

An American flag is shown waving on a flagpole against a bright, cloudy sky. The flag's stars and stripes are clearly visible. The overall tone is patriotic and hopeful.

# Social Mobility & the American Dream

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CLASS 10

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- ❖ According to you, what is the American dream?
  - ❖ How would you define the concept of “social mobility”?

# Context

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DEFINING THE AMERICAN DREAM



# Genesis

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The phrase was coined by **James Truslow Adams (1878-1949)** in his 1931 book *The Epic of America*.

This is how he describes it: *"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."*

Adams thought that the US had been too busy with riches/materiality. He believed Americans had forgotten about the **deeper aspirations** the nation was founded on.



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*“The American Dream” has always been about the prospect of success, but 100 years ago, the phrase meant **the opposite** of what it does now. The original “American Dream” was **not a dream of individual wealth**; it was a **dream of equality, justice and democracy for the nation**. The phrase was repurposed by each generation, until the Cold War, when it became an argument for a consumer capitalist version of democracy. **Our ideas about the “American Dream” froze in the 1950s**. Today, it doesn’t occur to anybody that it could mean anything else.*

Sarah CHURCHWELL ([source](#))

# What it means nowadays

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- ❖ Roots = 1950s, strategy for soft power
- ❖ Consumerist/free markets version
- ❖ Earlier version = principles of liberal democracy
- ❖ [Cambridge Dictionary](#): *“the belief that everyone in the US has the chance to be successful and happy if they work hard.”*

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

# The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the Separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Manner, as to them shall seem most likely to promote their Safety and Happiness.

The History of the present King of Great Britain is a History of repeated Injuries and Oppressions, all having in direct Object the Establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. The Prince himself has endeavored to bring us to the Edge of the Sword of Civil War.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public Good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and moderate Relief, until he should have the Assent of a new Assembly of men chosen by artifice, rather than by the free Choice of the People.

He has refused to assent to Laws for the Relief of the Debtors, for the easing of the Trade, for Ameliorating Punishments generally, and for other wholesome Laws, except only such as suited his private Trade.

He has refused to pass other Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public Good.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Acts for establishing Judiciary Powers.

He has kept open War, without Declaring it, and for many Years past, he has employed his Armies and large Fleets of Warships, to destroy us.

He has quartered large Bodies of British Troops among us, and has kept us long Time in the most unquiet and bloody War, in which the only Merit on our Side was that of our Bravery.

He has endeavored to bring us to the Edge of the Sword of Civil War, by the Assistance of his Cruel Mercenaries, he has endeavored to bring on the States a long and expensive War.

He has plundered our Seas, and ravaged our Coasts.

He has destroyed the Lives of our Citizens.

He has made us a Deserted Town.

He has attempted to bring on the States a long and expensive War, and to bring us to the Edge of the Sword of Civil War.

He has endeavored to bring on the States a long and expensive War, and to bring us to the Edge of the Sword of Civil War.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”



# Listening

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# “Why the American Dream is a Myth” (pp.60-62)

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# “Obama on social mobility in America”

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# Speaking

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# Do you believe in social mobility?

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You can, of course, discuss the French context.

Find arguments AND examples to illustrate your points.