



The
**American
Dream**
is **Dead**

(Long Live the American Dream!)



by **Karol Gajda**





About Karol Gajda

I'm on a quest to help 100 exceptional people (that's you!) achieve Ridiculously Extraordinary Freedom. I live anywhere (Wroclaw, Poland at the time of this writing), don't eat animals or animal products, and I'm the biggest Neti pot enthusiast you may ever meet.

You can read more via [E-mail](#), [RSS](#), or the [Web](#).



What Is A Manifesto?

When I started my site I never planned on writing a Manifesto. I planned on writing [Black Books](#). Underground guides on specific topics. But then I read the definition of Manifesto: a public declaration of intentions (as issued by a political party or government).

Considering the topic we're discussing, this is a Manifesto. I'm not a political party or government (obviously), but to say this doesn't involve politics and government would be a lie. This is my public declaration. In the last sentence of this Manifesto I'll ask you to make one as well.



About This Manifesto

I'm not a huge fan of copyrights or restrictions. A Manifesto should spread free. Much [like my blog](#), feel free to steal this Manifesto and share it wherever you see fit. It is non-commercial in nature and you will find no affiliate links inside.

To make it easy you can send your friends to the following link to download their very own copy:

<http://www.ridiculouslyextraordinary.com/the-american-dream-is-dead/>





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This Manifesto has no table of contents. I deliberately cut out all the fluff and made it easy to read in under 15 minutes.





The American Dream is Dead

(Long Live the American Dream!)

The phrase The American Dream conjures up lots of interesting thoughts amongst people. After I wrote this manifesto and began asking friends "What does the American Dream mean to you?" many of the answers revolved around freedom. Some of the answers (one of which is shared in this manifesto by the great [Derek Sivers](#)) asked why I limit it to "American?" Why put The Dream in a box?

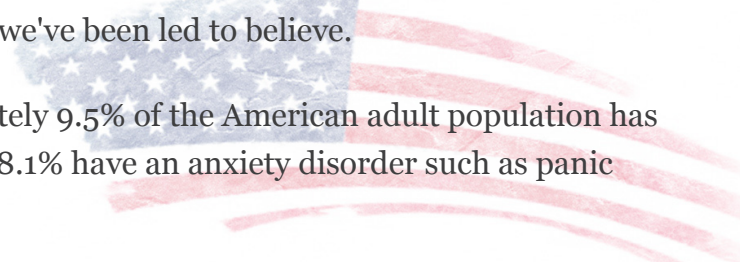
Part of it is history. The American Dream is a common, well-known phrase. Even if you're not from the USA you may very well be familiar with this phrase. At the very least you probably understand what it represents. Or, as the case may be, what it's *supposed* to represent.

Thoughts on "American": I agree that the word "American" is misused, but I also know if you're from the USA people around the world call you an "American." When in India or Thailand if somebody asked me where I was from and I answered "United States of America" they would look confused. If I stated "America" their eyes widened and they'd exclaim "America!" This wasn't an isolated incident, but a regular occurrence.

The American Dream is Universal. It's not just for US citizens or residents of the United States of America. No matter your race, creed, location, political views, or education, The American Dream applies to you. Later in this manifesto I'll rename The American Dream into something Universal. ;)

The American Dream is simply a phrase that represents opportunity, freedom, comfort, and prosperity. Ultimately these all culminate in happiness. At least that's what we've been led to believe.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health approximately 9.5% of the American adult population has a mood disorder such as major depression or bipolar disorder. 18.1% have an anxiety disorder such as panic disorder or OCD.



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Is that happiness? Is *that* The American Dream?

No.

So what happened?

First, let's quickly talk about the roots of the Dream.

In a way The American Dream has been around for centuries. Explorers came to North American shores in search of something better.

In those days The American Dream was rooted in a simpler way of life. Yes, these settlers wanted more riches, but they were willing to take their time ([delay gratification](#)), sacrifice, and work hard to acquire it.

The California Gold Rush of the mid-1800s was the first big push for The American Dream that we're most familiar with today. What I mean by that is it's the first time "overnight success" seemed possible.

