

When a Dream Comes True
Human Dissatisfaction and the Dream
of a Better Life

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1.
Human Dissatisfaction
and Dreams

Dissatisfaction and Fear

The fundamental theme of this work is the antagonism that exists between our ambitions and desire to search for a better life, and the frustrations, dissatisfaction and suffering that the experience of life causes for so many people, even in advanced societies with high levels of material well-being.

The focus takes individual motivations as a starting point, compared to which social and cultural structures appear to be something external, something already given where the individual has different options: either to accept them and adapt to them, or to try to change them, or to just discard them and start looking for an alternative situation.

The safety net provided by the social services available in modern welfare states, especially in Europe, may be accompanied by subjugation to a set of economic needs that impose a heavy burden on the pursuit of happiness, experimentation, and even adventure. The common theme that runs through this entire proposal as well as through the documentary film it accompanies, is the pursuit of happiness, conceived as a dream that a dissatisfied individual can aspire to make real.

We all have dreams, or at least, we have all had a dream at some point. Some of us let them slip away, while others will never stop pursuing them. The problem is that some aspirations and goals require renouncing some aspects of regular life. There

are dreams that inspire people to break with their daily routine and start again from zero. These are the type of dreams that, even if you try to forget them out of fear or convenience, come back and hit you even harder, that sometimes end up being labelled idealism or fantasy.

Dreams like this have the following characteristics:

- They can actually be made to come true.
- They conflict with people's lives.
- They've existed for years. In other words, these are aspirations or goals that have survived the passage of time and changing circumstances.
- It is up to the dreamer to make the dream come true.

For some who dream of a better life, their hard work and effort will always yield rewards. On the other hand, there are others who try to achieve a dream but eventually have to admit frustration and exhaustion. This causes them to resign themselves to a more modest life, where their dreams are seen not as ambitious goals to be achieved, but as false illusions that are better off left behind. These two attitudes undoubtedly reflect real experiences and feelings. Hard work and effort can lead to success, but also to frustration, while failure and bad luck can also lead to a desire to change things and to dream of a better life. Sometimes in life people want to achieve goals without passing them through the filter of logic or reason. Goals like this fall into the category of dreams. From an early age, people create images of what they will be (or what they want to be), but the reality is that they often give up on dreams out of fear or convenience.

In the search for a better life, dissatisfaction is the point of departure, because anyone who wants to try something they have never tried before needs to first have the feeling of being dissatisfied. The other feeling is fear, since pursuing means changing from a life that is known to one that is much more uncertain. Of course, this is a feeling people have with when any significant change is made their lives. But what are we really afraid of? Is our fear related to the loss of material comforts, or with the possibility of failing at something new? Are people really sure about what they really want? Or is it possible that there is some fear of seeing dreams actually come true?

Fear tends to lead to two possible outcomes: giving up on the dream or daring to make it a reality. If you convince yourself to forget about your goals, whether because they involve too much risk or because you think they are unreachable, you give up on your dream and by doing so eliminate conflict, insecurity, and uncertainty. But what kinds of people give up on their dreams? The only way to move forward with this process is if hope is stronger than feelings of panic.

Most people who start down the road towards their wildest dreams will sometimes feel that they are completely alone. Sometimes this loneliness is the result of needing to make waves with the people closest to you in order to continue forward. Of course, overcoming obstacles in the pursuit of a dream will always require some individual and solitary effort. The feeling of loneliness generally takes place right at the point of no return, in other words, when steps have already been taken to go forward and it has become difficult to turn back.

How can this feeling of loneliness be overcome? What role does pride play at this point on the road to a dream? The same social pressures that put obstacles between you and your dream can become feelings of admiration that encourage you to keep going. Both the fear of failure and the pride that comes with success can be determining factors.

It is also worth considering whether people who achieve their goals feel satisfied, or if their dissatisfaction with life stays with them and causes them to set new goals. We should also examine if people who give up on their goals or otherwise fail to achieve them see this as a positive learning experience or if they regret not trying harder.

The tension between reality and dreams can be compared in terms of the ways of life in Europe and the United States. In Europe's welfare states, people believe it is better and more emotionally healthy to learn to appreciate what you have rather than risking it. In the United States, on the other hand, society is more fluid and the options available to people encourage the pursuit of individual goals.

In one of many films that revolve around the pursuit of the American dream, *Little Miss Sunshine* tells the story a family traveling to California so that a young girl can compete in a beauty contest. When it becomes clear that things are not quite turning out as expected, the father declares, "There are two types of people in this world: winners and losers." To which the grandfather replies, "A real loser is someone who's so afraid of not winning, they don't even try." But then the girl replies, "You know what? To hell with beauty contests. Life is one big beauty

contest after another. First high school, then college, then work... To hell with it all. And to hell with the Air Force Academy. If I want to fly, I'll find a way to fly. Everybody has to do what they want, and to hell with everyone else". All of the emotions involved appear in this brief scene: the brashness, the uncertainty, the fear, the frustration, and the rejection of conformity.

The documentary film *When a Dream Comes True* is a reflection about whether or not it is wise to pursue dreams and goals, and when doing it can put what you already have at risk. Using the dreams of different characters encountered along the road travelled by a person searching for himself, the film tries to determine whether dissatisfaction is inherent to the human condition or whether it is the result of the cultural impositions and social structures in which we are all immersed. The question is whether it is better to aspire to everything we desire, or to the contrary, whether it is preferable to know how to value what we already have.

The American Dream

The American Dream is based on a belief that has been shared by every immigrant who has ever arrived in the USA in search of a better life. It is also something that the majority of Americans have internalized very well: if you work hard and avoid trouble with the law, you will be rewarded with a more

comfortable present and a future full of opportunity for your children.

This American utopia also has the nearly miraculous power of conferring new identities, by converting something old into something new. Originally, the American dream was a mythical vision rooted in religion. Arriving in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Pilgrims were religious dissidents looking for freedom of religion. Like Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, they saw the New World as a city on the hill – a metaphor that is still used today so many years later. The Declaration of Independence, the document that overturned Britain's colonial control of its American colonies at the end of the 18th century, included "the pursuit of happiness" as one of the basic human aims, along with life and liberty. By the beginning of the 19th century, there was a general feeling that these new United States of America had truly emerged as a nation of self-made men.

In America, the traditional religious sentiment of "I was a sinner but now I am saved" evolved to become "I was European but now I am American"; or "I was a foreigner, but now I am a citizen". Over time, the specific meaning of these feelings has been reflected in various ways: I was poor but now I am rich; I was ignorant, but now I am educated; I was a nobody, but now everybody knows my name.

