



America: The Beautiful Myth

By Sherilyn V. Anderson

As wee tots, Americans are taught to see our country as the land of opportunity, and a beacon of freedom, equality, and prosperity. These myths, deeply woven into the fabric of the American Dream, are the creed of a nation where everyone is supposed to be able to rise from rags to riches, where equality is the norm, and where Lady Justice always wears her blindfold. But, when we look behind the star-spangled red, white, and blue facade, we are forced to confront the reality that America has never lived up to its mythical image. Beginning with the mistreatment of Native Americans, then slavery, women's rights, other marginalized groups, and unchecked capitalism, the story of America is one of contradictions and unkept promises.

When the first European settlers arrived here, they encountered established and thriving indigenous communities with cultures, religions, and traditions. Instead of coexisting peacefully with them, the colonizers declared them to be “uncivilized” and relentlessly sought to conquer them. Natives were pushed off their ancestral lands, subjected to violence and disease, and their way of life was systematically dismantled. The Trail of Tears, the Wounded Knee Massacre, and other historical atrocities are painful reminders of the brutal treatment they endured.

While The Declaration of Independence states that all men are created equal and each has rights that can't be taken away, these principles were chiefly applied to white land-owning men while slaves were denied any human rights at all. How ironic is it that an African-American, Crispus Attucks, was one of the first men to lose his life for American Independence? It wasn't until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s that significant progress was made toward ending racial segregation and discrimination. However, the aftermath of slavery, Jim Crow laws, unjust incarceration, and systemic racism continue to plague the lives of Black Americans today.

The struggles of women and other minority groups to secure rights and equal treatment remind us that the American Dream isn't equally accessible to all. Women were denied the right to vote until the early 20th century and couldn't open a bank account without their husband's permission until the 1970s. The Polish, Greeks, and Italians were shunned and discriminated against until they gained the privilege of being labeled as

white people. Nowadays, the discrimination baton has been handed to the LGBTQ community, immigrants from south of the border, and several sects of “others.”

The plight of the poor in America is a testament to the shortcomings of Capitalism, our nation's economic system. While it is sometimes praised for its capacity to cut through red tape and generate innovation and wealth, it has also led to astonishing levels of income inequality. The American Dream promised upward mobility and a chance at prosperity for all, but millions of working-class people won't ever get to see the dream come to fruition. The gap between the wealthiest and the rest of the population continues to widen, and the unchecked drive for bigger profits has created problems beyond economic inequality. Deterioration of our environment, exploitation of low-income wage earners, and corporate greed have all been worsened because the system prioritizes financial gain over the well-being of individuals and the planet.

In the face of these harsh realities, we have to reevaluate the myths that have shaped America's image. Acknowledging the nation's past and present injustices, as well as the flaws in its economic system, is not an indictment of America itself, but is an essential step toward creating a more just and equitable society for all of its citizens. To move forward, America must honestly confront its history, make amends for past wrongs, and actively work toward a more inclusive and equitable future. It also requires reforms to the capitalist system to ensure economic opportunities are accessible and the pursuit of profit doesn't come at the expense of humanity and the environment.

America, with its diverse population and cultures, has the potential to be a great nation. However, this can only be realized when the myths are replaced with a commitment to justice, equality, and compassion. It is time for America to live up to its ideals and transform the beautiful myth into a beautiful reality.