It was the beginning of what I call The Magic Pill Phenomenon, which is essentially what we've been living since. (Top secret tip: there is no magic pill.)

The Magic Pill Phenomenon is the feeling you get when you hear about a "new" money making opportunity, get really excited, spend money and time, and either don't take action or take unfocused, unsuccessful action.

News of the discovery of gold in California in 1848 brought 300,000 people to the State from the rest of the US and abroad.

While California, specifically San Francisco, grew by leaps and bounds, the majority of these gold miners didn't reach any level of success. In truth, according to the *Journal of Economic History*, most miners made very little or lost money. (*Does this sound familiar?*)



As for the term "The American Dream," it was first put into print back in 1931 in a book called *The Epic of America* by James Truslow Adams.

The American Dream is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement."

Mr. Adams makes an interesting point. "Opportunity for each according to ability or achievement."

What has happened over the years is American Dream seekers have developed an entitlement mentality and turned it into a chase for more material goods. "Hard work be damned, I deserve the best in all its rich splendor!"

With consumer culture running rampant throughout the 20th and 21st centuries the American Dream has been synonymous with owning things: a big (and bigger still) house, a fancy car, extracurricular toys (e.g. boats and jet skis), big TVs, gaming consoles, jewelry, \$200 jeans, and other *things*.

Our culture transitioned from "buy what you can afford, because there is no other way" to "buy whatever you want, here's a credit card, be responsible now, OK?"

The American Dream, unlike what Mr. Adams stated above, became "I live in the USA, give me my Dream. I will not work for it. I expect it." This entitlement mentality is toxic, scary, and is the root of many problems of our past, present, *and* future.

Who's At Fault?

We all are.

It's not the banks. It's not the government. It's not your mortgage broker. It's not the President.

Yes, you've been lied to. Yes, you've been taken advantage of.





But we all messed it up.

Through a perfect storm of events, predatory lenders, a government with no foresight, and people who put more trust in others than themselves, we all came together and broke The American Dream.

The sooner we accept the fact that we messed this up together. The sooner we stop placing blame elsewhere. The sooner we can fix this.



My Story

My family, like many other immigrant families, came to the US with hopes of a better life. I was just shy of my 1st birthday before arriving on American soil so I don't have any recollection of the Communist Poland my Parents were leaving.

What I do know is that with a Communist regime in place people are not free.

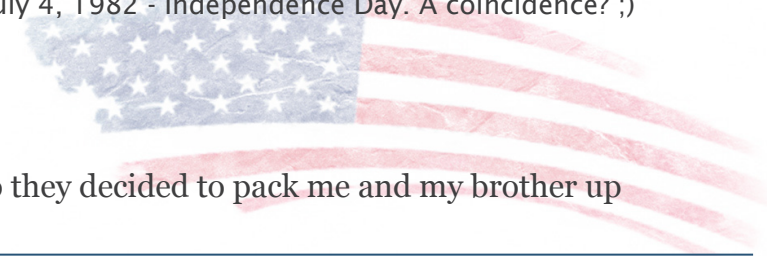
They're not free to be rich or even free to be poor. That choice is not theirs. Their economic status is essentially the same as everybody else's. Barely scraping by. The people are not free to do what they want. Most everything is decided.

For some people, having these important choices made for them made life easy. No choices meant no failures. It's a complacency mentality that is actually similar to what has happened with The American Dream. While we still have the freedom to choose, we decide not to, because failure is scary.

For some people, like my Parents, no choices meant *no way*. So they decided to pack me and my brother up



Me and my Mom in the Bay City Times
July 4, 1982 - Independence Day. A coincidence? ;)



and head out. 2 suitcases, 2 children, a few hundred dollars in savings, and absolutely no grasp of the English language.

Success? Failure? Who knew what would happen. But there had to be something better.

In Search Of The American Dream

We arrived on US soil on March 1, 1982. There was a big hullabaloo about us arriving and we were on the front page of the local newspaper. Even at 361 days old the paparazzi wanted a piece of me. ;) We were in the newspaper a few more times, hence my fat baby picture above!