This miracle of change by merely countries not only has religious connotations but also to some degree conforms to the revolutionary dream, i.e. the hope of changing social rules and

structures by radical political means in order to achieve a better life. As political scientist Louis Hartz once wrote:

“...the men of the seventeenth century who fled to America from Europe were keenly aware of the oppressions of European life. But they were revolutionaries with a difference, and the fact of their fleeing is no minor fact: for it is one thing to stay at home and fight the ‘canon and the feudal law,’ and it is another to leave it far behind. In a real way, physical flight is the American substitute for the European experience of social revolution.” (Hartz 1955)

The American dream is founded on liberty, prosperity, and security, but it is distinguished from other ideal ways of life, whether religious or revolutionary, because it involves the escape of the individual from previous ways of life and a subsequent reinvention of the immigrant.

Once safely on American soil, the pursuit of the dream continues. For many immigrants, the dream turns out to be a mirage and deception and new frustration forces them to continue with their search. This means that many immigrants will not stay in their first city of arrival, but will continue traveling to other cities and states across the country looking for a way to make their dream a reality.

The taming of the Wild West helped forge the national myth: anybody could find land to build a new life and prosper. For at least a couple of centuries, the country's borders were expanding and it was possible to continue traveling westwards. Although the chance to go west may have been more of a myth

than a reality for most of the immigrants who initially settled in the country's eastern states, this myth was a very important means of solving problems. Even in the mid-19th century, when the borders with Canada and Mexico had almost been solidified, the immensity of the territory and relatively ease of movement allowed Americans to continue thinking that they could solve their problems with physical flight better than by resigning themselves to the problems and trying to improve their situations. If an environment becomes uncomfortable or frustrating, why raise your voice in protest and risk getting in trouble when you could just disappear instead? In fact, by offering a way out of serious social and political conflicts, the lands to which people could emigrate were in the words of historian Frederick J. Turner, a "force tending towards democracy" (Turner 1921).

When it was decided that the country's borders could be expanded no further and the frontier was closed (as late as the early 20th century), the immigrant mentality remained. The idea of packing up your bags and going off to some better place never disappeared. The typical American mentality is not one of confrontation, but one of escape or escapism. When someone is unsatisfied with their job, the company where they work, the neighbourhood they live in, the club they are member of, the city they live in, the state they live in, or even the husband or wife who lives with them (and typically because the expectations of the dream have not been fulfilled to the degree expected), the most typical American reaction is not to protest or try to reform the institution in question. The automatic

response of the immigrant is to go somewhere else – always with the hope that it will be somewhere better. After emigrating from Europe, Latin America, Africa, or Asia, the new Americans and their descendants continued to “emigrate” across the country, looking for new cities, new job opportunities, and new social connections.

The myth of America's “wild frontier” continues to be very popular. It has had an influence on popular literature, film, and TV shows, where the conquest of the West is portrayed as a grand adventure of individualism, violence, and six-gun justice. In some versions, other “frontiers”, such as those involving scientific and technical innovation, play similar roles in the dynamics of American society. Interestingly, in the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy called his set of innovative ideas “the new frontier”. In the speech he gave when accepting his party's presidential nomination in 1960, he called upon the American people to “be pioneers towards that New Frontier. My call is to the young in heart, regardless of age – to the stout in spirit, regardless of Party”. This New Frontier political program was particularly focused on space exploration and technology. The myth of the frontier once again was used as a metaphor for change and progress during Kennedy's presidency. The dream of an ideal life can never be made to come 100% true, but this dream has always been a driving force behind the effort, optimism and innovation needed to make the attempt.

A Changing Dream

The American dream has changed over time. In fact, during the relatively short history of the United States there have been three versions: the rural and agricultural dream from the country's beginnings until the 19th century, the suburban dream of the 20th century, and the current dream, which is now in the process of redefinition and reconstruction.

Ever since the first British colonists arrived on American soil, the family farm was the country's basic social and economic institution. Wave after wave of explorers and homesteaders poured into the vast lands to the west. Up until about 100 years ago, the vast majority of America's population lived in rural areas. The family farm was an economic and social unit, where everything was shared among all family members, including father, mother, and children: production and consumption, work and relaxation, entertainment and learning, etc. Towards the end of the 19th century, as reflected in the novel (and famous film adaptation of) *Gone with the Wind*, on her deathbed Melanie asks Scarlett to make her dream for her son come true, which consists of going to college, taking a trip to Europe, and owning a horse.

Beginning in the 1920s, and especially from the middle of the 20th century, the rural and agricultural version of the American dream was replaced by the suburban, industrial, and service-industry dream. In fact, the expression "American

dream" was first coined during this second phase. The work of popular historian James T. Adams is worthy of note here. In his book *The Epic of America* (1931), Adams says "that dream or that hope" has been in America from the very beginning. "...that dream has been realized more fully in actual life here than anywhere else, though very imperfectly even among ourselves." In this way, "the American dream of a better life, with more wealth and happiness, and available to all citizens regardless of their circumstances", has become the great American contribution to worldwide thought and well-being.

For America's baby boomers (i.e., those born in the population explosion after World War II), the new version of the American dream was a house in the suburbs, two cars in the garage, and two or three kids. That generation grew up in a period of economic growth and prosperity, resulting from their country's global position of hegemony. This optimism was also fuelled by some of the government's economic policies, like the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly referred to as the G.I. Bill. This law benefited millions of veterans who were able to attend university for free and receive special assistance to buy a house. This reinforced the idea of equal opportunity for everyone.

As in the first version of the American dream, in this new version, the family home remained the basic social unit, but now there was more of a division of labour among its members. Father drives to work in his car and mother takes care of the house while the kids are receiving a full-time education. It was expected that everyone would have a job for life, a social

security system to rely upon, and a guaranteed retirement income.

Both the first rural version of the dream and the second suburban version provided prosperity and a certain amount of economic security to tens of millions of Americans, and above all, attracted millions of people from around the world to come to the United States with the hope of sharing this ideal life.

This dream was shaken somewhat with the most recent economic crisis, which is making many Americans fear that their children will not have access to the same material lifestyle as the previous two generations.

However, the crisis facing the American dream has much in common with the crisis faced at the end of the 19th century. Beginning a little over a century ago, new mechanical and manufacturing technologies spread throughout the countries of Eurasia and the Americas, making US farmers less competitive than before. Agricultural industrialization and automation enormously increased productivity, but also led to millions of farmers' sons and daughters moving to the cities. Inequalities in wealth and income increased for several decades. In those days, the parties blamed for this were primarily the railroads and banks. At the beginning of the 20th century, new populist political movements expressed the frustration of the old dreamers. As is still the case today, the protesting back then was directed against what was considered to be the decline of the original American social model, while the myth of going "back to the good old days" continued to grow.

