

# The American Dream

Frederiksberg HF 2026

IRL

Source: Instagram post by former president of America, Barack Obama, March 15<sup>th</sup> 2021.



 **barackobama** • Following ...

 **barackobama** I entered public service for a few reasons, not least of which was my mother. She was an anthropologist and free thinker who instilled a little bit of her mindset in me. Another motivation toward this path was the recognition that I needed to figure out who I was as a Black American. I looked around and saw that too many Black folks were being shut out of the American Dream. I admired Civil Rights leaders like John Lewis and

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Martin Luther King, Jr. and knew that I wanted to follow in their footsteps. So, to me, pursuing a path in public service felt necessary. My salvation was there. So, in my early 20s, I found myself in Chicago working with folks who were going through all sorts of struggles, asking questions like: How am I going to find work? How am I going to get my kid a job or into college? What's happening to the value of my house? These folks were going through hard times and I was seeing it in concrete terms. And that experience—listening to them, working together to build something better—became redemptive for me. In my mind, I thought if I could help the community that I had become a part of, maybe I could redeem a piece of America, too. That became my mindset. Take a listen to my conversation with Bruce @Springsteen on Spotify.

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- Tara Westover, *I Am Not Proof of the American Dream* (article, 2022).
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## **Movies**

- Denzel Washington (written by August Wilson), *Fences* (Movie, 2016).

## What Has Happened to the American Dream?

May 3, 2025. The New York Times. Link:

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/05/04/us/trump-american-dream-voters.html>

**THE AMERICAN DREAM** — often idealized by the house and white picket fence — has been debated, pondered and relentlessly pursued by those who have lived in the United States for generations, as well as more recent immigrants.

It is a diffuse concept: Everybody has the opportunity to build a better, fuller life through hard work and determination. But its roots are in big, philosophical ideas: liberty, equality, democracy, justice.

Invoked by American presidents and voters alike, the [American dream](#) serves as a deeply personal yet universal framework for people to talk about their lives, their government, their economy and the values they cherish.

President Trump has nodded to the American dream time after time. In his first congressional speech in March, he described it as [unstoppable](#) — “surging bigger and better than ever before.”

But Americans are increasingly skeptical about the concept, both in whether the country can live up to its ideals or whether it can help its citizens fulfill their own personal goals. Today, just over half of the country still believes the dream is possible, according to a 2024 [Pew Research Center survey](#). Another 41 percent said the dream was no longer achievable, and 6 percent said it was never possible.

Mr. Trump’s first 100 days in office — a period of staggering economic, political and social change — has raised critical questions: What is the state of the dream? Is it attainable? Do the original values still stand?

The New York Times interviewed people from across the country, including a ride-share driver, a software engineer and a retired federal worker, about the American dream.

Some believe Mr. Trump’s economic agenda will eventually deliver the dream as he promised through a stronger, made-in-America economy. For others, the entrenched income disparities and economic uncertainty have been disruptive and unmooring, more barrier than pathway.



**‘Sometimes it’s stressful, but life is life’**

**Scott Meyer, 40, Davis, W.Va.**

Scott Meyer has never doubted the American dream.

Mr. Meyer, a glass artist and owner of a studio in West Virginia, believes the dream is grounded in freedom and the right — if not duty — to work hard for a satisfying life.

“A car. A vacation. A couple kids. Sometimes, maybe it’s a boat or a motorcycle, you know? Whatever you’re into. Your effort is how you get anywhere in life,” he said. “I get up every day and work. If I don’t, I don’t eat, and it’s not on anybody else.”

“I work seven days a week,” he said. “I struggle through. I do what I have to do to make it work. Sometimes it’s stressful, but life is life.”

Mr. Meyer said Mr. Trump’s policies will be good for the economy and the tariffs will even the playing field.

“I keep telling everybody, just give it time,” he said. “I think everything is going to be fine.”

- **Roberto Lopez, 44, Miami Beach, Fla.**

*A naturalized U.S. citizen and software engineer who voted for Mr. Trump.*

The American dream is not about equal outcomes. It’s about opportunity. The opportunity to actually have a chance of succeeding. There’s an opportunity, no matter how hard it may seem. I do believe in the American dream. I think things are going great. The president’s bold actions will make the dream possible for more people.

- **Damian Conley, 51, Caledonia, Wis.**

*A truck driver who voted for Mr. Trump.*

I think I live it a little bit. I don’t have the white picket fence, but I got a house, married with two kids, so I’m kind of there. Being 51, that was kind of the traditional American dream that I grew up with. Buy your own home, get a white picket fence and have two kids, right? With President Trump, I think I will still be living the dream.

- **Jack Ragheb, 67, North Bethesda, Md.**

*A biotech consultant who voted for Kamala Harris.*

American dream? I think it’s still the Horatio Alger story, rising up from very little to succeed. Is it still possible today? Yeah, you see examples around you all the time. But I think the traditional avenues have narrowed.

- **Marcos Rivera, 44, Tampa, Fla.**

*An e-commerce entrepreneur who voted for Mr. Trump.*

The American dream depends on self-sufficiency. It took 40 years for us to get where we are now, where everything we have — you look underneath and it says ‘Made in China.’ It’s going to take at least half that time to come out of that. I think the policy changes are good for the economy, but the execution has been a little uncoordinated.

- **Sam Crane, 19, Cincinnati**

*A college student who voted for Mr. Trump.*

The American dream is that you have the ability to get by on your own. I think it is getting less attainable mainly because of housing prices. I am not going to be idealistic and say that one person is going to fix everything, but I think the dream is going to be more attainable in the next four years than it was in the last four years.



**‘It feels like it is slipping away’**

**Malinda Burke, 40, Raleigh, N.C.**

Days before Thanksgiving, Malinda Burke lost her job as an aircraft safety trainer.

In the monthslong search to find a new job, especially in a market suddenly flooded with unemployed federal workers, Ms. Burke was forced to tap into her retirement savings to pay her mortgage and student loans. For the first time, Ms. Burke questioned if the American dream was sustainable, she said. “I have always felt that if I worked hard enough, I could achieve the American dream. I was able to buy a house on my own,” said Ms. Burke, who describes herself as fiscally conservative and socially liberal. She did not vote in the 2024 election.

“And then in the blink of an eye,” she said, “I was like, ‘Oh my God, what if I lose my house?’”

Ms. Burke, who lives in Raleigh, N.C., started a new job in the same field in April but is earning substantially less.

“I am part of a middle class that has been shrinking for decades,” she said. “I think most of us just want a comfortable life, but that is really hard these days. It feels like it is slipping away.”

