlers came to the New World in pursuit of liberation from religious persecution, political oppression, and inflexible social hierarchies that constrained their prospects in Europe. This idealistic vision of a new society founded on liberty and equality established the groundwork for the *American Dream*. The concept was articulated in the foundational texts of the United States, particularly the Declaration of Independence (1776), which asserted that "all men are created equal."

The term American Dream first used in *The Epic of America* by James Truslow Adams (1931:58). Adams declared "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement."

The *American Dream* changed a lot in the 20th century, especially after World War II. It became more about consumption and living in the suburbs. Owning a home, having a steady job, and living in a nuclear family became signs of success. But this time also showed paradoxes, as systemic racism and inequality kept many people from completely fulfilling the Dream (2023:33). The Civil Rights Movement and other social movements made it clear that there was a big difference between what people wanted and what they really lived.

### **3.2 Definition of *American Dream***

The *American dream* of American Studies has long been a core component of American cultural thinking. Many Americans consider dreams to be an essential aspect of their identity, and they serve important purposes within American culture. However, its relevance has changed over time, responding to the changing circumstances of those who pursue it and the opportunities that arise. The American ideal is that of a place where life should be better, richer, and fuller for everyone, with equal opportunity for all regardless of skills or success.

The powerful statement "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..." in the Declaration's Preamble declares a fundamental belief where everyone is born with the same basic worth and should have the same initial chances in life, no matter their origins. It can be seen at the very beginning of the second paragraph of the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

The *American Dream* upholds the principle of equality. This does not mean that everyone is equal in everything, but everyone has the same opportunity to achieve their life needs, as stated by Ralph Dolgoff in his book *Human Nature and The American Dream* below.

According to Adams, if a country has a large dream, it may be great (1931:404). The phrase "*American Dream*" also has endured to this day in America, which is a prime illustration of this. According to the *American Dream*, hard effort is the first step toward success. The *American dream* has been embedded in the mentality of the country ever since the establishment of the United States of America.

Comprehending the *American dream* is like touring the entirety of the country. Understanding the American ideal is linked to understanding the political, social, and even popular aspects of American culture and behavior. It's a common belief among Americans. Because more people are studying America, the *American dream* is therefore mentioned more frequently. Some people were once motivated by the American ideal to think that they might improve their lives by working tirelessly. This concept's primary idea is to fight using one's own power rather than seeking assistance from others or a specific social class.

The *American dream* is a concept that has been embedded in the thoughts of many Americans. It represents the dominant cultural values of the United States. James Truslow Adam was the first to propose the *American dream* in his book during the 1930s, the depression era. According to Adams (1931:404), his biggest contribution to the world's conception was his desire to improve the lives of all American classes so that they may realize the *American dream*. Since then, the *American dream* has grown and is now embraced by all Americans.

### **3.3 Indicators of *American Dream***

Cullen explained there are 5 indicators that are associated with the *American Dream* including, freedom, equality, upward mobility, home ownership, and the quest for personal fulfillment (2009:8).

Cullen emphasizes that freedom is foundational to the *American Dream*, encompassing the ability to make personal choices and pursue aspirations without undue restraint (2009:8). This freedom allows individuals to Cullen critiques

historical limitations on this ideal, noting that while the Declaration of Independence asserts equality, systemic barriers often hinder true equity.

Cullen highlights upward mobility as a core aspect of the *American Dream*, illustrating how individuals can rise from modest beginnings to achieve success through hard work (2009:8). Meanwhile, home ownership is frequently viewed as a tangible achievement of the *American Dream*, symbolizing financial stability and personal autonomy. Cullen argues that owning a home represents not just economic success but also a sense of belonging and community.

According to Cullen, one of the most significant yet unfulfilled aspects of the *American Dream* is the pursuit of equality, particularly in the struggle of African Americans. Cullen emphasizes how this continuous struggle for civil rights resulted in the movements of the 1950s and 1960s, initiated by figures like Martin Luther King Jr. King's brilliance lay in framing his struggle within what a foreign observer once called "the American Creed"—a set of shared ideals rooted in the Declaration of Independence. By aligning his vision with these foundational American principles, King not only shaped the public perception of the *American Dream* but also made it difficult for his opponents to dismiss his cause. Furthermore, his legacy extended beyond individual success, redefining the dream as a collective pursuit of justice and equality.

According to Cullen, the concept of homeownership stands as one of the most widely recognized manifestations of the *American Dream* (2009:9). This aspiration, rooted in history, has evolved significantly over time. Special attention is given to its development from the enactment of the Homestead Act, signed by President

Lincoln in 1862, to the rise of suburban life in the latter half of the twentieth century. While the suburban dream has symbolized stability and success for many, its widespread realization has also brought about both comforting and concerning consequences.

Additionally, personal fulfillment encompasses the pursuit of happiness and self-actualization (2009:9). Cullen suggests that achieving one's dreams involves not only material success but also emotional and spiritual well-being.

### **3.4 False Consciousness**

According to Tyson, false awareness occurs when ideologies such as the American Dream promote the notion that individual effort guarantees success, when an ideal serves to mask its own failures, it is a false ideal, or false consciousness, whose real purpose is to advance the interests of those in power (2006: 58). This "false ideal" benefits those in power by persuading marginalized populations that their failures are due to human insufficiency, not institutional exploitation. For instance, the *American Dream's* story of meritocracy obscures how capitalist systems disproportionately favor the wealthy, keeping the working class in cycles of self-blame.

False consciousness develops from the idea that the dominant ideology promoted by the ruling class shapes the way society, especially the working class, views things so that they accept and legitimize the injustice and exploitation they experience. False awareness not only misleads individuals regarding social reality

but can also leads to harmful behaviors, resulting in misguided actions that are damaging to themselves and others.