

the american dream

'god helps them that help themselves'

By Janet Lliteras

It was a place to start over, a utopia, a land untouched by Europe. People came to this land because they believed it was new, untouched and nearly free for the taking.

They could start over with a new life, and maybe, just maybe they could have a better life. The American Dream was born. This dream has been caught on the pages of American literature. It has traveled west with the Daniel Boones and Davy Crocketts, and starved along side the jobless factory workers of the Depression Era.

Through hard time, the dream has remained shining, a goal to strive for, a hope for a better life.

Kenneth S. Knodt traced the American

Dream in his book *Pursuing the American Dream*. Perhaps the earliest example of the self-made man was Benjamin Franklin and his motto: "God helps them that help themselves," "Early to bed, early to rise..." "He that lived upon Hope will die fasting, There are no Gains, without Pains," and "Women and Wine, Game and Deceit, Make the Wealth small, and the Wants great." Franklin stressed the idea of working to achieve a better life.

The belief that America was the land of opportunity persisted. Knodt wrote that people believed the individual was free to work out his economic destiny, where the "nobody so often become(s) somebody on the strength of his personal powers," "that

any man can achieve fortune through the practice of industry, frugality, and sobriety..."

Self-help propagandists insisted that "rural origins foretold success and urban origins failure."

Knodt found one early writer who wrote, "The sturdy, vigorous, hardy qualities, the stamina, the brawn, the grit which characterize men who do great things in this world, are, as a rule, country bred." In 1883 a Brooklyn clergyman investigated the lives of 500 successful American men and concluded that "a man who wishes to succeed should select a country farm for his birthplace."

James Fenimore Cooper created Natty

Bumppo who thrived in the open spaces of the frontier. However, the 1900s saw the closing of the frontier and the creation of the industrialized society, where money made the man.

The dream for some meant money, enough money to live a life of leisure.

John C. Van Dyke wrote in *The Money God*:

It is money that the new generation expects to win, and it is money that the parents want them to win. The boy will make it, and the girl, if she is not a goose, will marry it. They will get it in one way or another.

Not all authors were as positive. F. Scott Fitzgerald attempted to show, according to Knodt, that the American Dream could never be realized because it was only a dream. His character Gatsby, in *Great Gatsby* is a self-made or self-created man who became rich through breaking the law. Gatsby believed he could conquer circumstances, that he could rearrange life the way he wanted it. Fitzgerald wrote:

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning—

Would man reach his goal? Would his dream become reality? What was reality?

John Steinbeck protested that poverty of the Great Depression in his book *The Grapes of Wrath*. People were being led to California by promises of a better place. They told of how they were mistreated, shot and beaten.

Homesteaders experienced a similar tragedy. Their dreams were rudely shaken by reality. Hamlin Garland in *Jason Edward*, wrote:

So this is the reality of the dream!
This is the homestead on the Golden West, embowered in tears beside the purling brook! A shanty on the barren plain, hot and lone as a desert, My God!

It wasn't just the frontier. The city wasn't pretty either. Cities were portrayed as centers of corruption and decay. Upton Sinclair exposed the unhealthy practices and unsafe working conditions of meat packing plants in *The Jungle*. Even wealthy men were not happy.

Edwin Arlington Robinson wrote a poem about Richard Cory, a rich gentleman, "rich, yes, richer than a king," who "went home and put a bullet through his head."

Despite the nightmare, Americans continued to strive for their dream, just as they continue to strive today, for who can live without hope?

Carl Sandburg expressed this idea in his poem entitled, "The people will live on." Part of it goes like this.

The learning and blundering people will live on...

This old anvil laughs at many broken hammers.

There are men who can't be bought. The fireborn are at home in fire. The stars make no noise. You can't hinder the wind from blowing.

Time is a great teacher. Who can live without hope?...



stereotype ousted...

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"We don't even have an equal rights amendment in the constitution," she said. "Half of the population is not even covered in the constitution."

Some of the goals to be accomplished yet, according to Edgar, are the end of job discrimination, equal opportunity for job training, equal pay based on skill not sex, and the right to control "our own reproductive systems."

The black woman's dream includes these and more, Lewis said. The black woman wants a better life, better job and educational opportunities and better housing.

Edgar and Lewis agree that hard work is the only way to make these dreams come true.

Black women have to work towards their goal, Lewis said. They should push for greater opportunity for them-

selves, and prepare for opportunities that will arise from the women's movement. He suggested women support political candidates who will help their cause.

Edgar encouraged women to work hard, and have the courage to not give up.

"Organize with other women at home and at work," she said. "Realize your aspirations don't have to be limited because you are female."

Women have to work for equality every moment, she said. "It's not something you can work a few hours a day on. It's something that is with you constantly."

Yes, women share a dream, a dream of equality. It's a very real dream to them. One that may take a long time to fulfill. But they appear to want it enough to dedicate their lives to obtain it.