With the help of the kind people of Mt Pleasant, Michigan my Dad got a job at a factory. Even though he was an Engineer, it's difficult to get a white collar job when you speak only a handful of words of English. So **he did what he had to do** and went to work doing manual labor.

That's an important point and I want to make it clear: he did what he had to do.

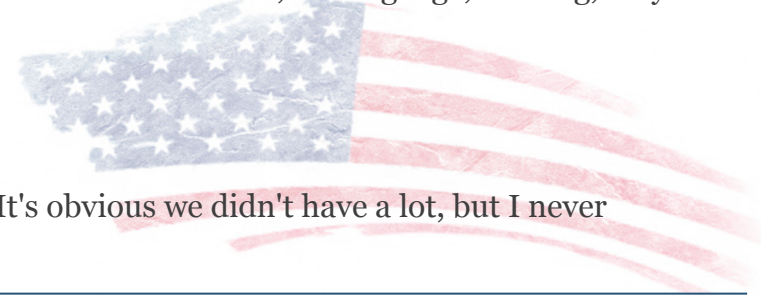
Manual labor, however, wasn't good enough. It was good enough *for the time being*, but it wasn't good enough for the future. Over the next few years my Parents learned English and eventually my Dad found a white collar job in Sterling Heights, MI. So we moved to what was (and still is) one of the safest cities in the United States. Just 9 miles from one of the most dangerous cities in the US: Detroit. (Interesting how that works out, huh?)

By this time I was just starting Elementary school. Two years later my Mom, a food scientist, also got a job and me and my Brother began to fend for ourselves on the mean streets of Sterling Heights. Meaning, we played outside without fear.

Just a year later my Parents bought their first home. Beginning with almost no cash, no language, nothing, they bought their first home within 6 years of landing in the US.

Was this The American Dream?

I've never asked my Parents if we were poor when I was young. It's obvious we didn't have a lot, but I never



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wanted for anything.

Well, let me rephrase. I wanted a lot, but I got what I got.

While all my friends were getting the awesome new Reebok Pump shoes I got the much cheaper LA Gear Regulators. Would I have rather had the Reeboks like my favorite NBA players? Yes. Did it matter that I got \$40 LA Gears, a brand being endorsed by the likes of Paula Abdul instead? In the grand scheme of things, it didn't matter at all.

I could play basketball. That's what really mattered. When you're on the court **nobody cares what tools you're using as long as you get the job done.** If they do care about the tools you're using then they're probably not the type of people worth associating with.

That's an important lesson than can be extrapolated to any facet of life.

You may not be the smartest, or the fastest, or the best. But if you get the job done, if you make things happen, then good things will come. It's not the tools, it's what you do with them.

And yet, not having the "best" shoes left a bad taste in my mouth. It instilled a hunger. Or as [Gary Vaynerchuk](#) might call it, "hustle." This would set me up for some important lessons later in life.

As I grew older my Parents got higher paying jobs, but the rules of life didn't change much. There was a little more discretionary spending, but even that was capped. For example, when I was 13 and wanted to learn how to play guitar I had to pay for half of it. And it was my Christmas present. :)

I don't know if these lessons were intentional or not, but they did teach me the value of money and the value of paying for what I [wanted](#) instead of putting it on credit.

While other kids my age were going through guitars like candy, I simply fixed mine when it broke and used it almost non-stop for 7 or 8 years.





The Chase

Although I never truly wanted for anything, I was jealous of my friends who had all the cool things I thought I wanted. I didn't need Reebok Pumps or Nike Air Jordans, but I didn't care. I wanted them. Rational thinking be damned. Price be damned. I wanted it all. I don't believe this is a result of growing up in the US. As the saying goes, "The grass is always greener on the other side." That's another root cause of The American Dream which has kept many people in a never-ending cycle of consumption.

So I did what so many others have done, and so many others will do.

I chased The (broken and bastardized) American Dream.

I had it good growing up.

I wanted better.

I studied hard. I hustled. I got a full academic scholarship to University and I started multiple small businesses. Web design, selling on eBay, affiliate marketing, information product marketing, permission based e-mail marketing, and more.

I wanted a big house, a black BMW, and more. Nothing was going to stop me. I was going to do what I had to do.