- **Sechita McNair, 45, Atlanta**

*A ride-share driver who voted for Ms. Harris.*

When I think of the American dream, I think of homeownership and building equity and passing the home along to your children. With the tariffs and the economy and the student loans coming due, the dream is simply not achievable. Honestly, I need to think about moving overseas.

- **Toccoa Lenair, 46, West Palm Beach, Fla.**

*An educator who voted for Ms. Harris.*

The American dream is to live a life where you don’t have to struggle. But for many people, it’s actually becoming more like a dream. It’s harder to achieve.

- **Ayo Suber, 42, San Francisco**

*A web and creative engineer who voted for Ms. Harris.*

I think the American dream is propaganda — that you can come here and be whatever you want. It’s accessible to certain people, for sure, but I don’t think that it’s evenly distributed. I think that’s always been the case for Black Americans, in particular, who are the descendants of enslaved people, because the country wasn’t set up for us to have that dream. I think we are going to see more instability and the American dream will be a lot less attainable for a lot more people.

- **Olivia Correia, 20, Los Angeles**

*A college student who voted for Ms. Harris.*

I think the American dream is a political tool. I think it’s a very useful one for convincing people within our country that we are an equitable and just and free nation. I wish that what we think of as the

American dream could be realized. I don't believe that it's ever been realized by most people in this country. The question is: Who is the American dream for?

- **Arely Avitia, 23, El Paso**

*A college student who voted for Ms. Harris.*

You don't think that your economic class matters until you come here and you understand the ins and the outs of the United States. And you come to a conclusion that, well, this system, this American dream, it was not meant for me.

- **Bob Beaudette, 79, Phoenix**

*A retired I.R.S. revenue agent who voted for Mr. Trump.*

That dream has evaporated a little bit. Most people I know are trying to live, paycheck to paycheck, and stay alive. It seems like the middle class is disintegrating. Real estate is out of control. I don't know how young people are going to make it.



**'The dream is deferred for too many people'**

**Mijuel K. Johnson, 33, Philadelphia**

Mijuel K. Johnson is a guide for a company that gives walking tours focused on early Black history in Philadelphia.

Mr. Johnson said that since the Declaration of Independence, putting the values on which the country was founded into practice has been a work in progress.

He said he always viewed the American dream as the aspirational middle-class life, but also as the manifestation of the country's foundational values of liberty, equality and justice.

"I like to say that these are America's professed values. It is the task of each successive generation to make our professed ideals real for everyone," said Mr. Johnson, who is also a community organizer. He voted for Kamala Harris in the 2024 election.

"The dream is deferred for too many people, especially people of lower economic means and people from historically marginalized communities," he said.

## Harlem

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*

1951

### **Information**

**Langston Hughes** was a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance, the flowering of black intellectual, literary, and artistic life that took place in the 1920s in a number of American cities, particularly Harlem. A major poet, Hughes also wrote novels, short stories, essays, and plays. He sought to honestly portray the joys and hardships of working-class black lives, avoiding both sentimental idealization and negative stereotypes. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/langston-hughes>)

### **The Harlem Renaissance**

In the 1920's, creative and intellectual life flourished within African American communities in the North and Midwest regions of the United States, but nowhere more so than in Harlem. The New York City neighborhood, encompassing only three square miles, teemed with black artists, intellectuals, writers, and musicians. Black-owned businesses, from newspapers, publishing houses, and music companies to nightclubs, cabarets, and theaters, helped fuel the neighborhood's thriving scene. Some of the era's most important literary and artistic figures migrated to or passed through "the Negro capital of the world," helping to define a period in which African American artists reclaimed their identity and racial pride in defiance of widespread prejudice and discrimination.

The origins of the Harlem Renaissance lie in the Great Migration of the early 20th century, when hundreds of thousands of black people migrated from the South into dense urban areas that offered relatively more economic opportunities and cultural capital. It was, in the words of editor, journalist, and critic Alain Locke, "a spiritual coming of age" for African American artists and thinkers, who seized upon their "first chances for group expression and self-determination." Harlem Renaissance poets such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Georgia Douglas Johnson explored the beauty and pain of black life and sought to define themselves and their community outside of white stereotypes. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/145704/an-introduction-to-the-harlem-renaissance>)

## **The American Dream and Nightmare**

*a short introduction to American history and the idea of the American Dream*

### **The American Dream**

The American Dream is a concept that is and has been central to the identity of the United States. It refers to the idea that anyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, can achieve success and prosperity through hard work and determination. It is defined as “the ideal by which equality of opportunity is available to any American, allowing the highest aspirations and goals to be achieved” in the Oxford Dictionary. The concept has been widely promoted in popular culture, literature, and political discourse. James Truslow Adams is the man credited with creating the term “The American Dream”. In his book “The Epic of America” (1931) Adams, explores how the American Dream has evolved since 1607.

### **America, settlement, and the Declaration of Independence**

America is often referred to as ‘The Land of the Free,’ and most people associate America with a country ‘conceived in liberty’ in which the right and opportunity of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” is given to everyone by God. In America “all men are created equal”, and America offers “liberty and justice for all”. The reality, however, might be somewhat different. Slavery was part of the history of the United States of America from the very beginning and thrived in the defining years around the revolution in 1765-1783. To the enslaved Africans the nightmare preceded the dream.

In the year 1607, the first 104 English settlers landed in the Americas, and the first permanent English settlement was Jamestown in the colony of Virginia. In 1619 20 enslaved Africans were brought to Virginia. This shows that African slavery was part of the earliest period in American history. Many slaves worked in the fields in the Southern states picking cotton from cotton plants and the production of cotton turned out to be a very profitable business in America. By 1861 cotton made up two-thirds of all the United States’ exports. To many this profitable production, slaves were needed as a workforce, and therefore, slavery as an institution was essential in American society at the time. Slaves destined for America lost everything – possessions, homes, loved ones – and were forced to begin a new life in an alien world.

The idea of the American nation and the American identity goes back to The Declaration of Independence from 1776. It states: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

### **The Civil War**

In the industrialized Northern states slavery was voted to be abolished in the years between 1777-1804 and by the mid-nineteenth century, slavery has become an issue threatening to tear the United States apart. The election of the Republican Abraham Lincoln as President in 1860 set off a chain of events that led to the Civil War (1861-65). Though the issue of slavery had caused the Southern states to secede, the North had not gone to war to end slavery, but only to keep the Union together. The North won the long and bloody war in 1865. The emancipation of all slaves and prohibition of slavery, however, was only

secured later by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments,<sup>1</sup> which were passed by the US Congress in 1865.