However, just as 100 years ago, the new technologies of the 21st century have been chipping away at the foundations of this model. New communication technologies in particular have created massive amounts of competition from other countries and shaken up traditional industry. As during American dream's previous crisis, the economy has once again become more capital-intensive than labour-intensive, and the territorial scale of trade has expanded to the point where it is now best described simply as global. The backbone of the American dream, the family household, was also destabilized by the collapse of the huge real estate bubble. Some dreams become a reality, but others do not. Equal opportunity is not the same thing as equality in wealth or income, and even though equal opportunity is at the core of the American dream, many Americans have begun to believe that opportunities are now reserved mainly for the children of those who have already succeeded.

These days, the typical American couple will have both partners working, but with little vacation time, high levels of debt and little savings, and not much time to have or raise children. Young people today, known as "millennials" because they became teenagers or young adults at the beginning of the new millennium, seem to have replaced the old dreams of finding a long-term job, having a family with multiple children, and developing skills and talent, to a large degree by the ambition or dream of making money, being recognized for their personality and attractiveness and, for some, also contributing to improving the world in some significant way.

The frustration and bitterness being seen during the current American presidential election campaign of 2016 are comparable with the frustration and fear that gripped the country at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. In those times, the populist wing of the Democratic Party, led by William Jennings Bryant, railed against the large companies and big banks. These politicians claimed to be anti-elitist and they opposed America's participation in World War I.

Current populist movements, whether within the Republican Party or the Democratic Party, also take aim at Wall Street and the "establishment". They think that international competition is to blame for many problems, defending a more isolationist foreign policy, and once again re-creating the myth of restoring a better past. It will probably take the technological and cultural creativity of more than one generation to reformulate and reconstruct the new 3.0 version of the American dream. These young millennials and their successors will have to create new centres of prosperity in the form of companies that are more efficient and transparent, that are flexible and highly-productive in their work. Whatever the American dream may mean to them, they will have to create a reality that is line with it.

The Dream in Economics, Sociology, and Psychology

The motivations behind the pursuit of a better life have been studied by economists, sociologists, and psychologists, with each discipline contributing a different perspective. However, all of these fields agree on certain elements: 1) dissatisfaction is the starting point; 2) the pursuit involves both spatial and social mobility; and 3) the results are largely self-determined and derived from the motivation itself, in other words, the desired reality does not exist outside of the dream, it is the dream themselves that inspires people to make their dreams a reality.

Economist Albert O. Hirschman summarized the main responses to any situation of loss or frustration as "exit, voice, and loyalty" (Hirschman 1970). "Exit" represents the most radical response, and tends to be motivated by greater, more optimistic expectations about making the dream a reality and finding a better life in another place. The second alternative is "voice", in other words, protesting and demanding reforms or changes. This response still involves a certain degree of loyalty to the original place, since there is a hope that the situation can be improved and will be more acceptable and satisfying. Finally, the response called "loyalty" (going along with the institutions and community where one is located) can be explained as a way to avoid the costs of rebelling, protesting, or escaping, although this response always brings with it a certain amount of bitterness.

Another possible interpretation of Hirschman's alternatives of exit, voice, and loyalty is that these also correspond to the past, present, and future. Loyalty means remaining in the place where your ancestors lived and where you were born, and maintaining your existing personal and social relationships and cultural references as you have become accustomed to them from past experiences. Voice is located more in the present, since it expresses the desire for a change with respect to the established past, but with the change taking place right away and in a visible manner so the results can be enjoyed. Exit, in contrast, looks only towards the future, and it is the most powerful expression of the dream of a better life.

The exit option – abandoning your relationships and points of reference, including your language, in exchange for new ones you are completely unaccustomed to – tends to come at a high cost, and sometimes can even result in an overall loss of well-being compared to the original situation. In general, those with the highest probabilities of gaining access to better opportunities (compared to those available in the place their ancestors left behind) are the American-born children and descendants of the original immigrants. Again, in the words of Frederick J. Turner, historian of the American frontier, even for those who had already arrived in America, expansion of the frontier during the process of westward settlement across the US was “the escape route from the ties of the past.” The essence of the “exit” is that it always looks towards the future.

Sociologists have also identified a variety of reasons why people may choose to emigrate, changing their place of

residence in pursuit of a better life. More skilled or educated workers want to give their families the kind of comforts described above, including a house, two cars, and material objects. Urban professionals want to have a lifestyle that reflects their previous achievements, while continuing to make progress in their careers.

When looked at from this perspective, immigration is a direct result of the dominant cultural influence exerted by the West that has now spread to every corner of the world, i.e. the dream of having a better life. As documented by sociologists Alejandro Portis and R. G. Rumbaut in their book *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (2012), American lifestyles have become a worldwide standard.

Success in making the American Dream come true is identified with better education and, above all, a rise in social status. Although the American Dream involves upward mobility on a metaphorical social ladder, this mobility is physical as well. This upward climbing of the social ladder is just one more example of the exit, or on-going immigration. The successful individual who rises socially leaves his original social group behind. In fact, the success symbolized and consecrated by a series of physical escapes from the country of origin towards America and, from there, from the poor inner cities and immigrant enclaves to new locations considered as better places to live.

The pursuit of making the dream reality also has very specific psychological motivations and consequences. By leaving their country of birth, immigrants make a difficult decision and

often pay a high price. These costs include separation from the country of origin (and possible loss of the ability to return), separation from family, and abandonment of many of the customs and traditions they are accustomed to. All of this implies the need to sever many emotional bonds. Immigration tends to bring with it a change in socioeconomic status, the need to observe and understand new cultural rules and contexts, and immersion into a new physical environment. These costs must also include any misunderstandings or even conflicts with local residents, economic discrimination, and language difficulties.

The American Psychological Association (APA) recently formed a "Presidential Task Force on Immigration", which produced an extensive, detailed report on the psychological problems that these changes, always guided by the pursuit of a better life, can bring with them. The clearest results from the accumulated body of research on this subject show that, in spite of the obstacles they must overcome, first-generation immigrants have certain advantages when it comes to achievement in school and profession, because of their "enormous optimism", "high aspirations", "dedication to their work", and "positive attitudes towards learning" (APA 2012).

Some of this research considers these attitudes to be essential for success. For example, Kao and Tienda (1995) concluded that "the optimism of immigrant parents about their children's prospects is decisive in terms of the educational success of first-generation and second-generation youth." In terms of work and social ascent, Kao and Tienda also point out

that immigrants from Mexico, in particular, “continue to show results in multiple well-being metrics that are as bad as, or worse than, those of other American minorities. They score lower on certain educational and employment evaluations, and this translates into lower salaries and higher rates of poverty than for African-Americans”. On the other hand, those who do achieve good results, especially those in the second generation, attribute their success to having “inherited an enormously optimistic motivation from their parents”, according to research by psychologists Gretchen Livingston and Joan R. Kahn (2002).

