

How the American Dream turned into a Nightmare – and where it is now

an Essay by Nikodem Skrobisz, 5th of February, 2017.*

One of the driving ideas that pulled millions of immigrants during the course of time into the United States and made the United States of America a great and powerful and prosperous nation, is the idea of the American dream, the vision of a better and freer life for every American citizen, of equality and liberty, an opportunity for everyone to achieve greatness and wealth with hard work, no matter of the background. For a long time, especially in the first half of the 20th century, the american dream somehow worked out, not perfectly and not for everyone, but at least it appeared as it could be one day be finally completely fulfilled. America was the richest nation in the world, jobs were readily available, and the people were free and wealthy and they could see how miser life was in the third world and the Soviet Union and how the Americanisation of Western Europe let it prosper. And when the iron curtain fell, hope raised to bring the Dream not only finally to all U.S. citizens, but also to the whole world.

It didn't worked out. At the time, the dream was already lying in his deathbed, bleeding by the wounds inflicted by the wars in Vietnam and the Near East and the economic and social changes within the States, especially the development of America into a surveillance / police state through the laws made by Nixon, Reagan and later Bush. And the globalisation following the fall of the soviet union and therefore the worldwide conquest of capitalism became the nails in the coffin. Capitalism is a great economical system, but it was the most fertile, when it was still growing up and also exclusive to America. The American capitalism developed to a radical and solitary consumerism. Globalisation and worldwide

development all over the globe enabled foreign countries to compete with the US and so the dominant position of the American economy started to crumble. Since then American workers have to compete with the whole, growing world, jobs are harder to get as the needed qualifications are higher. Furthermore, the ugly side effects of radical liberalism and capitalism started to show their face during the financial crisis of 2008. Sadly, liberty always comes at the expense of equality, as in a radical free society, the stronger, smarter, richer and better educated ones, will always outdo the weaker ones, if they do not install a stabilizing system, like free education for all. For a long time, the American society was balanced, but the competition with the entire world and the self-imposed role as a peace-bringing world police and the introduction of a repressive police and military machinery without adjusting the educational and welfare systems to the new world order, tore a gap in the American society, which is getting bigger every day and turning the USA from the great democratic country it was once into an oppressive and totalitarian state, tattered by inner unrest and social division.

Attempts like the introduction of Obamacare were right, but came too late, the people already lost the faith in the established government. And as the dream is slowly turning into a nightmare, people are getting more and more fearful and desperate. Entire cities like Detroit are turning into looted ghost towns, a devastating opioid epidemic floods the nation, heroin use among teenagers doubled from 2003 to 2013, fentanyl is eating up rural states like Virginia, where once the steel and coal industries were at home, before they moved away to China and Mongolia, leaving behind a flock of jobless people with now useless qualifications. The US education system, which privileges the ones with money, created an entire generation that either is suffocating under college loans or is sinking into a uneducated life without hope for a well-paid job. The American Dream is decaying in the US, turning into a dark nightmare. But instead of searching for a reasonable way

to get through this tough times and to stabilize and optimize the american society, and to arrange with this world, many Americans turn to demagogues and their simple solutions. They try to stop time or even reverse it, and this is the reason, why conservative parties and people, like Donald Trump, who are hostile to progress, who are hostile to globalisation, who are preaching the return of the great time, when America was the richest and highest developed country in the world, are on the rise. But you can't stop time, you can't reverse progress without causing mass destruction and mayhem, and therefore the path America has chosen now is not to become great again, but to decline and drown in the mud of fear, ignorance and melancholia, diving deeper down the hole of the nightmare. Building walls won't remove problems, it will isolate the States from a world, that is becoming a uniting melting pot, and so it will weaken the US in the long term.

Surprisingly the American Dream isn't dead, it just left America and settled mainly somewhere else (except of a few areas like California or NYC, where the American Dream is still surviving in America). If you look over to Europe, you will discover that the American dream is alive in the old world. Modern European countries, like Germany, Denmark, Netherlands and Switzerland are providing an environment, that enables to actually live the American dream on the fine line of freedom and equality. These countries managed to do so by adjusting their educational, law and social systems to the demands of the new globalised world and providing their citizens with all necessary things to maintain in the modern world, like e.g. free education and free health care. Now History is reversed. America once taught Europe in the World Wars and following decades what democracy and liberty mean and preached it's dream, and now it seems like the students are outdoing the teacher. ...

or at least, they have done it in the last twenty years, but the threatening breakdown of the European Union and the raise of nationalism and far right movements in recent time let one

question if the American dream will be able to survive there.

**an european student at the age of seventeen*