### **Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and The Great Migration**

Reconstruction (1865-1877). The abolition of slavery was the first major step in the Reconstruction of the Southern states. Another effort to reconstruct Southern society was the establishment of Freeman's Bureau in 1865, a government agency devoted to the social advancement of former slaves. They achieved remarkable success in establishing schools and colleges for former slaves. The fifteenth Amendment guaranteed all adult males regardless of "Race, colour or former condition of servitude" the right to vote, and many placed in the South were African Americans elected to political office.

However, almost immediately Southern states began passing laws to limit the advancement of former slaves and their descendants. This was done under the slogan "separate but equal". This doctrine was upheld with the Supreme Court ruling in the case *Plessy versus Ferguson* (1896) that made segregation legal if the facilities for each race were equal in quality. By 1950 many Southern states had achieved a high level of segregation with separate schools, restaurants, park benches and public lavatories for blacks and whites. Laws aiming at segregation were known as Jim Crow laws. Equality, however, was a fiction. African Americans found themselves with poor access to education and political participation, but also lacking the protection of the law. In some parts of the South, the African American population was submitted to regular harassment and even violence by their white neighbours with little or no protest from the authorities. Homes and churches of blacks were burnt, and individuals, who for some or no reason were thought to have misbehaved, were brutally beaten or even murdered. In many cases, these lynchings<sup>2</sup> were carried out without any attempt to hide from the authorities, who might even in some cases have been involved in the lynching. It is also during the reconstruction that the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) is created (in 1866).

The period between 1910-1970 is called The Great Migration because six million Afro-Americans moved from the American South to Northern or Western states. The driving force behind the mass movement was to escape racial violence, pursue economic and educational opportunities and obtain freedom from the oppression of Jim Crow. Many migrated to cities like Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia. The discrimination in the North was less severe compared to the South but racism and discrimination were still a big part of society, these were for instance manifested in housing discrimination.

### **The Civil Rights Movement**

The civil rights movement was a struggle for social justice that took place mainly during the 1950s and 1960s for Black Americans to gain equal rights under the law in the United States. In 1954 the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People) won an important victory in the US Supreme Court. In the case *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Court had decided to desegregate schools (whites only elementary schools could no longer exclude black children). African Americans continued the nonviolent struggle for racial equality. The struggle culminated in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom In 1963. An estimated 200,000-300,000 people gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial

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<sup>1</sup> Tillægsparagraf. Betegnelsen amendment anvendes oftest om ændringer i USA's forfatning (the constitution), der blev skrevet i 1787 og trådte i kraft i 1789. USA's forfatninger blevet ændret 27 gange ved amendments, hvor de ti første fra 1791 samlet kaldes Bill of Rights og indeholder de grundlæggende frihedsrettigheder. 13. amendment ophæver slaveriet.

<sup>2</sup> Dræbt uden rettergang.

in Washington DC to hear Martin Luther King give his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Over the next couple of years, the United States Congress passed the Civil Rights Act (1964) which banned discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion, sex, and national origin”, and the Voting Rights Act (1965) which protected voting right for all Americans and the Fair Housing Act of (1968) that expanded on previous acts and prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, and national origin. Legally, segregation and racism had been permanently abolished for the first time in the history of the United States, but discrimination, though now illegal, would not die easily.

### **Obama and Black Lives Matter**

The election of Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008 no doubt marked a watershed in American history. It seemed to prove that the saying “anyone can grow up to be president” was true. To be sure, Jim Crow style segregation is history and explicit racism is now met with considerable resentment by many Americans. Some, however, point out that racism now continues as structural racism. This means that racism today is structured into political and social institutions and therefore difficult to recognize directly. Consequently, African American still lag behind white Americans on many traditional parameters of success such as education and income while at the same time being significantly over-represented in criminal statistics. In 2014 accusations of police racism drew national headlines when several unarmed black men and boys, including Michael Brown from Ferguson, Missouri, and Eric Garner from New York City, were killed by white police officers who were never charged by the authorities. Their cases and others like them were the cause of protests in several cities as well as a renewed debate on the treatment of black Americans in the American justice system. These killings helped to led to the formation of Black Lives Matter, a political and social movement that seeks to highlight and fight racism, discrimination, and racial inequity. The Black Lives Matter movement returned to the forefront of the discrimination debate with massive protests in the wake of the killing of George Floyd in 2020.

The American Dream has been the subject of much criticism and debate. Some critics argue that the concept is overly optimistic and fails to acknowledge the many structural and systemic barriers that prevent many people from achieving success. Others argue that the pursuit of the American Dream has led to negative consequences, such as increased consumerism and materialism, and that it has contributed to social and economic inequality.

Overall, the concept of the American Dream remains a complex idea that has played a significant role in shaping American society and culture. As such, it is worth considering both the positive and negative aspects of the concept and its impact on American life.

References: This text is mainly and directly taken from *Black Voices* (2017) – Bianca Erlich-Møller og Mathilde Thomsen. However, I have added information from *Den Amerikanske Drøm* (2022) – Rikke Mosegaard Dyring, *The American Dream* (2013) – Kelli Nørgaard, Historielærerforeningen - *Noter* nr. 235 (2022).

The Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln is considered one of the most famous and important political speeches in the history of the United States of America. It was held in the midst of the American Civil War in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 1863

## The Gettysburg Address, 1863

"Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us--that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion--that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."





Martin Luther King Jr. speaking at a news conference in Selma, Alabama, 1965

# Martin Luther King Jr.: I Have a Dream

(excerpt) 1963

**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** (1929-1968) was a priest, a civil rights activist and the leader of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). He is famous for his “I Have a Dream” speech of August 28, 1963, which is considered by many to be among the most powerful speeches in American history.

King was born in Georgia as the son of a pastor and had a religious upbringing. He graduated with a degree in religious studies. Later on, he married and had four children.

King led the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 (see p. 97) and was a leading figure in the non-violent protest to end racial segregation and inequality in 1963. Under King’s charismatic leadership civil rights were put on the national political agenda.

Martin Luther King Jr. has become an icon for civil rights and racial equality, and he was, at the time, the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for his tireless work to end segregation. He was assassinated in Tennessee in 1968.

## PRE-READING

1. Watch and listen to Martin Luther King’s speech “I Have a Dream” on YouTube.

Afterwards, in pairs/small groups, discuss the following:

- In what way does Martin Luther King speak?
- Who were present in the audience?
- Are you moved by his speech? Why/why not?