One of the most interesting psychological results seen among those who have emigrated in search of a better life is a strong psychological impulse to enjoy the things they paid such a high price for. When the immigrant looks to the past, to his or her country of origin and the people there, all of these will seem to be more horrible than ever. The immigrant has to believe that his or her new adopted country is the best in the world, and should serve as an example for all the rest.

The United States in particular is the country of last resort. Since most US residents are descended from immigrants who at some point in their lives changed their country in an effort to make their dream a reality, leaving their country would be something unimaginable for them. As discussed above, they may still have other kinds of exits available, but in this case only those within the same country would be seen as feasible. The fact that the vast majority of countries worldwide have only small numbers of Americans emigrating to them reinforces the belief that America is the place you should want to go to, not a

place you should want to leave. The American Dream reinforces itself, even if the reality an immigrant finds there is not entirely as imagined.

The Reality of the Dream

The current setbacks affecting the myth of the American Dream are largely derived from the frustration of so many expectations about the ability to climb the social ladder. The dream begins to tarnish when dreamers get the impression that their children will not have a better life than they did. They have gambled big on this pursuit of happiness based on the belief that America is the land of opportunity. However, the belief that opportunity will always appear is more of a motivation for hard work and persistence than a reflection of some reality that actually exists. Opportunity is not just waiting around for the next batch immigrants to arrive. Instead, it is the product that results from the immigrants' ongoing mobility and willingness to change, along with their sense of inventiveness and creativity.

This psychological attitude can be seen in the results of surveys in which American citizens essentially paint a portrait of themselves. According to some recent polls, 90% of Americans identify as "middle class". However, since larger differences in social class remain apparent, these self-identifications tend to be sub-categorized into "lower-middle", "middle", and "upper-middle", and only a small minority of Americans confess to being either "upper class" or "lower class".

During the presidency of Barack Obama, the Middle Class Working Families Task Force was created, chaired by Vice-President Joe Biden under the slogan, "a strong middle class equals a strong America." This committee has released a series of studies and legislative proposals on education and career training and re-training, work and family, occupational safety, and retirement. One of these conclusions states that "middle-class families are defined by their aspirations more than by their incomes." Specifically, it claims that, "middle-class families aspire to buy a home, a car, and a university education for their children, and they want health care and security for their retirement and a vacation once in a while". The problem these days, however, is that prices for some of these (such as health care, university tuition, and housing) have been increasing faster than people's incomes.

As noted by economists Richard R. Reeves and Kimberly Howard, inter-generational upward mobility is only possible when there is an equal proportion of downward mobility. However, this second type of change has been much less studied. These authors have empirically determined that possession of personal abilities and talents, which can be measured even in adolescence, can predict high probabilities of living in a high-income household as an adult. However, a very high proportion (more than 40%) of those who end up living in high-income households have only modest levels of talent or ability, which means that if their success were to be judged solely on the basis of merit, they could be expected to fail in terms of social ascent.

This means that teenagers from poor families who are able to attend university and demonstrate that they have the talent and motivation needed to achieve a better life, have high probabilities of succeeding as long as they finish their studies in graduate. However, young people who come from a high-income family but who possess less talent, and who therefore should experience social descent according to the myth of social mobility through meritocracy, have an almost 25% probability of ending up in a high-income households as an adult. The rich seem to have a “glass floor”, to use the metaphor employed by many authors. Many who fall down the social ladder for lack of talent or effort will end up falling beneath this floor, but this invisible floor it also prevents many of those who have been born above it from slipping downwards (Reeves and Howard 2013).

The cited authors have developed this argument most extensively in their recent book *Dream Hoarders* (2016). This work is focused on the 20% of Americans with the highest incomes, and it documents how these families have been so effective in passing their social and economic status down to their children, in a manner such that overall social mobility has decreased. Children from upper-middle class families tend to become upper-middle class adults.

This “opportunity hoarding” by wealthier groups can be exemplified in numerous ways: urban planning that tends to reinforce the stability of the different neighbourhoods as well as the differences between them, and access to public education based on place of residence, which tends to create schools with

socially homogeneous groups of students. University admissions procedures and employment opportunities are also more favourable for members of families with “friends in high places”. However, there is one specific mechanism that has traditionally been considered as a source of opportunity, and it backs up this realization of unequal opportunity very nicely: internships. In other words, students or recent graduates are offered the “opportunity” to work for a few months at a company or institution for no pay, and they do so with the hope that they will receive a job offer later on. The problem is that working for six months or a year with no pay is often not feasible for young people from low-income or middle-income families.

Nevertheless, the dream lives on. Even if inequality increases temporarily, Americans continue to believe that the American Dream is real, and this idea continues to generate enormous energy: any American willing to demonstrate sufficient determination and courage can rise to the top of the economic ladder, regardless of how or where their life may have begun.

Even though many recent studies have suggested that faith can indeed move mountains, the reality still cannot coincide with everything many people believe. In a study published by Davidai and Gilovich in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (2015), a distribution of American society into five income categories was presented to 3,000 survey respondents. The researchers asked each respondent to estimate the probability that any person selected at random in the lowest income category would be able to rise up into one of

the other income categories during their lifetime. The reality is that about 30% of these individuals will be able to make this leap in the United States, which is comparatively a very high figure (according to social mobility data from the Pew Research Center). The survey respondents, on the other hand, overestimated the probability of this social ascent from the poorest category to one of the other three higher categories by almost 50%. In other words, they estimated that the poor would be able to make this ascent with an average probability of about 45%.

The results of a similar experiment have been published by Michael W. Kraus and Jacint J.X. Tan in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (2015). In this case the difference was that the participants were asked to estimate the probability of rising up the social scale for people similar to themselves "in terms of their ambitions, abilities, talents, and motivations". Implicitly, they were actually being asked about their own expectations of social ascent.

These responses overestimated the probability of social climbing by even more than in the previous study discussed. These respondents were also asked a similar question related to the probability of attending university, with the results again being highly overestimated. What is also very revealing regarding this optimistic psychological attitude is that the people who overestimate their probabilities of social ascent most highly are those in the lowest income categories: those with the longest road to travel tend to be the ones most willing to believe that advancement is possible. Also, Americans who

are members of ethnic minority groups (African-American, Latino, and Asian-American) tend to overestimate their possibilities of upward social mobility more than those of European origin.

