

## AMERICAN DREAM

Lexile 700L

The *American Dream* is a popular idea about what most Americans want from their lives. Today, the American Dream often means having a good job, a home, a family, and enough money to care for oneself. Many Americans believe that America is a country where people can get the American Dream if they work hard and take risks. The idea of the American Dream has been around since the early 1900s. But the idea has changed over time. Some groups of people have been stopped from getting the American Dream in the past. But many Americans still believe they can get the American Dream through their own hard work.

### History of the American Dream

People started talking about the American Dream in the early 1900s. This idea arose during a time when Americans wanted change. Many wanted more rights. They wanted to work hard but also to earn fair **wages**. Wages are the money people are paid for their work. The American Dream was about everyone having those rights. It was about changing America to help more Americans be happy.

The phrase American Dream was first printed in a book in 1931. This book was *Epic of America* by James Truslow Adams. The book said the American Dream is a dream of “a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone.” This idea of the American Dream was not about getting more things and money for each person. It was about making the country better for everyone.

America then fought in wars. World War I lasted from 1914 to 1918. World War II lasted from 1939 to 1945. America changed a great deal after these wars. **Technology** changed, too. Technology is the knowledge to make new things. The new technology of the 1900s included faster vehicles and televisions. Technology helped companies make new products. People started buying more. They started to value the new things they could buy.

These advances changed society. They also changed what people thought of as the American Dream. People began to think of the American Dream as an individual goal. It was no longer about all people. It was about individuals getting what they wanted. It was about people having success for themselves. Many people thought the American Dream was about owning a home. Some people considered owning a car as part of the American Dream, too.

### Today's American Dream

The American Dream today is similar to what it was in the 1950s. It is still about having success. It is still about people getting what they want. But it has changed in some ways. For



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example, a study in 2017 showed that most people do not think money is part of the American Dream. The studies showed that Americans think having freedom is the most important part of the American Dream. The same study found that Americans think they can achieve the American Dream.

The American Dream has changed as the country has changed. America is still changing now. The idea of the American Dream could change again in the future.

## The Use of the American Dream

The American Dream is an idea. It is something that people think and talk about. People often talk about wanting to have the American Dream. **Politicians** often discuss the American Dream, too. Politicians are people who work in the government. Politicians often talk about helping Americans get the American Dream. The American Dream is also important in movies, on television shows, and in books. It is an idea that many made-up characters have thought about and tried to get.

## Problems with the American Dream

The meaning of the American Dream has changed over time. Yet it has always been about Americans having good lives. Most Americans would like to achieve the American Dream. But doing this can be difficult. Not all groups of people in America have always been treated fairly. Laws and rules made it hard for some groups of Americans to succeed. For example, some states in America in the 1950s had laws that hurt black people. The laws made black people live in certain areas. They made them go to certain schools. This made it hard for black people to fulfill the American Dream. Also, people who are born very poor in the United States might not achieve the American Dream. Yet, studies still show that many people of all backgrounds still think they can get the American Dream.

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### ■ By Elizabeth Mohn

*Elizabeth Mohn has more than ten years' experience as an author and editor of educational materials for all ages.*

## COMPREHENSION TEST

### Multiple-Choice Questions

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1. What did James Truslow Adams think of the American Dream?

- A. He thought it was about owning a home and a car.
  - B. He thought people achieved it through hard work.
  - C. He thought it was about people living happy lives.
  - D. He thought people achieved it by taking risks.
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2. What is the term for the money people are paid for work?

- A. jobs
  - B. technology
  - C. wages
  - D. goals
- 

3. How did unfair laws stop some Americans from getting the American Dream?

- A. by making houses expensive
  - B. by making them live in certain areas
  - C. by making wages lower
  - D. by making jobs harder to get
- 

### Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

4. The American Dream is often thought of as owning a home and a car, having a family, and having a \_\_\_\_\_.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ often talk about how they can help people get the American Dream.

6. Studies show that people of all ages think they can get the \_\_\_\_\_.

## COMPREHENSION TEST ANSWERS

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### Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

- 4. The American Dream is often thought of as owning a home and car, having a family, and having a **good job**.
- 5. **Politicians** often talk about how they can help people get the American Dream.
- 6. Studies show that people of all ages think they can get the **American Dream**.