

DOI(Journal): 10.31703/gssr
DOI(Volume): 10.31703/gssr.2025(X)
DOI(Issue): 10.31703/gssr.2025(X.II)



p-ISSN: 2520-0348

e-ISSN: 2616-793X

GSSR

GLOBAL SOCIAL SCIENCES REVIEW
HEC-RECOGNIZED CATEGORY-Y

www.gssrjournal.com

Global
Social Sciences Review
exploring humanity

Volum X, ISSUE II SPRING (JUNE-2025)



Double-blind Peer-review Journal
www.gssrjournal.com
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Article Title

From Promise to Paradox: Unmasking the American Dream

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Global Social Sciences Review

p-ISSN: [2520-0348](#) e-ISSN: [2616-793X](#)

DOI(journal):[10.31703/gssr](#)

Volume: X (2025)

DOI (volume):[10.31703/gssr.2025\(X\)](#)

Issue: II Spring (June 2025)

DOI(Issue):[10.31703/gssr.2024\(X-I\)](#)

Home Page

www.gssrjournal.com

Volume: IX (2024)

<https://www.gssrjournal.com/Current-issue>

Issue: II-Spring (June-2025)

<https://www.gssrjournal.com/Current-issues/10/2/2025>

Scope

<https://www.gssrjournal.com/about-us/scope>

Submission

<https://humaglobe.com/index.php/gssr/submissions>

Keywords: American Dream, 9/11, Manifest Destiny, Immigrants

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Pages: 225-236

DOI:[10.31703/gssr.2025\(X-II\).18](#)

DOI link: [https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2025\(X-II\).18](https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2025(X-II).18)

Article link: <http://www.gssrjournal.com/article/from-promise-to-paradox-unmasking-the-american-dream>

Full-text Link: <https://gssrjournal.com/fulltext/from-promise-to-paradox-unmasking-the-american-dream>

Pdf link: <https://www.gssrjournal.com/jadmin/Auther/31rv1olA2.pdf>



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Citing this Article

18	From Promise to Paradox: Unmasking the American Dream		
Authors	Syed Muhammad Bahramand Shah Abbas Jan	DOI	10.31703/gssr.2025(X-II).18
		Pages	225-236
		Year	2025
		Volume	X
		Issue	II

Referencing & Citing Styles

APA	Muhammad, S., Shah, B., & Jan, A. (2025). From Promise to Paradox: Unmasking the American Dream. <i>Global Social Sciences Review</i> , X(II), 225-236. https://doi.org/10.31703/Gssr.2025(X-II).18
CHICAGO	Muhammad, Syed, Bahramand Shah, and Abbas Jan. 2025. "From Promise to Paradox: Unmasking the American Dream." <i>Global Social Sciences Review</i> X (II):225-236. doi: 10.31703/Gssr.2025(X-II).18.
HARVARD	MUHAMMAD, S., SHAH, B. & JAN, A. 2025. From Promise to Paradox: Unmasking the American Dream. <i>Global Social Sciences Review</i> , X, 225-236.
MHRA	Muhammad, Syed, Bahramand Shah, and Abbas Jan. 2025. 'From Promise to Paradox: Unmasking the American Dream', <i>Global Social Sciences Review</i> , X: 225-36.
MLA	Muhammad, Syed, Bahramand Shah, and Abbas Jan. "From Promise to Paradox: Unmasking the American Dream." <i>Global Social Sciences Review</i> X.II (2025): 225-37. Print.
OXFORD	Muhammad, Syed, Shah, Bahramand, and Jan, Abbas (2025), 'From Promise to Paradox: Unmasking the American Dream', <i>Global Social Sciences Review</i> , X (II), 225-36.
TURABIAN	Muhammad, Syed, Bahramand Shah, and Abbas Jan. "From Promise to Paradox: Unmasking the American Dream." <i>Global Social Sciences Review</i> X, no. II (2025): 225-36. https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/Gssr.2025(X-II).18 .



