

Is the American Dream Dead?

A white picket fence, 2.5 kids, weekend barbeques—this vision was once ingrained in the American psyche. The American Dream imagined this way was portrayed across media and permeated American culture. Today, America feels like a different place. The claim that America is evil—unforgivably and [systemically racist](#), [sexist](#), and hateful—runs counter to this idyllic picture of American life. This new vision of America begs a serious question: Is the American Dream dead?

American Society

Over the last few decades, American culture and society has dramatically shifted, and within the past couple of years (since the COVID-19 lockdowns), this change has quickened.

Katrina Trinko points this out when [discussing](#) a recent *Wall Street Journal* poll:

“In August 2019, mere months before the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) would shatter normal life in America, 89% of Americans thought hard work was very important, according to a [Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll](#). Sixty-two percent of Americans saw community involvement as very important. Over 6 out of 10 Americans thought patriotism was very important. Almost half of Americans (48%) saw religion as very important, and 43% saw having children as very important.

A new [Wall Street Journal poll](#), conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago, finds that support for all those values has plummeted.

Now, two-thirds of Americans (67%) see hard work as being very important. Only 38% see patriotism as very important. When it comes to religion and having children, it's now 39%

and 30%, respectively, who see those matters as very important.”

The morale of the American people seems to have been crushed. American [trust in institutions](#) is at an all-time low. And in the hostile political and cultural climate, other examples of the dearth of hope for the future abound.

Economics and Inflation

Feeding into this sentiment is the economic future America is facing. Inflation has [outpaced](#) wage growth during the past few years with the economic stimulus policies. This means that people are effectively earning less. Even though they may be making more dollars, those dollars don't buy as much as they did in 2019.

This isn't strictly a recent phenomenon, though. Adjusted for inflation, wages have generally [stayed the same](#) since the 1960s. At the same time, other items have become comparatively more expensive. For instance, the price of houses has [grown faster](#) than wages over the last 50 years. While these conditions affect everyone in America, they are particularly relevant for the younger generations as they set up their lives and set the tone for the future of the country.

Despite stagnant wage growth, these younger Americans are more [educated](#) than ever—in terms of graduating high school or college, though the quality of the education is subject to [much debate](#). And as we might expect as a result, [student loan debt](#) over the past decade and a half has rapidly grown.

In other words, Americans today are starting off at a severe financial disadvantage in a completely different economic landscape than many of their parents did. It's no wonder there's such pessimism for the country's future.

None of this is to say that we should bail out all college

loans or let those who make choices to go to college claim the victim card, but it does put the sentiment of today's America into some context.

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The economic and cultural conditions in America certainly need remedy, but our material possessions do not determine the worth of the country. America's worth—the promise of the country and the dream in that promise—are about life, liberty, and [the pursuit of happiness](#). Fixing America's economic, cultural, and political situation requires first going back to the country's founding principles.

In a practical sense, we can find ways to revive these values in our own lives. Building community, especially [religious community](#), can bring meaning and hope into our lives as well as the lives of those around us. Considering and encouraging alternative and affordable [educational](#) and career opportunities—such as [homeschooling](#) or [apprenticeships](#)—sets people up for a successful life and can give them financial stability to raise a family. Seeking to create a [traditional family structure](#)—falling in love, getting married, and having children—or supporting families in our lives (like by offering meals to a family with a newborn) builds the foundation for society.

Life has markedly changed in the past several decades in America—and not always for the better. However, that doesn't mean the American Dream is dead. It means that America desperately needs men and women who believe in America's founding principles.

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