

Independence Is the Key to the American Dream

The American dream seems to be in question over what it entails and if it is even still alive. The American dream to be what and who one wants to be is very much still alive. Every day children, young adults, and even adults dream about their goals in life; whether it is a child dreaming of being an astronaut or an adult with more realistic goals of owning a business. With hard work and dedication, realistic goals are highly attainable. There is one huge obstacle in the way of gaining our American dreams, and her name is America.

Society today has no shame and is quick to ask for a handout and even quicker to take a handout. According to Welfare statistics approximately 13 million Americans are on welfare, 47 million on food stamps and 6 million on unemployment insurance. This glamorizing of government subsidies enabling our citizens is ruining our drive and dedication. People are noticing that they work long strenuous 40 hour weeks while their single neighbor sits at home all day long. They start to wonder how she is able to pay her rent and feed her four children. The reality is that because she has four kids she cannot support, the government provides her with assistance. With benefits ranging from food stamps, Medicaid, and welfare checks, why would they need to work? According to Stuart M. Butler "Under this vision of opportunity, government action can sometimes support such efforts—but it can never fully substitute for them, and often undermines them." What Butler is saying is government action is meant to be short term not a permanent solution. He means by undermining them is when someone is fully dependent on the government for practically everything it undermines their confidence and ability to become independent. Some people are scared that if they actually work they will lose their benefits, which is true. Why work one's fingers to the bone when he/she could watch Jerry

Springer and C.S.I all day? This mentality that the government will completely take care of someone spreads like wildfire.

After I got out of the military, I claimed unemployment and received 424 dollars a week. Unemployment gave me easy money: all I had to do was five job searches a week. I found my mind set slowly changing, wondering why I should go back to work when I can make all this money doing absolutely nothing? I wanted to go back to work because I was bored at home, but if I did I would lose half of my money I was making actually working. This makes no sense to me and I do not agree that someone could make more money doing nothing opposed to working. I had to take a hard look in the mirror and ask myself if I wanted to live off someone else's dime and take tax money from others who actually need it, or be self-sufficient. Being dependent on the government is not my dream and probably not most.

Work registration is a requirement to be involved in active work searches and other related programs in order to receive the benefits. Surprisingly work registration is not required for most social services. Not requiring someone to be willing to work is in no one's best interest. A perfect example is an eighteen year old who has everything handed to her and never worked a day in her life. Now put her in a scenario where all of a sudden she has to provide for herself and live off her own dime. How successful do you think she will be? Chances are the results are going to end up in failure, but whose fault is this: the girl or the parents? Many would agree that the parents failed their daughter by not teaching her life lessons or responsibilities. The eighteen year old represents families on government subsidies and the enabling parents represent the government. By making benefits easily accessible and responsibility-less creates comfort and welfare dependency.

Welfare dependency is used to describe people who depend completely on government subsidies for survival. Sanford Schram writes, "it becomes difficult to see welfare dependency as a metaphorical dependency; instead it comes to be seen as if it were literally like a chemical dependency, in need of the same kind of clinical treatment"(69). He makes a great point that People have become so dependent on the government subsidies that there is no possible way for them to function without them. Metaphorically they become like a crack addict; just as a crack addict needs the next fix, welfare dependents need their payments. Without these government subsidies they have no other means of supporting their families. The government spends approximately 132 billion on welfare, and this is not including food stamps and unemployment payments.

Fraser and Gordon quote author Karen Tumulty: "Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas spoke for many conservatives in 1980 when he vilified his sister ": She gets mad when the mail man is late with her welfare check. That's how she is. What's worse is that now her kids dependent feel entitled to the check too. They have no motivation for doing better or getting out of that situation"(309). This explains perfectly the mentality that many people on welfare feel. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are everyone's rights not a monthly check from the government. Entitlement plays into welfare dependency very heavily. After a certain time period, people start to believe that it is their right to a monthly government check. They pass that entitlement mentality to friends, family and their children. What people do not realize is that money they are receiving is not free; they are taking it out of someone else's pocket. Many people believe that Robin Hood, taking from the rich and giving to the poor, is a great idea but how is this even ethical not to mention a ridiculous idea. People who work hard for their money

should not be punished and forced to work extra hours to compensate because others feel entitled and decide not to work.

Welfare programs were meant to be a stepping stool for those who legitimately need help. Welfare statistics states that the largest population of recipients, 26.9 percent, have been on welfare for two to five years. Only 19 percent of all recipients stay for less than seven months, yet 19.6 percent stay for longer than five years. Relying on the government for five years or longer is unacceptable. Not all Americans take advantage of the systems and have legitimate problems. Take, for example, hunger in American: according to Joel Berg "one in six Americans — 49 million people — struggle against hunger." Most people do not realize how many people are actually starving in the United States. We commonly use the phrase 'there are starving kids in Africa' to convey to others that they should be grateful for what they have. Some send money to other countries in order to feed their starving kid, but what about our country? Why are we walking past the dingy homeless man asking for food but sending money to other countries? We are contradicting ourselves in order to make our 'image' seem like a caring and sensitive person. We need to take care of our own to a certain extent. Food stamps are a program providing a little extra money for families to provide food. The great thing about the food stamps is the money can only be used for food and nothing else. Another good thing about food stamps is that "the U.S. avoided mass starvation due to the effectiveness of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program"(Berg). Just as we cannot deny people health care, we should not deny food to those who are actually hungry.

Remember when we didn't have to worry about locking your doors when you left the house for ten minutes and people were typically honest and genuine? It seems to be more socially acceptable to lie, cheat and steal. Not all social programs are more harm than good, but it

seems like people take advantage of the systems every day. When we hear multiple stories on the news of women with four kids with four different fathers on welfare it makes me sick. I often hear people assume that the woman continues to have kids so she can get more money from the government. My first question to her is that if she can not even support the three that she already has, why would she have another? There are resources out there for her such as birth control and contraception. This seems off topic, but it is not for the simple fact that people feel like they can do anything without consequences because they know the government is often always there for them. What starts out with a few checks for food turns into getting on welfare and so on and so forth. Pretty soon people are scheming and finding ways to get the maximum amount of money from their benefits. Every day people start to realize not what they can do for their country, but what their country can do for them.

Many issues trace back to the enabling of Americans and seem to create a chain reaction of negative effects. With new morals comes a new American dream. The current dream is difficult to explain because it seems to be interchangeable from person to person. What can be said is that the American dream is still alive and well; people just need to not be discouraged. Although it is hard to take a step out side of one's comfort zone it is necessary in order to live the American dream. It is easy to live on someone else's dime but being dependent on someone else should be no one's idea of an American dream.

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