Global Social Sciences Review

www.gssrjournal.com

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gssr>



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Abstract

The 9/11 attacks significantly changed the perception of the American Dream, revealing how the United States shifted from a welcoming society for immigrants and highlighting the deep impacts of this tragic event. This research digs into the myths and realities about the American Dream while applying a qualitative approach to analyze it. Key events and movements have significantly shaped public perception and introduced new interpretations with the passage of time. The research article examines the evolution of the American Dream alongside concepts of American exceptionalism as expressed by Alexis De Tocqueville, Manifest Destiny, multiculturalism, and cultural practices, which bring Diversity in the USA. In light of the above discussion, it also investigates the political, economic, and social repercussions of 9/11 on the very essence of the American Dream and how the Trump Administration's policies have redefined the aspirations associated with the American Dream for other individuals seeking to attain this ideal.

Keywords:

American Dream, 9/11, Manifest Destiny, Immigrants

Introduction

The American dream has transformed significantly throughout history, shaped by the shifting values and aspirations of society. At its core, it encompasses a variety of ideals, including the pursuit of upward mobility, the importance of self-reliance, and the belief in the opportunity for all to achieve personal success. This ever-evolving concept reflects the diverse experiences and dreams

of individuals striving for a better life in a land of promise and possibility. The founders of America laid the foundation stone of the American Dream. Besides political figures like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, many other political personalities, including Thomas Paine and Benjamin Franklin, contributed to the concept of the American Dream. The American dream is indeed a living concept, like a living organism. One



should not take it as a complete or absolute concept but rather as a relative term. The term "American Dream," while perceived as ambiguous by some critics, constitutes a fundamental element of American nation-building. This analysis will explore two contrasting perspectives: one that supports the American Dream and another that offers a critical assessment. The proponents of the American dream believe in individualism, capitalism, hard work, and determination, which lead to success. It is closely related to the American ideal of opportunity and self-reliance. The second school of thought posits that the American Dream is a myth; thus, it is a nightmare for many individuals. This discussion will boldly examine the transformation of the American Dream, American Exceptionalism, Multiculturalism, and cultural practices in the United States both before and after 9/11. It will provide a comprehensive analysis of the political, social, and economic impacts of 9/11 on the American Dream. Furthermore, it sheds light on the significant rise of Islamophobia and xenophobia in the aftermath of the attacks while also tackling the emergence of anti-American sentiments within the country. This comprehensive exploration promises to deliver valuable insights into these critical issues.

Materials and Methods

The research methodology presents a qualitative approach combined with a deductive framework to explore the myths and realities of the American Dream. Textual analysis is critical in conducting this in-depth survey. Due to practical constraints, direct data collection from the field in the U.S. was not feasible; thus, the data have been sourced from secondary materials, including congressional reports, speeches, books, research articles, newspapers, websites, documentaries, journal articles, and dissertations. To maintain a smooth flow of understanding, graphs and images have been intentionally excluded from the research.

Results

Before 9/11, the concept of the American Dream was predominantly regarded as a narrative of hope, individual achievement, and progress. However, there existed a discourse concerning the inadequacy of this Dream in addressing the systemic issues of racism and classism. The

American Dream took on a new meaning after 9/11, as it became more complex amid rising nationalism, economic struggles, and cultural divides. This concept increasingly merged with issues related to security, patriotism, and national identity. Simultaneously, the challenging economic landscape, characterized by inequality, job instability, and downturns, made the Dream feel less attainable for many Americans.

Discussion:

The Concept of the American Dream: A Brief Overview

Oxford English Dictionary defines the American dream as "the idea that every citizen of the United States should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative." James Truslow Adams (1931) coined the term 'American Dream' in his masterpiece *The Epic of America*, which defines it thus, "The dream of a land in which life should be better, richer, and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement". James Truslow Adams (2017) went on to say that the American Dream is "not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of their birth or position". Calvin C. Jillson (2004) mentions in his book *Pursuing the American Dream: Opportunity and Exclusion Over Four Centuries* that Walter Lippman (1914) penned down the phrase "the American Dream" in *Drift and Mastery* while James Truslow Adams (2017) popularized the phrase in his Classic *Epic of America*.

Evolution of the American Dream

The idea of resistance, hard work, striving for self-respect, and pursuit of happiness is found in innumerable works of different prominent thinkers and politicians like Thomas Paine, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Benjamin Franklin, and James.

