**The American Dream: A Story for Every Story**

The phrase “American Dream” promises hope, but it can also resemble as a puzzle. For migrants like me, who journeyed from a city south of the Yangtze River in China to the Madison; early on, I felt I had to hide my accent and my cultural habits to fit in. With time, I realized the American Dream is not about erasing one’s identity. Instead, it is about taking part in a bigger, ever-changing story that many people help shape. Below, I explore its roots, its portrayal in literature, and how it unfolds in modern life and how it takes its portal in my personal story.

***Historical Context***

David Gerber notes in American Immigration that the American Dream traces back to ideals of freedom and mobility (Gerber 23). In the nineteenth century, it gained momentum as European immigrants arrived with the firm belief that hard work would bring success. However, Gerber cautions that “race, class, and immigration status often determine how far one can go” (156). Then, with the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, new guidelines emerged about who could enter the country. Editors Mary C. Waters and Reed Ueda explain in The New Americans that these changes broadened access for some non-European immigrants yet still left many at a disadvantage (Waters and Ueda 12).

***Literary Representations***

Many authors show how the Dream can inspire some and disappoint others. In F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby, Jay Gatsby strives for wealth to win Daisy’s favor, reaching for the “green light” that never stops receding (Fitzgerald 180). This struggle highlights the heartbreak of single-minded ambition. Carlos Bulosan’s America Is in the Heart follows a Filipino immigrant working under grueling conditions. “I was leaving behind the poverty of my village,” he writes, “but I carried with me the wounds of my people” (Bulosan 23). Meanwhile, Amy Tan’s The Joy Luck Club explores Chinese-American daughters torn between their mothers’ legacy and American life. One says, “To you, America is freedom; to me, it’s another burden” (Tan 42). These perspectives underscore how the Dream can look entirely different depending on who chases it.

***A Contemporary Struggle***

Today, many still seek this Dream, but they face ongoing challenges. Karla Cornejo Villavicencio’s The Undocumented Americans shows how hard work often “only prevents deportation,” rather than leading to prosperity (Cornejo Villavicencio 12). David K. Shipler’s The Working Poor spotlights workers trapped in low-wage jobs, lacking fair pay or benefits (Shipler 57). Valeria Luiselli’s Tell Me How It Ends reveals the plight of Central American children stuck in legal limbo (Luiselli 45). Even Jacob Lawrence’s The Migration Series, centered on African Americans moving north, calls attention to racism, meager wages, and few opportunities (Lawrence). These accounts show that while the American Dream still lights a spark of hope, it often remains uneven across race, status, and class.

***The American Dream of Mine***

My own perspective on the American Dream has shifted as I have grown accustomed to life in the United States. In my first year of college, I saw “fitting in” as an urgent priority. I tried to learn popular slang, show interest in sports I had never followed, and downplay my Chinese accent—all in hopes of seeming more “at home.” Yet no matter how many local customs I picked up, I still felt like an outsider when discussions turned to celebrities I had never heard of or national holidays that were new to me. This sense of dislocation taught me that erasing parts of my identity did not guarantee acceptance. Instead, it lead to me being disconnected from both my own heritage and the new environment I was trying to embrace.

Gradually, I realized that American culture is more than football, celebrity gossip, eternal parties or Stanley cups. It is a mix of many races, backgrounds, upbringings. People from every corner bring their own traditions, food, language, and music. That mix keeps changing and growing. A Latin American professor inspired me by showing how she stayed true to her roots while teaching. In A Tale of the Dispossessed, Laura Restrepo writes, “exile does not mean loss but rather another form of rebirth” (Restrepo 78). While I am not in exile, I do feel transformed. I later took an active role in an International Student club and shared my favorite Chinese poems at events. Each time, I realized that my culture added new energy to campus life. As Gerber notes, “the history of immigration in America is a history of redefining identity” (Gerber 289). My story is part of that ongoing change; and it is one of a million unique pieces that makes up the American Dream.

***Conclusion: An Unfinished Story***

The American Dream is no longer symbolized by suburban houses and white picket fences. It is a living, breathing concept that invites each of us to bring our own stories. As Sonia Nazario writes in Enrique’s Journey, “the end of a journey is never a true ending, but simply another beginning” (Nazario, 2006, p. 89). The Dream’s true power lies in its capacity for reinvention, shaped by the diverse experiences of those who pursue it. It is not a static prize but an unfinished story—one that we all help write through our struggles, hopes, and persistence.

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