

Summary of *The History Of The American Dream*

The American Dream has been an essential part of the building of America for centuries. However, while it was once thriving, it is now becoming less and less prominent with the weak economy not showing any signs for improvement. The author goes through the history of the American Dream, and how it has changed over the years. The article emphasizes the idea that the American people are facing the question of whether or not the dream has a future. "To recover the Dream requires knowing where it came from, how it lasted so long and why it matters so much." Meacham is saying that we have to explore the history and origins of the American Dream in order to restore it.

With the middle class slowly dying out, the American Dream is as well. The middle class is thinning due to costs rising and stagnant income. The American Dream and the middle class are completely in line. When the middle class dies, the American Reality dies.

In order to understand why the American Dream is slipping away, we must also understand its origins and history. The American Dream started with two goals: religion and riches. Explorers came to America in the 16th and 17th century in order to find gold, while religious dissenters came to express their religion freely. "We have been cognitively dissonant from the beginning." European settlers were coming for their own liberty and religious freedom, but then drove Native Americans out of their land for their own liberty. They were being cognitively dissonant, because they wanted one thing, but deprived other people from having what they wanted just so that they could have it. Meacham goes on to talk about the slave trade that happened in Virginia. "... While white settlers built and dreamed, people of color were subjugated and exploited by a rising nation that prided itself on the expansion of liberty."

The article talks about the government being a vital part of the American Dream because it "helped make the individual possible". There were many acts passed by the government that made the Dream possible. For example, the Pacific Railroad and Homestead act created a

transcontinental railroad. These acts helped take the American Dream out of the place where it was only for the white male, and took it into a place where it was a more equal and inclusive dream.

During the Great Depression, it seemed as if the American Dream was dead. However, the Dream was not only revived after World War II, but it had a new dimension: “the broad expectation that the government had a role to play in advancing individual lives.” FDR was responsible for helping to boost the economy after the Great Depression, because of the New Deal.

With the middle class slipping away, the American Dream is becoming harder and less likely to be achieved than any other time in American history, with the exception of the Great Depression. Other countries may even be attaining their own dreams much like the American one. The American Dream was an important issue for people considering which candidate was better to lead our country back in the 2012 election. The author explained that the winner had to be the one who could “fuel economic growth”. However, restoring the American Dream is not just up to the candidates, but more importantly, it is up to the people themselves.