Madison and many others. One can argue that the origin of the American dream sprouts from the Slogan life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, which is also incorporated in the Declaration of Independence in 1776. The American dream has

gone through an evolutionary process. Every age finds some successes and faces challenges, and has never gone to perfection. So, getting the American Dream is not a smooth ride, but rather, it is a rough ride. As Lawrence R Samuel (2012) mentions in *The American Dream: A Cultural History*:

Samuel (2012), noted that:

Despite being a constant presence, the American dream has hardly been a straight line. Its trajectory is a roller coaster ride of ups and downs and twists and turns. Frequently given its last rites, the dream has always managed to bounce back to life, each miraculous recovery both shaping and reflecting the renewal of the American spirit (p. 4)

Jim Cullen divides the concept of the American Dream in *A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation* (2004) into seven phases: (1) the Dream of the Good Life: The Puritan Enterprise (2) Dream Charter: The Declaration of Independence, (3) Dream of Good life: upward mobility (4) king of America: the dream of Equality (5) Detached houses: the dream of Homeownership (6) Dream of Good life: the cost (7) Extending the dream. He offers compelling insights into the American Dream and its transformation throughout history (Cullen, 2003).

The American dream has a complex history, as it includes difficult realities where Black individuals faced the injustices of slavery and women struggled for equal rights, including the right to vote. Discriminatory laws, like the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and Jim Crow Laws, were passed to segregate Black people from White people. Therefore, some critics believe that the American Dream is a myth because there are no equal opportunities for all races and colors. Cal Jellison contends that several classic American novels, including Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Richard Russo's *Empire Falls*, unequivocally fail to address the complexities of the American Dream. This perspective is also shared by other critics, including W.E.B. Du Bois, Toni Morrison, and Frederick Douglass. Frederick Douglass (1952) rebuked the white Americans in his speech titled "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?":

Douglass (2022), stated that:

The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of

justice, liberty, prosperity, and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought light and healing to you has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn (p. 5)

Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr. had strong reservations regarding the American Dream. Therefore, he delivered his famous speech, "I Have a Dream." "It is a dream deeply rooted in the American Dream. I have a dream that one day, this nation will rise and live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal" (King, 1963) Before the 9/11 incident, slavery and suppression of women were the main hurdles while pursuing the American dream, but this incident further added fuel to the fire, which resulted in xenophobia, islamophobia, and identity crises for immigrants. This framework thoughtfully explores the historical perspective, economic mobility, cultural dimensions, immigrant experiences, and the various challenges faced by the American Dream. This research aims to gain a deeper understanding of the American Dream in both the pre- and post-9/11 contexts.

American Exceptionalism and the American Dream

Since its inception, the United States of America has been organized by an ideology which is Americanism. Different political thinkers have said that the concept of Americanism is being treated in political discourse like other isms. Americanism originated from the creed, which consists of five words: liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, Laissez-faire, and populism. So, to extend further, the combination of these words makes American exceptionalism.

The concept of American exceptionalism, as mentioned by William V. Spanos (2013) in the research article "American Exceptionalism in The Post-9/11 Era: The Myth and The Reality," is the belief that the United States of America is fundamentally different and unique from other nations. This belief can be traced back to the late 1920s. The Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, first used the term to criticize a communist faction within the American communist party led by Jay Lovestone. This group is also known as Lovestonites; it believes that the U.S. was not subject to the same

historical forces that influenced Europe. Joseph Stalin condemned this act and called it a heresy against the very orthodox definition of communism. During the Cold War, the concept of American exceptionalism was reinterpreted, and it became a central stance against communism. Cold War thinkers believed that the U.S. not only resisted communism in America but also remained exempt from the communist laws proposed by Karl Marx. American exceptionalism suggests that it has a unique socio-economic and political system, therefore it defeated communism in The U.S. This idea reinforces that America is the beacon of democracy and its economic and political systems are inherently superior to those in communist countries, therefore, it underpins the very idea that America has the license to lead the world. So, this is how it gives the justification to the American people for the nullification of communism.

John Winthrop, in his famous sermon in Massachusetts, says, “We shall be as a city upon a hill--the eyes of all people are upon us. It indicates that the American Dream has roots in the Puritan enterprise. Ronald Reagan also idealized Winthrop’s idea in his farewell speech:

According to Reagan (1989):

I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind, it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors, and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it and see it still.

