



New York Times. 12th July, 2016.

The Innate Nature of Competition

By Diane Georges 10J

The American economic machine is broken, writes David Collins.

You will not succeed solely on the benefits of hard work. One look around our country should make this self-evident. Why then is this supposed 'truth' a cornerstone of an outdated ideology that we preach throughout our modern society as The American Dream? It is a rather fitting descriptor, considering that this simply cannot be an achievable reality of all citizens in America. This is clearly observable through incontrovertible statistics, and common sense really does reaffirm these observations. To begin with, no one begins with the same amount financially. Much like the fact that every person is a unique individual, they also have a unique economic background. We are also able to plainly see that the current capitalist agenda is incredibly toxic to a purportedly classless society by the overwhelming *lack* of a genuine redistribution of wealth that has been evident over the past half century.

Thus, how is it possible to declare that any alternatives to this broken system are doomed to fail? As a government and a society, we are adamant that there are no functioning alternatives. However, that is simply not the case. As it currently stands we cannot move forward as we are, continuing to lie to future generations, and ourselves, by choosing to falsely believe that everything will be alright if we simply work hard.

The American Dream is a lie.

Competition will naturally breed triumph, as well as tragedy. This is unavoidable. However, the continued inability to confront the truth that not everyone can become wealthy is a plague to modern thinking, and well-being. It sets people up to fail even more harshly than reality already insists upon. Today's current economy coldly reflects that we cannot all make it, with the top 1% of people, owning 22% of pre-tax income. The American people recognise that this is a problem. Recent Democrat candidate Bernie Sanders spoke passionately about it, and how the "... very, very rich get richer and the poor get poorer." This is unquestionably true. The reality is that a capitalist society is a competition, with clear winners and clear losers. The consequences of this system have been laid bare in America for decades, with a growing divide between the haves and the have nots. The middle class has been almost entirely eliminated. It is astounding to note that the top fifteen wealthiest people in America, people such as Bill Gates, and the Coca Cola brothers, own more than the bottom 40% of people in this country combined. These statistics only reinforce that we cannot 'win' in a capitalistic society based solely on the toil of hard work.



The ultimate example of this in American literature is Miller's, *Willy Loman*. He is an average American citizen, providing for his wife after having raised two children. According to The American Dream, he should be a complete success, having dedicated his life to hard work and chasing wealth. This is supposed to be the pure fantasy that we aspire to. Yet, Willy fails. *Miserably*. Like Willy, so many Americans have found that their materialistic dreams have proven to be nothing more than a delusion, preventing them from attaining more realistic goals. Although the ending of Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is extreme, it is easy to see that the cruel invention of an American Dream does nothing more than hinder the working class in their pursuit of realistic goals and achievements. To continue chasing this mistaken belief is quite possibly the single greatest mistake a citizen can make.

Continuing to lie to oneself in order to convince that there is a possibility that we could, maybe, be one of the ones that make it, is foolish ... and results only in heartbreak. It sponsors a mindless, and unequal society. Of course this sort of great success *may* happen, but just like the lottery, it is almost certainly not going to happen to you. The statistics support this. The poverty rate for children in the US is 32.2%. Almost a third of children in the land of 'the dream' live in poverty! That means that a third of America's parents are struggling to provide for their children.

However, The American Dream would have you believe there is a way out of poverty through education. It is undeniably an admirable goal; a young person seeking to learn and better themselves should be encouraged. Yet, at this current time, the undertaking of higher education is a mirage for many. First of all, it is incredibly expensive. Prices of a degree haven't risen approximately 28% since the 2008 recession. To combat this crushing impost, many potential graduates opted for a loan. An understandable decision. This means that there are currently seven of every ten graduates leaving higher education with more than just a degree, but also a collective debt totalling up to \$1.2 trillion USD. To add to this appalling situation, over seven million people are currently defaulting on this debt. As a tool that is supposed to help the impoverished escape poverty, the education system simply does not work. It simply cannot offer a reliable way out of poverty, as The American Dream would have you believe.

This issue was unsurprisingly discussed in the recent primaries. Bernie Sanders acknowledged that this was a considerable problem and proposed offering free higher education. Donald Trump, held by many as a demagogue, has told us "The American Dream is dead". If a man who appeals only to the most primal and primitive prejudices of our country is able to give an accurate analysis of this underlying problem in our nation, surely other, more careful and decided political minds, should have addressed this.

It is clear that the way to advance in this country currently holds more true to the practise of nepotism than to a meritocracy. There can be no doubt that the lies we are telling ourselves, that people acknowledge as a problem and seem to be begging us to confront, are ruling our lives. As it stands, education is sadly not the way out of poverty.

Despite these examples of false ideologies and misplaced faith, there are still those who would claim that not only is The American Dream alive and well, it is the backbone of our society. There should be enough



evidence to prove that the current system is less than perfect. The amount of control the upper class has over the middle and lower classes is astounding, and the mobility of people within classes has begun slowing down. For example, there is a 1 in 17 chance that the children of a politician who holds an elected office will become a politician themselves. This is an outrage, considering the population of 319 million, and the 537 federally elected offices, including the house of representatives, senate, and President. This cannot be healthy for a supposedly respected democracy.

Further to this, The United States' wealth has been progressing on a downward trend, as we currently rank 27th out of 27 high-income countries in the world for median income. This would have been incredible to those of the late 1940s and 1950s, as in the beginnings of the Cold War, America emerged as a powerhouse alongside Russia. This battle of ideologies would shape The American Dream into what it is today; as a cornerstone of its opposition to socialism and communism. Thus it is understandable, that if The American Dream was still in the position of power that it was sixty years ago that Bernie Sanders (a self-confessed socialist) would not have been nearly as successful in running for the presidency as he was.

Regardless of how America is shaped for the future, for the sake of the continued prosperity of all, it appears critical that our government and its citizens must abandon the untruth that is The American Dream. The American Dream is, without doubt, an admirable dream. One's wealth depending entirely upon the effort they put in? It sounds great! Yet, in our current time, it simply does not function as we wish it could. It can only be what it is, *a dream*. To continue surrounding ourselves in a fantasy that everything will be alright if we just work that little bit harder, is cruel, demeaning and unjust. It is an injustice to society, our nation and to ourselves. An alternative must be reached. Otherwise, we are simply doomed to continue living out what has become The American Nightmare.