2. Match the words from the “I Have a Dream” speech in the left column with their synonyms in the right column.

1	unite (vb.)	A	racism (sb.)
2	protests (sb.)	B	obvious (adj.)
3	discrimination (sb.)	C	undervalue (vb.)
4	segregation (sb.)	D	join (vb.)
5	underestimate (vb.)	E	rise up (vb.)
6	struggle (sb.)	F	separation (sb.)
7	score (sb.)	G	demonstrations (sb.)
8	manacles (sb.)	H	twenty (num.)
9	emerge (vb.)	I	battle (sb.)
10	self-evident (adj.)	J	shackles (sb.)

# I Have a Dream

score (sb.) snes, tyve stykker  
**Emancipation Proclamation** bekendtgørelse om ophævelse af slaveri  
**decree** dekret, forordning  
**beacon (of) light** ledestjerne  
**sear** brændemærke  
**withering** visne/falme  
**captivity** fangenskab  
**crippled** invalideret, gjort til krøbling  
**manacle** lænke  
**segregation** raceadskillelse  
**midst** midt i  
**vast** umådelig, enorm  
**prosperity** fremgang, velstand  
**languish** vantrives, henslæbe sit liv  
**exile (sb.)** person der lever i eksil  
**condition** tilstand  
**capital** hovedstad  
**cash a check** indløse en check  
**Constitution** den amerikanske forfatning  
**Declaration of Independence** den amerikanske frihedserklæring  
**promissory note** gælds-brev  
**fall heir** arve  
**unalienable** umistelig  
**pursuit** stræben efter  
**default** forsømme, misligholde (en låneaftale)  
**sacred** hellig  
**obligation** forpligtelse  
**insufficient funds** utilstrækkelige midler  
**devotee** tilhænger  
**fatigue** træthed  
**gain** opnå, vinde  
**lodging** logi  
**mobility** mobilitet, bevægelighed  
**stripped** afklædt  
**dignity** værdighed  
**righteousness** retskaffenhed  
**wallow** svælge i  
**despair** fortvivlelse

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation. Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous

5 decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

10 But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself

15 a shameful condition.

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was

20 a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness". It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people

25 a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds".

4:20

... There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never

30 be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their self-hood and robbed of their

35 dignity by signs stating: "For Whites Only." We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

9:14

40 ... Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

10:45

11:55



*Martin Luther King Jr. waves to the 250,000 civil rights supporters from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington after his famous speech "I Have a Dream", 1963*

creed trosbekendelse  
 self-evident selvindlysende  
 swelter ved at gå til af  
 varme, smelte  
 oppression undertrykkelse  
 vicious ondskabsfuld  
 interposition intervention,  
 indgriben  
 nullification annullering,  
 ophævelse

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

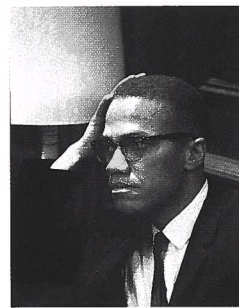
I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" – one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

exalted ophøjet  
crooked krum, skæv

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; “and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.”

14:52



# Malcolm X: The Ballot or the Bullet

(excerpt) 1964

**racial equality** lighed for alle racer

**black supremacy** sort overherredømme

**anti-Semitism** anti-semitisme, afstandtagen til jøder

**white supremacists** hvide mennesker der tager afstand til andre befolkningsgrupper, i dette tilfælde sorte

**Malcolm X** (1925-1965): Although he was given the name Malcolm Little by his parents, he took on the name Malcolm X. He wanted the “X” to represent his unknown African name as a symbol of the heritage that had been stolen from him and his slave ancestors. Malcolm X also adopted the name El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. He was a Muslim minister and a human rights activist. He believed in racial equality, black supremacy and anti-Semitism. During his childhood, his father was killed by white supremacists, his mother had a nervous breakdown and was placed in a mental institution, and so the family fell apart.

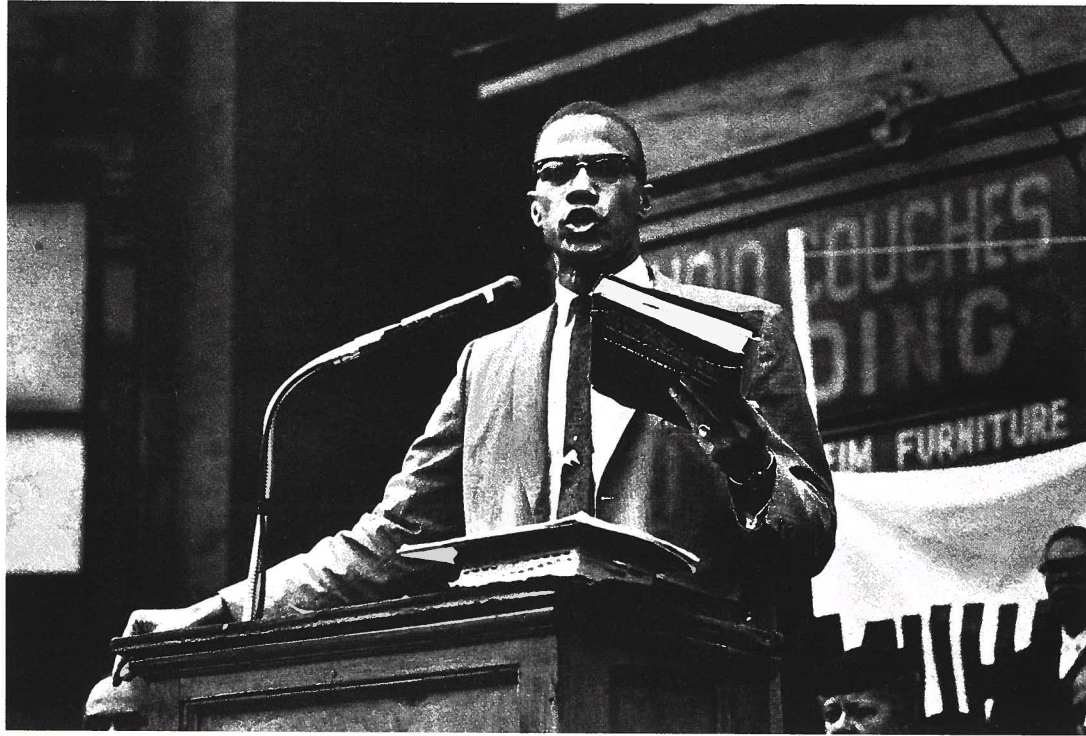
In 1946 Malcolm X was imprisoned for burglary. In prison he became a member of the political group Nation of Islam, which worked for improving conditions for African Americans. Malcolm X favoured violence in the struggle for black equality – and perhaps even supremacy – as he distrusted ideas about racial integration.

Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam stood out from the rest of the civil rights movement by preaching black supremacy and arguing for the complete separation of white and black Americans. However, he changed his opinion over time and developed a more accepting attitude towards the mainstream civil rights movement. He was shot and killed by members of the political group he himself had belonged to, the Nation of Islam, in Harlem, New York in 1965.

## PRE-READING 1

1. In pairs or small groups, look up information about Malcolm X online in order to answer the questions below:
  - A. Did Malcolm X and Martin Luther King know each other?
  - B. Did Malcolm X and Martin Luther King agree on how to fight racial segregation? Why/why not?
  - C. Debate whether it is relevant to compare Malcolm X to Martin Luther King and to discuss their political beliefs.
2. In pairs/groups debate:
  - A. What does the title of the speech “The Ballot or the Bullet” mean? What do you expect the speech to be about?
  - B. Before a presidential election, how can a civil rights activist influence future politics?

Malcolm X gave his speech “The Ballot or the Bullet” on April 3, 1964 in Cory Methodist Church in Ohio. The following is an excerpt from the speech.



Malcolm X giving a speech

**ballot** stemmeseddel  
**community** samfund, befolkningsgruppe  
**jive** tale uforståeligt til en, drive gæk med en  
**crook** skurk  
**letdown** skuffelse  
**trickery** fusk, svindel  
**treachery** forræderi, løftebrud  
**intend** have til hensigt  
**nourish** give næring til  
**dissatisfaction** utilfredshed  
**Brother Lomax** Louis Lomax (1922-70), en afrikansk-amerikansk journalist blandt tilhørerne

## The Ballot or the Bullet

...  
 1964 threatens to be the most explosive year America has ever witnessed. The most explosive year. Why? It's also a political year. It's the year when all of the white politicians will be back in the so-called Negro community jiving you and me for some votes. The year when all of the  
 5 white political crooks will be right back in your and my community with their false promises, building up our hopes for a letdown, with their trickery and their treachery, with their false promises which they don't intend to keep. As they nourish these dissatisfactions, it can only  
 10 lead to one thing, an explosion; and now we have the type of black man on the scene in America today – I'm sorry, Brother Lomax – who just doesn't intend to turn the other cheek any longer.

**delude** vildlede, føre bag lyset  
**diner** middagsgæst  
**legislation** lovgivning  
**amendment** forfatningsændring, tilføjelse til forfatningen  
**filibuster** forsinke vedtagelse af en lov ved at holde lange taler  
**pass** vedtage  
**Polack** polak (nedsættende)  
**disguised** forklædt  
**hypocrisy** hykleri  
**flag-saluter** en person der hylder flaget  
**flag-waver** patriot, en der vifter med flaget

...

Well, I am one who doesn't believe in deluding myself. I'm not going to sit at your table and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner. Sitting at the table doesn't make you a diner, unless  
 5 you eat some of what's on that plate. Being here in America doesn't make you an American. Being born here in America doesn't make you an American. Why, if birth made you American, you wouldn't need any legislation; you wouldn't need any amendments to the Constitution; you wouldn't be faced with civil-rights filibustering in Washington,  
 10 D.C., right now. They don't have to pass civil-rights legislation to make a Polack an American.

No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy. So, I'm  
 15 not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag-saluter, or a flag-waver – no, not I. I'm speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare.

...

## INTRODUCTORY WORK

### Politics

1. Why is 1964 going to be “the most explosive year”?
2. What is Malcolm X's view on politicians? Why?
3. What does Malcolm X say about legislation, amendments and the Constitution? Why?

### An American

1. Comment on why Malcolm X feels like a “victim of Americanism”.
2. Debate why Malcolm X sees “an American nightmare”.

# Barack Obama - Keynote Address 2004

## Democratic National Convention

### Tuesday, July 27, 2004

On behalf of the great state of Illinois, crossroads of a nation, land of Lincoln, let me express my deepest gratitude for the privilege of addressing this convention. Tonight is a particular honor for me because, let's face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely. My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father, my grandfather, was a cook, a domestic servant to the British.

But my grandfather had larger dreams for his son. Through hard work and perseverance my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place; America, that shone as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before. While studying here, my father met my mother. She was born in a town on the other side of the world, in Kansas. Her father worked on oil rigs and farms through most of the Depression. The day after Pearl Harbor my grandfather signed up for duty, joined Patton's army, marched across Europe. Back home, my grandmother raised a baby and went to work on a bomber assembly line. After the war, they studied on the GI Bill, bought a house through FHA, and later moved west--all the way to Hawaii--in search of opportunity.

And they, too, had big dreams for their daughter, a common dream, born of two continents. My parents shared not only an improbable love; they shared an abiding faith in the possibilities of this nation. They would give me an African name, Barack, or "blessed," believing that in a tolerant America your name is no barrier to success. They imagined me going to the best schools in the land, even though they weren't rich, because in a generous America you don't have to be rich to achieve your potential. They are both passed away now. And yet, I know that on this night, they look down on me with great pride.

They stand here and I stand here today, grateful for the diversity of my heritage, aware that my parents' dreams live on in my two precious daughters. I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that in no other country on earth is my story even possible. Tonight, we gather to affirm the greatness of our nation, not because of the height of our skyscrapers, or the power of our military, or the size of our economy. Our pride is based on a very simple premise, summed up in a declaration made over two hundred years ago, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

That is the true genius of America, a faith in the simple dreams, an insistence on small miracles. That we can tuck in our children at night and know that they are fed and clothed and safe from harm. That we can say what we think, write what we think, without hearing a sudden knock on the door. That we can have an idea and start our own business without paying a bribe. That we can participate in the political process without fear of retribution, and that our votes will be counted—at least most of the time.