So, one can deduce that Ronald Reagan gives the modern definition of American exceptionalism.

American exceptionalism is a mission that starts from the 17th-century Puritan thought to the revolution, the doctrine of manifest destiny in the mid-19th century, and the late 19th-century imperialism, then proceeds to Wilson's idealism, to Cold War communism, and finally it reaches George W. Bush's unilateral actions. The above-mentioned transformational phases will be discussed in detail in the following discussion:

James W. Ceaser (2012) cites Beveridge's speech to the U.S. Senate in his article “The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism,” in which he explains:

Ceaser (2012) quoted that:

God has given us the spirit of progress to overwhelm the forces of reaction throughout the earth. He has made us adept at government that we may administer government among savage and senile peoples. Were it not for such a force as this, the world would relapse into barbarism and night. And of all our races ... he has marked the American people as his chosen nation to finally lead in the redemption of the world.

In the 19th century, manifest destiny influenced American foreign policy. It was a political program to acquire more territory in the American continent to implant democracy in the new regions and open the door for European immigrants. In a real sense, it was a land-grabbing idea in an exalted way. The proponents of manifest destiny were a group of intellectuals and political leaders, mostly democrats, who were leading the moment ‘Young America.’ John L. O Sullivan coined the term Manifest Destiny. Among other intellectuals were Stephan Douglas and Walt white man (Widmer, 1998).

The most prominent spokesperson for American exceptionalism was Josiah Strong (1885), a leading clergyman of that era and the author of the bestseller *Our Country*, which gives a proper understanding of the American mission (Exceptionalism). He states that God has bestowed a great deal of wisdom, honor, and skill upon the Anglo-Saxon race. He believes that a time will come when the world enters a competitive stage, and the dominant Anglo-Saxon race, with its centrifugal tendencies, will assert its influence on American soil. In his own words:

Strong (1985), Claim that:

Then this race of unequalled energy, with all the majesty of numbers and the might of wealth behind it the representative, let us hope, of the largest liberty, the purest Christianity, the highest civilization having developed peculiarly aggressive traits calculated to impress its institutions upon mankind, will spread itself over the earth. ... And can anyone doubt that

the results of this competition of races will be the survival of the fittest.

Samuel P. Huntington (2004) presents ideas that closely align with those of Josiah Strong. In Huntington's scholarly works, the themes of religion and Puritanism serve as fundamental components of American exceptionalism. Other than his popular phrase 'Clash of civilizations', He discusses in his post-9/11 book, *Who Are We? Challenges to America's National Identity* (2004), that though the settling of America was economic and other factors were also involved, religion was still central.

He justifies the violent practices of America across the world like pre-emptive war, military tactics of 'Shock and awe', and the unilateral regime change policy (P Huntington, 2004). In the aftermath of 9/11, the above-mentioned violent practices reflected in the 'war on terror' in George W. Bush's regime. To cut to the chase, due to American exceptionalism, the Bush administration justified the establishment of the 'Homeland Security State.' He idealizes American democracy and considers it exceptional in his address to the National Endowment for Democracy, asserting that freedom is not only for us but for all humankind. The discussion reveals that the United States universalized its Indigenous values, such as democracy and freedom, through the concept of American Exceptionalism. However, for many individuals, the American Dream and American Exceptionalism are perceived as myths, often regarded as a nightmare.

For many academicians and historians, American exceptionalism is a myth. A prominent historian, Godfrey Hodgson (2009), puts in his seminal work *Myths of American Exceptionalism* that there are myths that have been created throughout the history of the United States of America, which kept the people of America in delusion. The myths are discussed as follows: the myth of innocence; believes that America is fundamentally innocent and a moral specimen for the world, but Hodgson (2009) argues that the U.S has a long history of coercive actions which are driven by the American self-interest like genocide of American native citizens and invasion of countries like Iraq and Afghanistan. Second is the myth of benevolence; the US is often seen as the beacon of Democracy, freedom, and human rights. He debunks the myth

and reveals that America's invasion abroad in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East was motivated by the US economic and strategic interests rather than altruism.