There can be no room for doubt regarding the psychological and social usefulness of these errors in perception, because overestimating upward social mobility is useful for both the rich and the poor. Those who see themselves at the top of the ladder can justify this to themselves, by believing that they have managed to find the same success that is available to everyone else as well. For the poor, this optimistic perspective gives them hopes of a better future and motivates them to continue with their efforts.

2.

Dissatisfied Dreamers:
The Pursuit Goes On

The search to turn the American Dream into a reality has led to the production of numerous literary works as witnesses to this process, everything from non-fiction books, autobiographies, novels, films, to TV shows in the American tradition. These products succeed because immigrants trying to make their own dream come true are able to use these stories of other people's transformations as a model to emulate and can compare them with their own fantasies, anxieties, and fears.

The typical theme of these works implies that America is something fundamentally good and open to the dreams of the immigrant for personal advancement and enjoyment of individual liberties. Once in a while, however, some sort of criticism that cannot be ignored arises to call attention to the fact that America is failing to accommodate the ambitions it has inspired for so long in new immigrants from other parts of the world. Stories of failure and deception raise doubts about America's self-promoted image as the country of opportunity for all. Nevertheless, even in these more cautionary tales, the idea behind America continues to be that of a dream that immigrants identify with their own personal growth and advancement.

20th-Century Immigrants

Film director Elia Kazan, nephew of an Armenian immigrant who had arrived in the US in the early 20th century, told the story of his uncle Svatros in his 1963 film *America, America*.

Back in Anatolia, members of the family were always talking about their dream:

"You say in America they have mountains bigger than this?"

"In America, everything's bigger."

"What else? What else in America?"

"What are we waiting for?"

"Come on you, let's go you, with the help of Jesus."

Svatros' father gives him his whole life savings for the trip to America, so that from there Svatros will be able to help other family members follow in his footsteps. However, the journey is extremely perilous. His money is soon stolen. In Constantinople, where Svatros has been held up for a while, the daughter of a rich Turkish man wants marry him, and asks her father to help persuade him to stay. She tells her father,

"Yes, once he showed me some pictures in a book.

Pictures?

Of a city in America. Very tall buildings. He told me all about them... how tall they were, as if he'd been there. He told me he once had a dream to go there. I didn't know what to say."

"Don't worry, don't worry. All boys have dreams. I had the same dreams, once... when I was a boy, to go to new lands, start a new life."

Finally, after a few more incredible adventures, Svatros arrives in New York and becomes a resident of his new country. He writes a letter to his family:

"And here I am. I reached America... It's no different here. But let me tell you one thing, you have a new chance here... for everyone that is able to get here, there is a fresh start. So get ready, you're all coming. You're coming. I'm working to bring you all here. One by one."

As Kazan has explained, that is exactly what his uncle did, "And he did bring them. It took a number of years, but one by one, he brought them here. Except for his father. That old man died where he was born."

Some written accounts of immigrants from those years in the early 20th century reflect the enormous satisfaction they felt after their dream had come true. Others, however, talk about the difficulties they had to overcome and the doubts that haunted them during their transformation, often up until the point when their integration into American society was sufficiently strong to prevent them from going back.

George Steiner, a Jew who emigrated from Germany to New York, wrote in *From Alien to Citizen* (1914):

"It's not unusual for foreigners like me to love this country, and to love it more, perhaps, than a native ever really could. Many times I would have liked to see the typical American citizen – unconcerned, taking freedom for granted – having an experience like mine, so he could know the value of being a free man from birth. I'm sure it would be a glorious feeling to experience the sudden transformation into a citizen,

from barely being allowed to speak the word "I" to pronouncing those great words in unison: We the people..."

"America has given me the opportunity to achieve certain things and has given me certain rights and privileges, but I think that this country needs to remain young and vital in order to extend these blessings to all of the people along our shores, in our cities, and with whom we interact in our daily lives... I have become increasingly aware that the right to citizenship is given away too easily, only to be taken too lightly afterwards; both the native and the foreigner need to learn that it is not just a gift, but a privilege that must be earned and deserved... We must be sincerely thankful for our awareness of the power of ideals in our national life, and that these ideals require effort in order to be made real."

Taking a different perspective, Abraham Rihbany, a Syrian with Greek Orthodox parents, presents some reflections on the process of integration in "A Far Journey" (*The Atlantic*, 1914), on the premise that his experiences may be helpful for later immigrants.

After living for a while in New York but always among other Syrian immigrants, Abraham decides to try a new place, "During my stay of almost 18 months, I never even had a chance to speak 10 sentences in English. Everyone I worked with, and all my friends too, we ate the same food, spoke the same language, told the same stories, did the same things on the weekends, and were caught up in the same conflicts, those from our native country. I felt like I was still so far away from real life in America, the way I had seen it back in Beirut or

Tripoli... My experience in New York made me realize that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to really become 'Americanized' if I kept on living in a community with just other people from my own country. Just as a new species cannot evolve without a radical break with the ancestral line, the true transformation of a foreigner into an American can never fully take place without a completely breaking away, both internally and externally, of the individual with respect to his or her group of origin."

"The Syrian community in New York helped me as much as it could since they gave me a place of refuge among them for 18 months. They spoke my language and observed my customs and traditions. They protected me from a transition that could have been too abrupt. If I had been launched into American society as soon as I arrived in the country, with no money and without sufficient knowledge of English, the change in environment would have been too violent for me to be able to handle very easily. The community allowed me to deal with many of the difficulties I encountered at first, while my curiosity to learn about the other American influences I felt around me continued to grow."

Rihbany also responds to some criticisms that American citizens had about the "gregarious habits" of foreigners. "It is evident – I admit – that relationships between foreigners, especially in large cities, tend to promote among them the desire to maintain their ways of thinking and inherited ways of life, which makes Americanization doubly difficult. However, if the foreigners with their 'gregarious habits' become dispersed

prematurely, they will soon lose their self-control. They would suffer from loneliness and depressing isolation, and would become a burden on the society that is trying to take them in. Like anywhere else, the law of survival of the most well-adapted also rules in these communities of foreigners.”

For decades, the classic Hollywood film *Casablanca* (1942) has helped to solidify the American Dream. The story begins with a voiceover from the narrator: “With the coming of the Second World War many eyes of imprisoned Europe turned hopefully, or desperately toward the freedom of the Americas.”

The story is largely set in a lively piano bar called Rick’s Café Americain. Much of the plot revolves around the character of Laszlo, an anti-Nazi resistance leader trying to escape to America. Café Americain is also known as the kind of place where black-market traveling papers to the New World might be obtainable.

For example, Mr and Mrs Leuchtag are seen celebrating the fact that they will be leaving for America the next day. They are trying to practice their shaky English, so along with the maître d’ named Carl, they make a toast “to America”.