**crossroads** korsvej  
**express** udtrykke  
**gratitude** taknemmelighed  
to address at tale til  
**particular** særlig  
**presence** tilstedeværelse  
**herding** vogte  
**shack** skur  
**perseverance** udholdenhed  
**scholarship** stipendium  
**shone** skinnede  
**beacon** fyrtårn  
**oil rigs** borerig (til olie- og gasudvin-  
ding)  
Pearl Harbor I december 1941 angreb  
Japan den amr. flådebase Pearl Har-  
bor, der ligger i Hawaii.  
GI Bill en lov der skulle understøtte  
veteraner fra 2. verdenskrigs genind-  
træden i samfundet. Betalte bl.a. for  
uddannelse  
**FHA** Federal Housing Administration  
(offentligt program der skulle bidrage  
til at skabe boliger til befolkningen)  
**abiding** blivende  
**faith** tro  
**achieve** præstere  
**pride** stolthed  
**diversity** alsidighed  
**heritage** arv  
**precious** kostbare  
**owe** skylder  
**debt** gæld  
**Affirm** bekræfter  
**premise** grundtanke  
**declaration** erklæring  
**self-evident** selvindlysende  
**endowed** udstyret  
**Inalienable** umistelige  
**tuck** putte  
**that they are fed** at de har fået noget  
at spise  
**clothed** påklædt  
**harm** skade  
**sudden** pludselig  
**a bribe** en bestikkelse  
**participate** deltage  
**retribution** gengældelse

This year, in this election, we are called to reaffirm our values and our commitments, to hold them against a hard reality and see how we are measuring up, to the legacy of our forbearers, and the promise of future generations. And fellow Americans—Democrats, Republicans, Independents—I say to you tonight: we have more work to do. More work to do for the workers I met in Galesburg, Illinois, who are losing their union jobs at the Maytag plant that’s moving to Mexico, and now are having to compete with their own children for jobs that pay seven bucks an hour. More to do for the father that I met who was losing his job and choking back the tears, wondering how he would pay \$4,500 a month for the drugs his son needs without the health benefits that he counted on. More to do for the young woman in East St. Louis, and thousands more like her, who has the grades, has the drive, has the will, but doesn’t have the money to go to college.

Now don’t get me wrong. The people I meet in small towns and big cities, in diners and office parks, they don’t expect government to solve all their problems. They know they have to work hard to get ahead and they want to. Go into the collar counties around Chicago, and people will tell you they don’t want their tax money wasted by a welfare agency or by the Pentagon. Go into any inner city neighborhood, and folks will tell you that government alone can’t teach our kids to learn. They know that parents have to teach, that children can’t achieve unless we raise their expectations and turn off the television sets and eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white. They know those things. People don’t expect government to solve all their problems. But they sense, deep in their bones, that with just a slight change in priorities, we can make sure that every child in America has a decent shot at life, and that the doors of opportunity remain open to all. They know we can do better. And they want that choice.

In this election, we offer that choice. Our party has chosen a man to lead us who embodies the best this country has to offer, and that man is John Kerry. John Kerry understands the ideals of community, faith, and service, because they’ve defined his life. From his heroic service to [in] Vietnam to his years as prosecutor and lieutenant governor, through two decades in the United States Senate, he has devoted himself to this country. Again and again, we’ve seen him make tough choices when easier ones were available. His values and his record affirm what is best in us.

John Kerry believes in an America where hard work is rewarded. So instead of offering tax breaks to companies shipping jobs overseas, he offers them to companies creating jobs here at home. John Kerry believes in an America where all Americans can afford the same health coverage our politicians in Washington have for themselves. John Kerry believes in energy independence, so we aren’t held hostage to the profits of oil companies or the sabotage of foreign oil fields. John Kerry believes in the constitutional freedoms that have made our country the envy of the world, and he will never sacrifice our basic liberties nor use faith as a wedge to divide us. And John Kerry believes that in a dangerous world, war must be an option sometimes, but it should never be the first option.

You know a while back I met a young man named Shamus in a VFW Hall in East Moline, Illinois. He was a good-looking kid, six-two, six-three, clear eyed, with an easy smile. He told me he’d joined the Marines and was heading to Iraq the following week. And as I listened to him explain why he’d enlisted, the absolute faith he had in our country and its leaders, his devotion to duty and service, I thought this young man was all any of us might ever hope for in a child. But then I asked myself: Are we serving Shamus as well as he’s serving us? I thought of the 900 men and

**commitments** forpligtelser  
**measuring up** to lever op til  
**legacy** arv  
**forbearers** forfædre  
**health benefits**  
**diners** billigt spisested  
**to get ahead** at komme frem  
**collar counties** (blue collar counties) “blue collar” er slang for arbejderklasse. County betyder amt  
**a welfare agency** velfærdsmyndighed  
**achieve** (her) præstere  
**expectations** forventninger  
**eradicate** udrydde  
**slander** bagtalelse  
**slight** let / mindre  
**decent** (her) rimelig  
**remain** forbliver  
**community** fællesskab  
**faith** tro  
**prosecutor** anklager  
**lieutenant governor** vice-governør  
**decades** årtier  
**devoted** viet  
**affirm** bekræfte  
**Rewarded** belønnet  
**can afford** har råd til  
**health coverage** helbredsdekning  
**energy independence** energyuafhængighed dvs. ikke at være afhængig af energiresourcer fra andre lande, fx de store olieproducerende lande i Mellemøsten.  
**hostage** gidsel  
**oil fields** oliefelt  
**constitutional freedoms** forfatningssikrede friheder  
**envy** misundelse  
**sacrifice** ofre  
**wedge** kile  
**VFW Hall** VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States) er en offentlig støtteorganisation for veteraner i USA. n VFW Hall er deres lokaler.  
**to explain** at forklare  
**to enlist** at indrullere (sig i hæren)  
**devotion** det at hellige sig / det at ofre sig  
**duty** pligt

women, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, friends and neighbors, who won't be returning to their own hometowns. I thought of families I had met who were struggling to get by without a loved one's full income, or whose loved ones had returned with a limb missing or nerves shattered, but still lacked long-term health benefits because they were reservists. When we send our young men and women into harm's way, we have a solemn obligation not to fudge the numbers or shade the truth about why they're going, to care for their families while they're gone, to tend to the soldiers upon their return, and to never ever go to war without enough troops to win the war, secure the peace, and earn the respect of the world.

Now let me be clear. We have real enemies in the world. These enemies must be found. They must be pursued and they must be defeated. John Kerry knows this. And just as Lieutenant Kerry did not hesitate to risk his life to protect the men who served with him in Vietnam, President Kerry will not hesitate one moment to use our military might to keep America safe and secure. John Kerry believes in America. And he knows that it's not enough for just some of us to prosper. For alongside our famous individualism, there's another ingredient in the American saga.