The third myth is the Myth of Progress. In the United States, there is a widely held belief that the country is constantly advancing in upward mobility and justice. While it's true that there has been progress in certain areas, Hodgson emphasizes that systemic issues such as racism, injustice, and economic inequality are deeply entrenched in the fabric of the country (Hodgson, 2009). The fourth myth is the Myth of the Free Market; The American economic system is always considered a fair system where anyone can succeed via hard work. He illustrates that the corporation and the wealthy people always manipulate the market, which leads to the exploitation of workers, inequality, and environmental degradation. Last but not least, the myth of the good war; Whereas WWII is remembered as a good war by the US to defeat fascism and save democracy (Hodgson, 2009). He acknowledges the vital actions taken to combat fascism and other injustices. However, it is also important to consider the significant casualties resulting from the US bombing of Japan. This situation highlights the need for a deeper reflection on American exceptionalism and its impact on various communities around the world.

It is important to mention the other names and works of prominent writers who have challenged American exceptionalism. Howard Zinn's (2003) influential book *A People's History of the United States* challenges the traditional narratives about America, which glorify America's past and ignore the sufferings of common people and the horror of Slavery. Similarly, in another seminal work, *Declarations of Independence: Cross-Examining American Ideology* (1990), he critically examines the various facets of American ideology, including the fairy tales of individualism, meritocracy, and benevolence in foreign Policy (Zinn, 1990). Noam Chomsky (2003) in his scholarly work, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* and *Who Rules the World*, exposes the famous narratives of American exceptionalism. He critiques the US interventionist policies abroad and challenges the very notion of American moral superiority. Similarly, Dunbar-Ortiz's (2014) book *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*

presents a gruesome picture of American exceptionalism by highlighting the adverse effects of colonization and dispossession. In the book, *The Assassination of Julius Caesar: A People's History of Ancient Rome* and *The Face of Imperialism*, Michael Parenti (2004) critiques American Exceptionalism and also examines the global consequences of US imperialism. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said (1993) offers insight into the relationship between culture, imperialism, and ideology, and critically evaluates how Western nations, including the US, have justified dominance and control through the constructed narratives. James W. Loewen (2018) argues in his masterpiece, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, that American history textbooks perpetuate the myth of American exceptionalism or misrepresent American history. In the same vein, the book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* by Michelle Alexander (2010) challenges the notion of American exceptionalism. It examines the systematic racism and the adverse effects of mass incarceration on African American communities.

Multiculturalism and Cultural Practices before and after 9/11 in America.

Multiculturalism is a vital element of American society. Therefore, American society is called a melting pot, where people come across the world to pursue the American Dream. Before 9/11, it was comparatively easy for immigrants to pursue the American Dream. Unfortunately, the environment became a little bit difficult for people to pursue the American Dream after 9/11. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) mention that before 9/11, the US had a significant influx of immigrants from various regions, including Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Cultural practices before 9/11 presented a unique plot, and educational institutions promoted multicultural awareness through their curricula. The Multicultural Education movement (1970s-1990s) advocated textbooks that incorporate the themes of diverse histories and contributions of various ethnic communities. The motive of this movement was to challenge the Eurocentric narratives and to build an understanding of American true history. Takaki (2008) elaborates in his book *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* that the Civil Rights movement (1950s-1960s) helped to promote

multiculturalism. These movements were sufficient to challenge racial segregation and discriminatory laws. The Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965) paved the way for eliminating the legal barriers to equality. It created an inclusive environment for people of color and other minority groups. The Immigration Reforms and Nationality Act of 1965 eliminated the national origins quota system, resulting in a significant increase in immigration from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This period fostered the development and enrichment of diverse art forms, cultural expressions, and culinary traditions.