In another scene, Annina explains to Rick (the bar’s American owner):

“We came from Bulgaria. Oh, things were so bad there, Mister. A devil has the people by the throat. We, Jan and me, we don’t want our children to grow up in that country.”

“So we decided to go to America.”

“If you only knew what it means for us to leave Europe and arrive in America!”

More than 70 years later, this same myth and dream are still alive. A much more recent example is found in the novel *Brooklyn* (2009) by Irish writer Cilm Tóibín (the film version of the same name was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture of 2015). This work brilliantly reflects the feelings of doubt, hope, and determination shared by European immigrants arriving in America in the mid-20th century.

A young Irish girl named Eilis says, "I always assumed I would live in the village my whole life, like my mother had done, where I knew everyone, I have the same friends and the same neighbours, the same routines and the same streets. I expected I would find a job in the village and then marry somebody, stop working, and have kids." But then by chance an Irish priest who had immigrated to the United States visits the village, and he offers her the chance to go back with him to live in a house with some other responsible young women and work in a fancy shop. "She would have preferred to stay at home, sleeping in that room, living in that house, dreaming about a new dress or some new shoes." But her sister encourages her to go, so that one day she will be able to have her own home and her own family.

After Eilis settles in Brooklyn, she works in the shop during the day and takes classes at night to become an accountant, so she can get a better job with more responsibility. When she feels sad, her supervisor at work tell her, "You're just homesick. It happens to everyone. But it will pass. For some it passes faster than for others. Nothing is harder than feeling homesick."

One year after arriving in America, Eilis goes back to her village in Ireland for her sister's funeral, and she stays for a month. She soon begins to feel pressure from her mother and her old friends. They offer her a job and even find her a suitor to tempt her into giving up her new American life and live with them again in the village. She does feel more relaxed there than in Brooklyn, because she knows everybody and how everything works, and she starts to once again become accustomed to the daily routines there. But she ends up remembering the drawbacks that would come along with a return to the village, including a sort of suffocating frugality. "I forgot what this village was like", she replies to a neighbour who had been making derogatory comments about certain aspects of her life in America.

When she leaves again for New York, another young Irish girl travelling on the same ship tells her about her anxieties and fears, just as Eilis had told her fears to another woman on her own initial journey. "They say there are so many Irish in Brooklyn that it's like being back home." Eilis answers, "Yes, it's just like home." As mentioned by the critics, the novel and film represent a true study of the search for a home where one can feel at home, and the difficulty of imagining what this may be like before actually finding it. Beyond the specific details of Eilis' own adventures, this story also has a more universal value.

Teenage Dreamers

The American Dream of a better life that exists today is different from the one that existed just a few decades ago. In this section, eight high school students from Los Angeles, California between 15 and 17 candidly express the feelings of fear and loneliness that can often go along with pursuit of the American Dream. The speakers include: Ibrahim and Omar from Africa; Diana, Eduardo, Juanita, Marisol, and Ricky from Mexico; and Karla from Honduras.

Q: How did you get here from your country of origin?

Diana: I never wanted to be here. Never. I only wanted to go back to Mexico. It was really hard for me. I can remember that when I was young I really loved school. I don't think I was even required to go to school there, since I think you aren't supposed to start until age 6, but my mother knew the teacher and she went and talked to her... But then we came here and I started my first year in school here and it was really hard for me. I already knew, like, the alphabet and stuff, but only in Spanish. And when I got here the teachers couldn't, like, talk to me in Spanish, and they laughed at me if I spoke it. It was really difficult for me.

Karla: It was really bad, because I remember that when I was still in Honduras my sister was always calling from the US. She

told my mother she wanted to go back, that she didn't want to stay there, and she was, like, so miserable, and I was like, 'Oh, my poor sister!' But then four years later they told me I was coming here too, and I felt really bad. It was like, 'Oh no, the same thing is going to happen to me!' But they all thought this was really strange because, like, I'm the one who always took care of herself... when my mother and father were both working I was the one to take care of my little sister and my brother, so they thought my response was odd. Now when they call me they always tell me to come back, which makes me start to cry and all that. My mom, my dad, my other sister, and my little brother, they're all still in Honduras. My mother is a history teacher at the local high school and my father was a professional soccer player, but he's retired now and runs a soccer academy for young kids.

Eduardo: My mom and dad, both of them have really given me the label of model child. They want my little brother to be just like me, do the things I do and get good grades and all that. They want me to look out for him, keep him out of trouble.

Q: Do you feel more American or African?

Ibrahim: I would say American, because even my parents used to tell me that. My parents used to tell me that I'm losing my roots, losing my roots.

Q: And you don't like that?

Of course not! I'm forgetting everything about my culture.

Q: You're forgetting...

All kinds of things.

Q: Like what things?

Everything.

Q: And how do you feel about that?

[Pause] I don't know what to say. That's how it goes... [Pause]

Q: That's how it goes? That's all?

Yeah.

Q: How were your first days at school?

Omar - Well, when you go to a new school, of course you're going to be, like, frustrated. You don't know hardly anyone, and especially the language. You see, the worst part is that you're sitting there, looking at the teacher, they're saying all this stuff, and you have no idea what they're saying. All you can do is just sit there, watching what they're doing. You can't even read what they're writing on the chalkboard. It's really hard.

When I first started school here, I tried talking to everyone. When I had a question or problem, I would tell somebody. I talked to one person today, another one tomorrow, to see who I could communicate with the best. I ended up hanging around with people who didn't just listen and nod their head and stare at me, like I was just talking nonsense. Because some people will listen, but they have no idea what you're saying. And there

other people who, if you talk to them, they will really listen to you. They actually talk to you, you know, and when they're talking they will give you advice about what to do and what not to do.

Karla: There were some other students from Honduras here, but they were older than me and they graduated that year. But every time I went to lunch break after my first three classes, I remember that if I had homework in those classes they would tell me to go down to the cafeteria with my notebook, and they would translate it for me, they would help me do the homework and all that, and when we were finished we would go outside and play or whatever. They really helped me a lot.

Q: Did you have trouble learning English?

Juanita: At first I felt like a foreigner, because, like I said, I didn't know anybody here. I didn't know English. I had no friends and I felt, like, really bad when I had to go to class. I couldn't understand what the teacher was saying. I was really nervous.

Karla: I remember that when I went to my first day of class, the teacher was talking to the students and I was sitting there, like, I have no idea what you're saying. And I tried to ask some Dominicans, since they speak Spanish, but there are things in their Spanish that are different, and I was confused again and really frustrated after that. Then they put me in a class where there were some other students from Honduras and they really

helped me out a lot. They helped me with my homework and stuff. And when I was at home my sister and my cousin always tried to make me speak English. I would say something in Spanish and they would be like, 'I don't understand you!' They were trying to force me to speak English, that's what my sister and my cousin did...