A belief that we're all connected as one people. If there's a child on the south side of Chicago who can't read, that matters to me, even if it's not my child. If there's a senior citizen somewhere who can't pay for their prescription drugs and having to choose between medicine and the rent, that makes my life poorer, even if it's not my grandparent. If there's an Arab American family being rounded up without benefit of an attorney or due process, that threatens my civil liberties. It is that fundamental belief—I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper—that makes this country work. It's what allows us to pursue our individual dreams, and yet still come together as one American family. "E pluribus unum." Out of many, one.

Now even as we speak, there are those who are preparing to divide us, the spin masters, the negative ad peddlers who embrace the politics of anything goes. Well, I say to them tonight, there is not a liberal America and a conservative America—there is the United States of America. There is not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there is the United States of America. The pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into Red States and Blue States; Red States for Republicans, Blue States for Democrats. But I've got news for them, too. We worship an awesome God in the Blue States, and we don't like federal agents poking around our libraries in the Red States. We coach Little League in the Blue States, and yes we've got some gay friends in the Red States. There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq and there are patriots who supported the war in Iraq. We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America.

In the end, that's what this election is about. Do we participate in a politics of cynicism or do we participate in a politics of hope? John Kerry calls on us to hope. John Edwards calls on us to hope. I'm not talking about blind optimism here—the almost willful ignorance that thinks unemployment will go away if we just don't think about it, or the health care crisis will solve itself if we just ignore it. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about something more substantial. It's the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs; the hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores; the hope of a young naval lieutenant bravely patrolling the Mekong Delta; the hope of a millworker's son who dares to defy the odds; the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too. Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. The audacity of hope!

**reservists** reservister (soldat eller officer i reserven)  
**solemn** højtidelig  
**obligation** forpligtelse  
**to fudge** at snyde med  
**to pursue** at forfølge  
**to defeat** at besejre  
**to hesitate** at tøve  
**to prosper** at have fremgang  
**Alongside** ved siden af  
**senior citizen** pensionist  
**prescription drugs** receptpligtig medicin  
**threatens** truer  
**civil liberties** borgerlige rettigheder / civile rettigheder  
**"I am my brother's keeper"** reference til Første Mosebog i Biblen  
**to prepare** at forberede  
**divide** skille  
**ad peddlers** reklamesælgere  
**embrace** omfavne  
**slice-and-dice** at dele op / skære ud  
**to participate** at deltage  
**cynicism** kynisme  
**unemployment** arbejdsløshed  
**to solve** at løse  
**substantial** væsentligt  
**bravely** modigt  
**millworker** fabriksarbejder (af fx steelmill stålværk / stålvalseværk)  
**dares** vover  
**odds** chancer  
**uncertainty** usikkerhed  
**audacity** dristighed / vovemod

In the end, that is God's greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation; a belief in things not seen; a belief that there are better days ahead. I believe that we can give our middle class relief and provide working families with a road to opportunity. I believe we can provide jobs to the jobless, homes to the homeless, and reclaim young people in cities across America from violence and despair. I believe that we have a righteous wind at our backs and that as we stand on the crossroads of history, we can make the right choices, and meet the challenges that face us.

America, tonight, if you feel the same energy I do, if you feel the same urgency I do, if you feel the same passion I do, if you feel the same hopefulness I do—if we do what we must do, then I have no doubt that all across the country, from Florida to Oregon, from Washington to Maine, the people will rise up in November, and John Kerry will be sworn in as president, and John Edwards will be sworn in as vice president, and this country will reclaim its promise, and out of this long political darkness a brighter day will come. Thank you very much everybody. God bless you.

**bedrock** fundament  
**reclaim** kræve tilbage  
**despair** fortvivelse  
**righteous** retskaffen / retfærdig  
**passion** lidenskab  
**sworn in** indsat (to swear in angiver, at der er tale om en edsaflyggelse)

## I Am Not Proof of the American Dream

5 *Feb. 2, 2022. NYT. By Tara Westover.*

When I think of my first semester of college, the memory comes to me as a physical sensation. I feel *tired*. There is the siren-screch of an alarm sounding at 3:40 in the morning. I feel it in  
10 my teeth. Then images: the orange glow of the jumbo numbers in pitch black, the instinctual, semiconscious tapping of the button, the gradual shrinking of my bed as I climb out of it and move toward the door. I do not change my clothes. It was my habit to dress for the day the night before, because an alarm blaring at  
15 3:40 really does sound much better than an alarm blaring at 3:30.

Outside I feel the Rocky Mountain winter on my cheeks as I begin the **scramble** to campus on sidewalks that will not be salted for another three hours. I'm heading for the engineering building, where I will pick gum out of short nylon carpet, wipe strange  
20 **equations** from dusty chalkboards, and **scour** the interior of toilet bowls with an **odorless** blue gel. I will finish around 8 a.m., then head to class.

This was my routine for the first two months of my freshman year. Then, because I was short on rent, I added a second job,  
25 serving coleslaw and Jell-O in the cafeteria. The woman who worked alongside me was also a freshman who could not afford the meal plan. I don't recall either of us mentioning the fact that we were serving food we could not afford to eat; I don't recall feeling angry as I hooked my apron in my locker and reached into  
30 my backpack for my own lunch, a protein bar and pack of ramen noodles (10 cents at my local grocery store). I also don't recall feeling humiliated or disrespected to be cleaning plates or toilets used by my classmates. The full complexity of my opinion on inequality and poverty then could have been summed up with  
35 utter simplicity: I was tired.

I wrote about these and other experiences in my 2018 **memoir**, "Educated," which surprised me by becoming a best seller. My story was one of extremes: born in the mountains of Idaho to Mormon parents who kept me out of school, I had never set foot  
40 in a classroom before my first semester of college at Brigham Young University. I graduated in 2008 and won a scholarship to the University of Cambridge, where I earned a Ph.D.

A curious thing happens when you offer up your life for public consumption: People start to interpret your biography, to explain  
45 to you what they think it means. At book signings, in interviews, I'm often told that my story is uplifting, that I am a model of

**The scramble:**  
Haste (gå hurtigt)

**Equations:**  
Ligninger/  
regnestykker

**Scour:**  
Skure (rengøre)

**Odorless:**  
Lugtfri

**Memoir:**  
Erindringer

**resilience**, an “inspiration.” Which is a nice thing to be told, so I say thank you. But every so often someone takes it a bit further, and says something to which I do not have a response. I’m told,  
50 “You are living proof of the American dream, that absolutely anything is possible for anybody.”

But am I? Is that what the story means?