The period before 9/11 was experiencing cultural diversity and integration, and the subsequent legislation made way for multicultural practices and persuasion of the American Dream. After the event, everything changed dramatically, and the terrorist attacks drastically changed the perception of multiculturalism. Louise A. Cainkar, in his review of a book, explains that this event increased suspicion and surveillance. The Patriot Act (2001) gave immense power to government authorities to interrogate and monitor the individuals who were suspected of terrorism; Communities were targeted indiscriminately (Cainkar, 2009). Peek (2011) adds that following 9/11, the surge of sentiment against immigrants was at a high point, especially against those people who belonged to Muslim communities. Moreover, discriminatory practices and hate crimes increased, fueled by misinformation. It hugely impacted cultural expression; many individuals were not able to express their culture profoundly, and altered their cultural practices to avoid suspicion. The focus of public discourse shifted to national security, identity, and patriotism, overshadowing the celebration of multiculturalism (Peek, 2011). The American Dream has gone through significant changes, and the themes of economic prosperity and upward mobility have shifted to security and safety. Immigrants, especially Muslims, have suffered a lot from these new developments, and it has become difficult for them to pursue the American Dream. One can argue that the 'Melting pot' in America turned into a 'salad bowl' after 9/11.

Impacts of 9/11 on the American Dream: Political Impacts

The attacks on September 11, 2001, have had

profound effects on the American Dream. The attacks led to significant changes in US domestic and foreign policy. It affected the American sense of security, civil liberties, and its global position. So, these changes in broader concepts influenced the American Dream, which has been traditionally linked with prosperity, upward mobility, and freedom. After the 9/11 attacks, the American Congress swiftly passed the Patriot Act (2001), which gives immense power to the US concerned authorities to counter terrorism and detain suspected individuals. Dempsey and Cole (2006) mention in the book review "Terrorism and The Constitution," that the US Patriot Act (2001) completely altered the legal landscape while giving immense power to law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Similarly, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (2002), which consolidated various state agencies for swift coordination in times of terrorism threats, marked a restructuring of the federal government machinery. The report "The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (Authorized Edition)" compiled by Jacobson and Colon (2006) noted that the creation of the Department of Homeland Security was the utmost transformation of the US state machinery in the last half-century.

Civil liberties were at stake after 9/11, and common people were under constant surveillance by the state machinery. NSA's mass data collection was justified to prevent further terrorist attacks in the future, which has sparked controversies and debate over privacy rights in America. Political commentators criticize such extensive surveillance of the masses, which has led to the erosion of Fundamental Civil Rights. As Kilroy and Greenwald (2016) observe in the journal article "Reviewed Work: No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State by Glenn Greenwald," the secret collection of data of American citizens by the NSA was a serious threat to individual privacy. Post-9/11 policies were used for racial and religious profiling, which targeted Muslim communities, especially those of Middle Eastern descent. These practices led to hate crimes, discrimination, and a gruesome atmosphere of suspicion. Peek describes that Muslim communities found themselves in the eye of a quagmire and national backlash and suffered from persistent

scrutiny from both state agencies and their fellow citizens.

Stricter Immigration control paved the way for fear and anger. This control system makes the environment more challenging for immigrants to achieve economic and social prosperity, which are the main components of the American Dream. Programs like the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) specifically pursued non-citizens, predominantly from Muslim countries. As Akram and Johnson (2003) in the book chapter "Race, Civil Rights, and Immigration Law after September 11, 2001: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims" believe that NSEER required non-citizens of the US to undergo certain fingerprinting, photographing, and interviews. Ngai (2006) noted in "No Human Being is Illegal" that the post-9/11 era witnessed increased cultural barriers for immigrants under the slogan of national security. The military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, undertaken as part of the American war on terror, have significantly undermined the United States' standing in the international arena. These prolonged conflicts, marked by intense combat and complex geopolitical challenges, have led to a perception of American decline and vulnerability, diminishing its influence and complicating relationships with other nations around the globe. The prime motive of these wars was to save American values from terrorist activities; however, it paid huge political and economic costs due to the war's longevity, which overshadowed the American Dream. Bacevich (2005) argues in "The New American Militarism, How Americans Are Seduced by War" that the war on terror fundamentally altered the US Foreign policy and pushed the US to a long, uncertain military engagement. Democracy and freedom are the core values of American ideals, but controversial practices like drone strikes and the notorious interrogation draw the attention of critics. Many critics believe these actions were against the very essence of the American dream. Ricks (2007) illustrates that the US war on terror, particularly in Iraq, deteriorated the moral status of the US in the world.