Diana: I couldn't talk to the other girls. I couldn't talk to, like, anybody, because I didn't know English. People just made fun of me. They said some pretty mean stuff... they called me stupid and a lot of other things too. I even had a teacher who said things like that to me. She was always like, I don't know, I think just because I was Mexican she thought I couldn't do the things the other kids could, you know the white kids... The teacher didn't want to speak Spanish and she would get really mad. She said I shouldn't be there because I didn't know English, and like, that I should go back to kindergarten and stay there.

Omar: When I was in school I only spoke English and that's all. No French, we don't speak French around here! The more you speak English, the better you get, so I speak English with my friends to improve my English, my vocabulary and so forth.

Ibrahim: You really need to speak English if you're going to succeed. English is like the number one language. You have to want to speak it. It's very important.

Q: Do you talk to your friends in French?

My friends, we always speak in French... or we mix it up – mix English and French.

Q: Do you have other friends who don't speak any French at all?

Yeah, sure!

Q: And how do you speak with them?

English. Some of my friends don't speak French. I think that's better, too. I think it's good because when I talk to them, I'm practicing my English too.

Q: Have you been able to make friends easily?

Karla: I don't know, I'm always really friendly with people. It's not hard for me. Like, within a few months after getting here I already knew tons of people. I was surprised – like, wow, they know my name! When I was going to school in Honduras I knew, like, some people, but when I came here everyone at the school knew me. So like, yeah, I have tons of friends here. Like the people in the ninth grade, they're the new ones at the school... I make friends with everyone at the school, even the teachers and stuff.

At first, when school started all the Dominicans, the Africans, the Hondurans, they all just sat with each other in groups. But after two or three months, you start to see everyone, like, there's a table with just Africans but also one Dominican – things are starting to mix a little. Then the next week you see a

table with all Africans but also three Dominicans... things start to change, it happens like that.

Some new guys arrived, tall African guys. When they first got here they sat just with the Africans, but they're not just with the Africans anymore. They're with the Hondurans and Mexicans playing soccer. And like, you see how things change. A takes, like, two weeks. The first week it's like they wouldn't talk to anyone. It's always like that. And then someone's like, 'Do you want to play soccer?' Everyone's playing soccer, basketball, everyone's together. And sometimes there are Dominicans and other Africans playing soccer too, but they don't make the teams that way. It's not like it's the Dominicans on one team and the Africans on the other, they're mixed. I like my school.

Q: Do you feel like you've been able to use these experiences as motivation, or do they really just cause you frustration?

Diana: I think because I was always really angry at people and, like, I didn't want them telling me what I was capable of doing... [Starts to cry]. Sorry... It's just because I've held it in for so long, and I've tried to forget about it, but it's, like, that's how I remember it. And now there are other kids, and it's like, I know what they're going through.

Q: Do you think the American Dream will come true for you?

Marisol: My parents, especially my mother, were always saying, 'You just have to watch how your cousins in Mexico do it, just

do it like that!' And I would be like, 'I never asked to come here. You guys brought me here, why harass me for not being like them?' They grew up in, like, a totally different environment, with different rules than us, everything different, different schedules, everything.

Q: Do you wish you stayed in Mexico?

It's hard to get a good education there, but some do manage to get one. I mean, a lot of people do. It doesn't really matter where you are. It's just easier here because you can get a good education for free at the public schools. There you have to pay for all kinds of things, it's hard... I think it would be the same. So it's like, I don't really care where I am.

Diana: Almost my whole family is there [in Mexico], I hardly have any family here, and this just makes it worse for me... I tell them that when I find a job in Mexico I will go and live there, but I don't know, maybe, maybe not. It's like... I don't know. Maybe I'll stay and bring my grandparents here. I don't know. I'm really not sure what my future will look like...

Omar: Here in the USA you can do what you want... You come here, you have a chance to find a good job. If you work hard, you get what you want.

What my mother wants is for me to finish school, go to college, get a good job, help out my family... if I go back to my country, it's a poor country, there are lots of days when people don't

have enough to eat. That's why my mother wants me to find a good job and help out my people there, like the members of my family. And this is basically what school is trying to do also. They just want you to graduate, go to college, get a job. It's all pointing in the same direction.

Ricky: Sometimes luck might help you out a little, but most of it depends on you. It depends on how dedicated you are and the expectations you have.

Karla: When we got our report cards from school in the mail, my cousins who were born here in the United States always got bad grades and failed math or science or whatever, but when my grades arrived it was rather different. Now I've started to notice some bad vibes with my aunt. I don't know if she's jealous or whatever, but she started to treat my sister and me differently than her own children. Because before she always looked at my grades and stuff like that, but now it's like, my report card comes in the mail and she doesn't even look at it, you know? She doesn't look because she knows they're good, and her own kids' grades are so bad. And she knows my grades are good, but she never says, 'Oh, congratulations!' or anything like that. But I don't care. I know the grades are for me, not for her.

Q: Why do you think things are going so well for you now?

Karla: Because I'm responsible, I think, and because I know what I want. I know why I'm in this country. And, I don't

know... I want to help my mom and dad. I mean, even though they had their problems and whatever, they always tried to give us the best they could... So, we try to do our best so we can give our kids the same thing our parents gave us when we were young. We want the same for them. My mother knew I always wanted to be, like, a doctor, so that's what she was aiming for, and she told my sister and me that we could have a better education here. Because the education in Honduras is not bad, but she knew that here we would have, like, more opportunities and more success.

Q: And do you agree with that?

Yes. [Laughs]. Yeah, I do.

Eduardo: My parents want us to have better opportunities, even if this means they will have to go on working in the fields for the rest of their lives. They want us to have a better education and more opportunities than what we would have had in Mexico.

Q: Do you think that's really the way it is?

Yeah. I mean, the economic situation there means I probably wouldn't be able to spend much time in college. Everything in Mexico is really bad, and here things are much more stable.

Illegal Youth

Edilsa, Él, Anh-Thu, and José are four students at the University of Texas in Austin (commonly referred to as UT), and all of them were brought to the United States as children. Texas is one of 10 American states that allow some undocumented students to pay lower in-state tuition fees, and also one of the few that allows them to be eligible to receive financial aid from the state. However, there is still an extra obstacle between these young people and the American Dream. Since they are undocumented residents of the country, and in spite of their efforts and the opportunities they have had, they don't know whether they will be able to stay in the country after graduation and gain access to certain types of employment and a more stable life.

