

How the American Dream Turned into a Nightmare

By Takis S. Pappas, Newsweek, 1/29/17



Immigrant children, newly arrived on Ellis Island, New York, in 1908. Takis S. Pappas writes that for years and years, it all went relatively smooth in the United States, until one day the people realized that the great dream was moribund. And then, after the elections, their country was not the old America anymore, and its institutions were not in place any longer, and its new leader was called Donald Trump. *Records of the Public Health Service. (90-G-125-29) / US GOV National Archives*

There was once a country with a dream of epic proportions. As one of that country's many bright writers put it in 1931, the dream was about living in a land "of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable."

5 The idea seemed attractive to other people in faraway places who, spotting the opportunity, decided to migrate to that land, soon turning it into a pot of cultures, religions, languages, races and ethnicities.

All those elements melted together in the pot, and became integrated into that country's dominant culture and its old institutions. [...]

10 For years and years, it all went relatively smooth in that country, until one day the people realized that the great dream was moribund. And then, after elections, that country was not the old

America anymore, and its institutions were not in place any longer, and its new leader was called Donald Trump.

How did it happen?

15 Well, it happened for three interrelated reasons: poor individual life prospects, imperiled majority group status and a yearning for bold, aggressive leadership.

In today's America, the predominant emotion among the majority of its citizens is dissatisfaction with not getting what they deserve, fear of the mixture brewing in America's melting pot and anger with established politicians who offer hope rather than decent jobs to make the American people upwardly mobile again.

20 Enter Trump. He is voted into office intent on punishing both the political establishment inside the country and its many outside enemies, scrubbing the pot clean of whatever ingredients are unappetizing to the ordinary folks in the majority, and reinstating the American dream: "Make America great again!"

25 Americans' general dissatisfaction with their lives is not difficult to discern. For many decades, commercial banks, corporations and government agencies had facilitated consumer lending, eventually turning America into a debtor nation.

And when the economy became sluggish, it was primarily the blue-collar, white working-class people across the country who felt the brunt. "There's no American dream for anyone who isn't a lawyer or banker," a Trump voter said.

30 Another voter, from Clarington, Ohio, was even more explicit when talking about her life prospects: "Clarington is a shit hole. Jobs all left. There is nothing here anymore. When Ormet aluminum factory closed, jobs all disappeared."

She bemoaned the lack of options for a better life: "I have five kids and two have addictions. There is nothing else for kids to do here but drugs. No jobs. No place to play."

35 And she explained her voting choices: "I voted for Obama the first time, not the second. Now I am voting for Trump. We just got to change things. "

40 Trump's promise to scrub the melting pot and reinstate majority rule was the second reason why Americans voted for him. As he made quite clear during his campaign, he dismissed accepted social norms of "political correctness" toward any minority and, without caring about whether he was accused of racism, misogyny or bigotry, he spoke in the name of the majority of "the

forgotten men and women of our country,” vowing that ordinary people who work hard should have a voice, pledging: “I am your voice.”

Interestingly, that message made full sense to naturalized minorities such as Latinos, Muslims and other former immigrants, who by now felt themselves “proud daughters and sons” of America. [...]

45 As Trump assumes office, America is now another country. The American dream seems to lie in tatters, and there is growing support for mass deportations of illegal and other unwanted minorities.

As the new president will have to deliver upon his promises to blue-collar and middle-class Americans, many believe him to be entirely unfit to govern.

50 With no concrete plan as yet, it is unlikely that his policies will turn around the lives of Americans in downtrodden areas that have lost factory jobs. Nor is it easy to imagine how scrubbing the melting pot will bring harmony and reduce the polarization and racial conflict in American society.

By far the most contentious terrain will be the institutions of federal government. The traditional checks and balances of the American political system may withstand a presidential political assault, but will certainly be strained and, perhaps, partially violated.

55 Parallel institutions controlled by the presidential family may also emerge, especially in the media. One thing is certain: America no longer has a grand dream, and risks spiraling into epic failure. May God bless her!

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This article originally appeared on the Democratic Audit UK blog. It gives the views of the author, and is not the position of American Politics and Policy (USAPP), or of the London School of Economics and Political Science.