Economic Impacts

The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks led to the redefinition and re-evaluation of the American Dream for many people. As we know, the

traditional notion of the American Dream was built on economic prosperity and upward mobility, which was challenged by uncertainty and security threats. People were thinking about their security and safety rather than their economic status. These attacks caused both immediate and long-term economic consequences: After the event, the US saw a huge downturn in its economy. The New York Stock Exchange remained shut down till September 17, 2001, which marked the longest shutdown since the Great Depression in 1929. Makinen (2011) mentions in the article "The Economic Effects of 9/11: A Retrospective Assessment" that the 9/11 attacks caused economic damage estimated at \$60 billion and \$123 billion in the following year. He also observes that certain industries were seriously hit by the events, and several airlines led to bankruptcy, like United Airlines and US Airways. The airline industry saw a massive economic setback due to the temporary shutdown of airports, travel bans, tight security measures, and strict immigration laws. Similarly, the tourism industry was extremely affected by tight security measures and travel bans.

In the long-term economic consequences, the US government increased spending on security and defense. Bilmes (2013) puts in her research article "*The Financial Legacy of Iraq and Afghanistan.*" The war in Afghanistan and Iraq, combined with other homeland security initiatives, caused an estimated \$5 trillion cost directly as well as indirectly in the following decade, which posed other higher economic concerns like higher interest payments, etc. Likewise, the labor market saw disruption due to the redirection of resources towards national security. So, these shifts jeopardized travel and tourism. Moreover, this incident seriously perturbed income distribution and social mobility. In the wake of 9/11, the then-US government took various fiscal measures, including tax cuts, reduction of interest rates, and increased government spending, to boost the economy. As Blinder and Zandi (2015) rightly state in "*The Financial Crisis: Lessons for the Next One,*" these initiatives were crucial to helping the US economy in the short term but also added to debt in the long term. The psychological impacts were huge of 9/11 on the consumer's behaviors. Consumers became more conscious, and they prioritized saving money rather than spending it on unnecessary items due to the uncertain environment in America at that

time. Makinen (2011) observes that the slowdown of the housing market rate, followed by the increased housing market in the 2000s due to low interest rates, contributed to the 2008 financial crisis. Bilmes also has the view that the long-term economic plans after 9/11 have contributed to the national debt, which has enormous impacts on American and socio-economic mobility (Bilmes, 2013).

Social Impacts

The attacks had enormous social impacts on the United States of America; they disrupted the US way of progress from economic prosperity to security and peace. These changes significantly influenced national identity, and social cohesion redefined the American dream. The strict security measures affected the daily routines of American lives, and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (2002) and Patriot Act (2001) further put the lives of non-US citizens into difficulty, which led to islamophobia and xenophobia, these phobias paved the way for Anti-Americanism in the United States of America.

Islamophobia and Xenophobia

The events of September 11, 2001, fueled the fire of the rise of Islamophobia in the United States of America. Before these events, Muslims were the same people as the Americans, but after that, they became different beasts for the American Federal Agencies. The impacts encompass various factors like changing American Immigration policies and the experiences of American Muslims. After the events, there was a significant rise in discrimination and hate crimes against immigrants, especially Muslims.

Gottschalk and Greenberg (2008) illustrate in their Seminal work, *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy*, that Islamophobia in the United States of America created a sphere of fear for Muslims, and it was quite challenging for them to feel safe in the US. Supporting the above idea, Shaheen (2015) describes in the book, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, that the media role was extremely critical and influential after the 9/11 events. Muslims were portrayed as extremists and terrorists, and negative stereotypes were perpetrated against them. He says that this biased depiction of Muslims in the media contributed to the

marginalization of Muslim communities in America. Muslim communities experienced extreme surveillance, bad profiling, and discrimination. Legislation like the Patriot Act (2001) and NSEERS makes it difficult to achieve economic prosperity and well-being and to pursue the American Dream. Bakalian et al (2011) argue in *Middle Eastern and Muslim American studies since 9/11* that Muslims experienced a lot of discrimination in various facets of life, including education and employment. The Muslim people were harassed in working environments, even though they were bullied in schools and other educational institutions. This discrimination obstructs the way to prosperity and success of Muslims which making it difficult for them to pursue the American Dream.

