

WHAT IS THE AMERICAN DREAM?

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From the beginning, America has been synonymous with hope. Some have come looking for religious freedom, others for economic opportunity. Many just said they wanted the American Dream, a phrase coined in 1931 by historian James Truslow Adams to describe "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." This notion has stuck with us, although it has changed from generation to generation and person to person — just as these attempts by six area residents to define the American Dream show.

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"Most of us kind of looked down on farming as an occupation. In other words, our dream was to get into something where you might achieve something other than through working with your hands. And the dream, I think for most of us, was do other than what your parents did."

— George Taoka, 93, South Toledo, retired college professor and son of Japanese immigrants



"I'm sure every parent dreams about certain things for his kids. I don't care if they are in Palestine, in Jordan, in India, in China, they all have dreams for their kids but the question is: Are they fulfillable or not? I'm sure in most of those countries that I mentioned, the change of fulfilling these dreams are a lot smaller than it is here. ... To me, my kids already achieved the American Dream. Why? Because they are in good schools. They are living comfortably. And best of all, the system here gives them the chance to go as high as they can go."

— Murshed 'Sam' Abdelsalam, 50, West Toledo, immigrant from Palestine and local businessman

"I guess I've never thought of it in terms of prosperity or a monetary aspect, but I think it's about opportunity at the end of the day. ... I've never been gold 'no' because of my gender, my beliefs. All of those obstacles have been removed for me [by past generations]. I think when you talk about, 'What's the American Dream?', again I don't know that it's buying the house. I think it's we're free to have the opportunities, and everybody fills in their own blanks with what opportunities they want to seize upon."

— Michelle Kranz, 41, Bowling Green, attorney and part-time farmer





“The first thing that always pops into my mind is the older school definition of the white picket fence, but I think it really and truly has changed a little bit. To me personally it is the life that you want, or the career, or the financial stableness. ... [It's] more along the lines of being able to do what you want to do with the amount of money that you make.”

— Charlie Keesee, 22, Ida, Mich., University of Toledo student

“I want my kids to not have to struggle and struggle and struggle. If they want to go out and buy a new car I want them to be able to do that. I want them to know if you go to school and get an education, that you can get a good job and have nice things because you deserve it and you worked hard for it. So that's my dream, just to be self-sufficient.”

— Delseyna Swain-Anderson, 33, Central Toledo, inventory control specialist and part-time Owens Community College student



“It's pretty typical I guess, like my grandparents had a great job in their day, raise a family, buy the American dream house, and retire and be able to travel once you retire from working after 30 years in a corporation or a company. And unfortunately, it's just the economical downturn of society right now that, it's not allowing a lot of people, including myself, to make that a reality at this present moment.”

— James Fayson, 35, West Toledo, laid-off Jeep worker

PHOTOS BY ANDY MORRISON

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