What happened?

I got everything I thought I wanted.



Was *this* the American Dream?

No.

Without a doubt, *that* American Dream is dead.

What ended up happening for me is that everything I owned was *just* something I owned. Nothing more, nothing less. Instead of being thrilled with all I had achieved, the realization that none of these material goods mattered sunk me into years of depression.

It wasn't until the beginning of 2008 that I began moving that dark cloud and seeing the light again.

The American Dream is not about owning things. Most of the things we "own" end up owning us. That's where we've gone wrong in the last several decades.

Owning a new house is not the American Dream.

Owning a fancy car is not the American Dream.

Owning a big screen TV is not the American Dream.

Owning an expensive guitar is not the American Dream.

A bigger house brings more to repair, more to look after, more utility bills to pay.

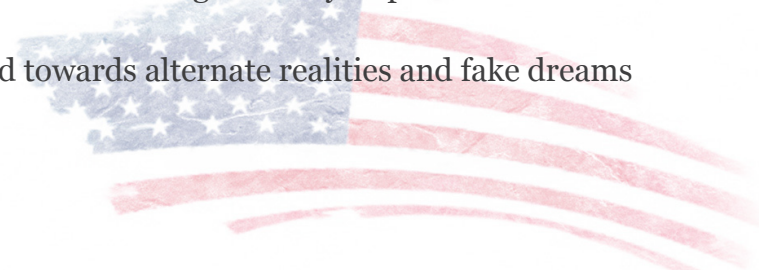
In a fancier car repairs cost more, and getting from point A to point B is not significantly improved.

With a big screen TV (any TV, actually) our thoughts are directed towards alternate realities and fake dreams instead of our present and future situations.

That does not sound like The American Dream to me.



My "American Dream."





Long Live The American Dream!

The American Dream is exactly what I stated in the opening of this manifesto: the American Dream represents opportunity, freedom, comfort, and prosperity.



Opportunity

The opportunity to do what you want, within reason.

Do you really want to sit at home and watch TV? Well then congratulations, that is your American Dream. You have no right to complain about the state of your American Dream if you choose a less-than-stellar American Dream.

Do you want to start a business and provide your own way? Congratulations, that is your American Dream.

Do you want to [travel the world and experience new cultures](#)? Congratulations, that is your American Dream.





Freedom

The Freedom to do what you want, when you want, wherever you want, with whomever you want.

Most importantly, the Freedom of choice.

You can choose what you want to do with your life. You can choose to eat a donut or an apple. You can choose to watch TV or read a book. You can choose to buy things on credit or save money and actually own what you buy.

That American Dream is still alive and well. It always will be. You can use it however you want to use it, because you have Freedom.





Comfort

The comfort to know you will be able to feed, clothe, and house yourself. Once these basic necessities are taken care of a world of stress is taken off your shoulders.



Prosperity

No matter what's going on in the World, financial prosperity is still part of the American Dream. That hasn't changed.

What has changed is how we recognize prosperity. It is not living in the biggest house, but actually owning a house outright.

Instead of living in a 3,000 square foot home that owns you how about actually owning a [Tiny Home](#)?

Instead of social climbing to try to get the highest paying job, how about cutting back to basics and enjoying life, friends, and family?

It's OK to want to be financially wealthy. But financial wealth for the purpose of financial wealth is a fool's game.



Prosperity With Purpose

What I mean is that we need to have a purpose for wanting financial prosperity.

Has your dream always been to own an NBA basketball team?

That's wonderful. You are going to have to hustle but it is doable.

Has your dream always been to earn a pilot's license and do a solo flight around the world? Perfect, you can figure out exactly how much that costs right now and then figure out how much you need to make it happen.

Here is why you need to think about experiential financial goals instead of regular financial goals: when you reach a regular financial goal you never actually reach it because you want more.

If you set an experiential financial goal and want to fly solo around the world there is an end point in sight and you're working towards something tangible.

That is true prosperity, true freedom.

That is the American Dream.





Choose Your Own American Dream

When I was young, Choose Your Own Adventure books were very popular. I loved them as many of my friends did. These books provided a guide, but we chose the route and the end result depended on our choices.