The 9/11 events led to xenophobia and caused tight security measures and strict immigration laws with increased suspicion. The consequences of the events were emphasized on security due to the fear of terrorism, which polarized American society. This polarization undermines social cohesion, the very notion of the American Dream. Chomsky (2003) argues in *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* that the US federal government implemented stricter policies, which caused a significant amount of deportation, particularly those who were perceived as a threat to American security. Critics believe that xenophobia led to a culture that excluded immigrants from the race to pursue the American Dream, thus it caused the cultural and social exclusion of Immigrants.

Anti-American Sentiments

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the US experienced anti-Americanism, which is characterized by the growing dissenting view of US policies both at home and abroad. The elements contributing to anti-Americanism were the US's controversial foreign policies, political polarization, economic inequality, and erosion of civil liberties. Noam Chomsky points out that the invasion of Iraq was based on faulty intelligence regarding mass destruction. This led to anti-Americanism on a mass level because the critics perceived it as aggression against innocent people under the slogan of self-defence. Security measures reduced privacy protection and undermined the freedom of civil liberties that are the very essence of American values. The illegitimate incarceration of prisoners at

Guantanamo Bay and the derogatory interrogation of people in the US further exacerbated anti-Americanism in the US. The shift of economic expenses from social security to traditional security diminishes the layperson's purchasing power; moreover, the aggressive foreign policy tools further pave the way for anti-Americanism. Due to the above-mentioned factors, US history experienced the manifestation of anti-Americanism in protest, and Activism like MoveOn.org and Code Pink organizations strongly opposed US aggression. Similarly, in art and cultural expression, Moore's (2004) *The Official Fahrenheit 9/11 Reader* film and many other artistic works critically analyzed the Bush Administration policies that hindered the pursuit of the American Dream.

Trump's Regime: Reinterpretation of the American Dream

Trump's presidency reinterprets the very notion of the American Dream, and it is challenged by the economic nationalism attitude, embraced by his administration, as well as the strict immigration policies. This deeply affected the opportunities available for social mobility that were previously synonymous with the country. An integral part of the protectionist trade policies, which were contained in the "America First" approach, was the imposition of tariffs on imports from China as well as changing trade agreements like the USMCA (United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement), which substituted NAFTA in 2020 to aid manufacturing and job opportunities in the US. While striving to boost domestic industries, scholars like Chad P. Bown have noted that the tariffs imposed did increase the prices for American consumers without clear improvement for global supply chains, which complicated the expected prospects for economic growth and the promise of getting jobs (Bown, 2021). At the other end, Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman argued in their co-authored works defending that the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act was designed to benefit the rich individuals and firms to the extreme worsening already deep income gaps, which made the case this hard work does not lead to upward social mobility (Saez & Zucman, 2019).

The administration's immigration policies have exacerbated social alienation and fear among immigrants due to the unfounded travel bans on

predominantly Muslim countries, family separations at the border, and intensified deportation activities. These policies further harden the image of America as a nation that welcomes and provides opportunities to foreigners. It deepened already existing patterns of civic ruptures and social harmony fractures. This raises the question whether the 'American Dream' is still plausible to the nation's mindset about race and divides (Center, [2016](#)).

Conclusion

The concept of the American Dream originated in the 20th century, but its foundation traces back to the 17th century, as already mentioned above. It is important to mention that the 9/11 event, in a certain way, partially redefined the American Dream. Pre 9/11 America was an open society, but after the incident, strict security measures became daily norms in America. The legislation under the slogan of 'war on terror' further deteriorated the living conditions for people in America, especially the immigrants who wanted to pursue the

American Dream. Therefore, anti-Americanism reflected in the political discourse is a reaction against the US's aggressive domestic and foreign policies, which caused Xenophobia and Islamophobia in the US. The incumbent Trump Administration policies reflect protectionism and xenophobic elements. Therefore, the diaspora faces certain challenges that hinder the pursuit of the idealized American dream. It is important to note that the current U.S. government policies can be critically evaluated in future research, as this is not the focus of this paper.

Acknowledgments

This article is derived from a thesis submitted for the MPhil degree, and it has not been published in any electronic or press sources.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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