After being tired, here’s what I remember most about being poor: a **pervasive** sense of costly **trade-offs**. Of course you had to take  
55 the maximum number of credits, because tuition was expensive; of course you had to pick up that second job, that extra shift, that third side hustle **raking** leaves or mowing lawns or shoveling snow. The only question I ever asked was how soon could they pay.

60 The architecture of my life was defined by money, meaning its absence, right down to the alarm blaring at 3:40 a.m. The night shift paid a dollar more, \$6.35 an hour instead of \$5.35. Never mind that my roommates blasted music until midnight, so that on a typical night, I got around three hours of sleep; never mind that  
65 I was **dozing** through my lectures, or that I spent the entire winter with a raspy cough and string of unexplained **sinus** infections. It was a dollar more! The math was straightforward and **decisive**.

My college ambitions nearly came to an abrupt end in my **sophomore** year. Blinding pain in my lower jaw turned out to be a  
70 rotting nerve. I needed a **root canal** and \$1,600 to pay for it. I decided to drop out. My plan was to hitch a ride to Las Vegas, where my brother was working as a long-haul trucker, and to get a job working at the In-N-Out Burger across the street from his trailer.

75 Then, a leader at my church pulled me aside and insisted that I apply for a Pell Grant, a federal program that helps poor kids pay for college. Days later a check arrived in the mail for \$4,000. I had never seen that much money, could not wrap my brain around the amount. I didn’t cash it for a week, afraid of what possession  
80 of such a sum might do to me. Then the **throbbing** in my jaw motivated me to take a trip to the bank. I got the root canal. For the first time, I purchased the required textbooks for

my classes. There was money left over, more than a thousand dollars, so I quit the cafeteria and swapped the night for the day  
85 shift. I stopped sleeping through my classes; the cough dried up, the infections cleared.

The day I cashed that check is the day I became a student. It’s the day the current of my thoughts shifted from obsessively tracking the balance of my bank account, down to the dime, to obsessively  
90 tracking my coursework. It was an experience not of wealth but

**Resilience:**  
Robusthed

**Pervasive:**  
Udbred,  
omsiggribende

**Trade-offs:**  
Afvejning

**Raking:** Rive (blade)

**Dozing:** Småsove

**Sinus:** Bihule

**Decisive:**  
Afgørende

**Sophomore:**  
Andetårsstuderende

**Root canal:**  
Rodbehandling  
(tænder)

**Throbbing:**  
dunkende følelse

of security, and with security, the freedom to ask questions about what I wanted from my life. What did I enjoy doing, or thinking about? What was I good at? I started seeking out and studying books outside the required reading; I took courses that were not  
95 required, for the simple reason I was interested in them, and I had the time.

Every decision I made from that moment on was a function of that check. In those desperate years a few thousand dollars was enough to alter the whole course of my life. It contained a  
100 universe. It allowed me to experience for the first time what I now know to be the most powerful advantage of money, which is the ability to think of things besides money. That's what money does. It frees your mind for living.

It's tempting to tell my story in the way people want me to. I  
105 would love to be the hero, and say that it's all about hard work and determination, the **white-knuckled** triumph of the human will. But if I put my ego aside, I know that's not the case. I entered college in 2004. I attended Brigham Young University, a private college heavily **subsidized** by the Mormon Church.  
110 Tuition was \$1,640 a semester. This was before the housing crisis, when it was possible to find a shared room in a shabby apartment for just \$190 a month. What these numbers meant, in real terms, was that it was possible for me to work my way through college.

I could make enough to cover tuition by bagging groceries for  
115 \$5.35 an hour during the summers. Back then, the nearly \$3,000 I needed for two semesters seemed **staggering**, and it **necessitated** me saying the words "Paper or plastic?" an unthinkable number of times. But it was possible. Without family money, without cultural advantages. It was a thing that could be done, if only just,  
120 if you really wanted it.

For kids today from poorer backgrounds, the path I took through education no longer exists. The numbers are not imaginable — not if your parents are truckers or farmers or cleaners or cabdrivers, maybe the hardest-working people in our country.  
125 According to the U.S. Department of Education, in the last three decades, tuition at four-year colleges has more than doubled, even after you adjust for inflation. A 2019 [report](#) by the Institute for Higher Education Policy tells us that at some state flagship schools (not fancy private schools, just regular four-year public  
130 universities), low-income students are asked to cover some \$80,000 beyond what they can afford. Even at B.Y.U., one of the most affordable four-year colleges in the country, tuition has nearly doubled since I graduated.

**White-knuckled:**

I en tilstand af ekstrem spænding, begejstring og evt. frygt

**Subsidized:**

støttet (af)

**Staggering:**

Svimmelende

**Necessitated:**

nødvendiggjorde

135 A Pell Grant was my first taste of financial security. Now even a full grant would be wholly **inadequate**, because of the rising costs of tuition and housing. When the program was established 50 years ago, the largest grant **covered** 79 percent of the costs to attend a four-year public college. Today it covers just 29 percent.

140 It's not enough. What that grant offered me — security, peace of mind, a space in which to consider, for the first time, what sort of life I wanted — it no longer offers.

To poor kids today, we present a no-win scenario. We shout **shrilly** that they must get a college degree, because without one

145 they can't hope to compete in the globalized economy, but even as we say it, we doubt our own advice. We know that we are asking them to bury themselves in debt at a moment when it is very uncertain what kind of job they will be able to get or how long it will take them to repay the loans. We know it, and they

150 know it. For them, the American dream has become a **taunt**. Perhaps my story is proof not of the persistence of the American dream but of its **precarity**, even its absence.

The solutions are **multitude**. We could restore funding to public universities and insist that they operate as public utilities, rather

155 than as strictly profit-driven businesses. We could increase Pell grants and reform student debt. If we were more ambitious, we could tackle the supreme inequality that, in recent decades, has **disfigured** every fact and facet of social and political life.

For my part, I will begin by telling my own story differently — by

160 **discarding** that fashionable old fable that reduces any tale of success to one of **grit** and **diligence**. I will admit that, to be frank, it was an easier time, and things were better. Our institutions were better. Perhaps that is what the story is about, inasmuch as it is about anything. There is the one thing I learned when I cashed

165 that check: that people cannot always be **resilient**, but a country can.

**Inadequate:**  
utilstrækkelig

**Shrilly:** Skingert

**Taunt:** Hån

**Precarity:** Usikre arbejdsvilkår

**Multitude:**  
mange

**Disfigured:**  
Vansiret

**Discarding:**  
kasseri  
(frasortere)

**Grit:** her mod

**Diligence:** (her)  
flid/omhu

**Resilient:**  
fleksibel/  
modstandsdygtig