The guide to The American Dream, YOUR American Dream, is available to you right now.

You can choose your route.

My American Dream is doing exactly what I'm doing. I've been working for myself since age 19 and inspiring others to do the same via my blog. I own almost nothing (3 T-shirts, 1 pair of pants; [full list here](#)), I get to live anywhere I choose for as long as I choose, I eat an amazing vegan diet full of nutritious foods, and I get to meet inspiring people on a regular basis through the connections I'm privileged enough to make through blogging.

Someone asked me recently what I do with my money since I live so frugally.

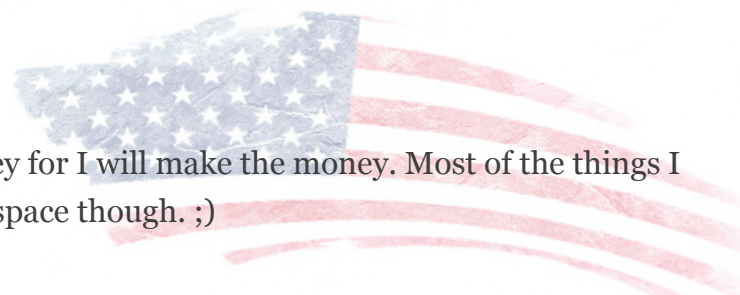
Others have asked me what it's like to be a millionaire.

That's a funny question, because I am not, by any means, a millionaire.

As far as what I do with my money? Anything I want.

That is *my* American Dream.

If there is something I want to do that I don't have enough money for I will make the money. Most of the things I want to do I'm able to pay for. I'm still working on that flight to space though. ;)



What do you want to do?

What is *your* American Dream?

When I asked the always insightful [Derek Sivvers](#) "What does the American Dream mean to you?" this is what he stated:

When I hear "American," my mind usually asks the same question: "Why are you limiting it?"

Maybe it's because I grew up around the world as a kid, and moved back to America when I was 6, after having lived in 4 other countries already. And because I'm nomadically living around the world right now, with no permanent home country.

But it makes me very aware when articles say, "90% of Americans feel that...". I have to stop and ask how the Greeks, Australians, Vietnamese, Brazilians and Swedes feel about it. Would you conduct a study and say, "90% of people in the locker room at my gym on Tuesday afternoon feel that..."?

It also reminds me of an international truism: "Those who loudly shout 'My country is the best!' are the ones who have never left."

It's short-sighted to think that the country you happened to be born in is the best. It's understandable, though. We need to feel justified for why we are where we are.

So for people in America, "the American dream" means comfort, autonomy, safety, and improvement. It feels American when said full of patriotism.

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But if you ask: "Why are you limiting it?" and include everybody, it's the same as the universal human dream: comfort, autonomy, safety, and improvement. Minus that thought-clouding patriotism.

Derek put that so well. And he brings up one of the many reasons I wrote this manifesto. This is not about The United States of America.

The American Dream is The Universal Dream.

No limitations. No patriotism.





The Future

Without trying to sound like a complete downer I don't believe most of us have learned a permanently better way. Lots of people are in a funk right now, but the economy is cyclical and it will turn around. With it will come many of the same problems of the past.

But you can stop that from happening.



We Need You

As citizens of the world, we need you.

We need you to achieve The Universal Dream.

We need you to go out and kick ass, every day. Every single day. Even when you're tired and you just don't feel like it. Even if your girlfriend/boyfriend/husband/wife has broken up with you. Even if you gave up on or lost your house. Maybe you have a trust fund. Maybe you're deep in debt. Maybe life isn't exactly how you want it to be. It does not matter.

Your Dream has been bastardized! But the opportunities to reach your Universal Dream are there for you. There are no excuses.

We need you to fight. We need you to take the power back.



For The Freedom Fighter Inside Of You

It's time to take a small action. Announce to the world that you're in, that you're ready, and that you will do whatever it takes to fight for your freedom.

Leave your Declaration in the comments section here: <http://www.ridiculouslyextraordinary.com/the-american-dream-is-dead/>