Edilsa López is 21 years old. She spent most of her childhood performing agricultural labour in the fields of Guatemala, while also caring for three younger brothers and moving from city to city to escape an abusive father. Even though she only finished the sixth grade there, by the time she was in the ninth grade in Houston (after a difficult border crossing that left her separated her from her family for months), she was able to read and write. Now in her third year at the University of Texas at Austin, she dreams of the day when she will be employed as a financial analyst and can support her younger brothers.

“When I first arrived I didn't speak English at all, so they put me in the ESL classes (English as Second Language). The teachers could see that I was a good student. I got a note from my English teacher that said, ‘You're going to have lots of success. I believe in you.’ I was so happy to think that somebody believed in me! In my first year I was already taking advanced classes and learning about what college would be like. My mother took my two younger brothers back to Guatemala, and my sister and I stayed here alone.

“We had no house, no food, no money. I found a place for my sister, but they only had space for one person. Then the director of a volunteer program decided she could take me in. I applied for all the scholarships I could find so I could go to UT, and I received enough money to cover my tuition and housing and also my meals and books.

“I want my life to be different from the way people live where I come from. There you're surrounded by people just trying to survive.”

José Torres-Don is 22 years old. He was born in Río Verde, Mexico, and recently graduated from the University of Texas at Austin. He can't work because he is undocumented, so instead he is organizing students to support the passage of the major new Federal law known as the Dream Act, which would facilitate the legalization of immigrants who originally arrived as children, while also providing access to the employment and economic opportunities that the country offers. Not long ago he risked

being deported when he was arrested at a sit-in in Washington, D.C.

"I'm the youngest of nine brothers and sisters and I arrived in this country with my family when I was four years old. Some of my siblings were already in the US, but they came back to help us cross the border. I remember my mother carrying me across the border at night, and I didn't know what was going on.

"I want to do so much. I want to go to law school, but at the same time I would love to see the world, and I would like to graduate, but right now I'm not making progress on that. I'm going to lose my eligibility for a lot of scholarships and some financial aid, but the roles in my family are changing, and we have to be the ones who will do what it takes to keep our family afloat – and that means we have to work. My mom needs dialysis, and her only option is to go back to Mexico. Her sister is sick too and I could be working, I could be working to pay for her treatment...

"But I won't start to worry about whether it's all worth it until after I graduate. I admit it: I get frustrated, I get angry, I complain. But what you do with your anger and frustration is what will end up deciding how things will turn out for you. I am choosing to fight, and I really think we are going to be able to make some changes to our laws."

Anh-Thu is 21 years old. From a Vietnamese family, she was born in a town on the Basque coast of southwest France. When she was just seven years old her family closed its restaurant in

France and moved to Austin, Texas order to be closer to Ahn-Thu's brother, who was studying engineering at UT.

"My English was terrible when we arrived. My parents found a school in Austin that already had quite a few Vietnamese students, so we went there. I learned English and at the same time I forgot all my French!

"I seem to remember that we had a lawyer who told us he could get citizenship for us, but eventually it became apparent that he couldn't, so we gave up on him. By then our visas had expired and we found ourselves in a bad situation, the same one I'm still in today!

"I can't participate in many activities at UT because I live so far away. It takes me about an hour each way on the bus to get there. I can't get a driver's licence, and my brother doesn't even want me to learn how to drive because he says I'll just crash into a tree! I can't go back to France. I don't even speak French anymore."

Him Ranjit is 19 years old. Until the age of 10 he lived in a modest home with his family in Kathmandu, Nepal.

"Undocumented students in Texas are pretty lucky because we pay in-state tuition and we can get financial aid. My scholarships cover the tuition, so my parents only have to pay for my living expenses. The Dream Act would make things so much better for us, because it will give us legal status so that we can work after graduation and do something productive in society.

“Before, we were all afraid to tell anyone that we were undocumented, but people are less afraid now. In high school I didn't know any undocumented students. Everyone kept that to themselves. You feel like you have no faith in your ability to live your own life. But as I've grown older, I've gained confidence in myself.

“In some places you can get deported if you get arrested, even just for a traffic violation. I try not to live in fear. I don't drive. I'm lucky to be here at UT because I can go anywhere on the bus. I used to be quite pessimistic and I didn't think I could do things the other students did, like driving. As I got older I became more optimistic and more appreciative of the things I have. I am in the USA. Compared to the way I grew up in Nepal, where everyone is so poor, my life is much better, even if I am undocumented.”

The Dream Versus the Reality

Some who have tried to make their American Dream a reality have told their own immigration stories, often with an emphasis on the hardships and dangers they faced. For example, in the literary works discussed in this section a poor widow from the Philippines reflects upon the emotional barriers she experienced when considering migration to the USA, a Russian immigrant speaks of the penalties for leaving the Soviet Union, a Peruvian in New York describes his intense feelings of homesickness, and a girl with South American parents living in California contrasts

her experiences there with the imagined reality still being dreamed up by some of her family members back home.

Milagros Galang was born in 1961, to Filipino parents in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. By the time she was 10 years old, her family had lived in seven different cities in the USA, Canada, and the Philippines. In *Letting Go to America* (2013), she tells of the dangers and challenges she faced when emigrating from the Philippines to the USA.

One day her husband said to her: "Milagros, I'm leaving... I just came to say goodbye. I have to go... Are you listening? I'm not kidding. *Aalis na ako...*"

When her husband Ernesto got to the capital city of Manila, "he had to work two jobs in order to make ends meet. He made pretty good money driving tourists around the island, but he had to work such long days and travel so far outside of the city to other provinces.

"He asks her, 'do you like it when I have to go away for weeks at a time? Do you think I like it?'

"The dream he holds so dearly is to take his whole family to Chicago, little by little. First I'll bring you, he would say, and he even told the nurse Mahal (who the family had to hire to care for one of the daughters) that she could have a new life there too. After we save up some more money there we can bring Angela, then little Lila and Lola Ani? I'll be working there as a chauffeur – *ikot ikot* – so I'll be able to buy the plane tickets, while you take care of our home in a community of our own people there – in America.

"Like in their dreams, they will live in luxury. What do you think "land of opportunity" means, Mahal?

"Imagine the girls going to school – a good school! – and then college. They could become doctors or engineers, or better yet, Hollywood movie stars!

"She laughs and gives him a playful shove. You don't know what you're talking about...

"We can stop dreaming. Start living.

"You're just being silly, she says. Every dream will have its end.

"The girls will have a better life there, *oo, nga*. Lola Ani can get the rest she needs. They'll sleep in a big soft bed – Lola and her Mahal – and they will never have to be apart.

And once she agrees to accept his dream, she starts to see that her face is radiating a new kind of brilliance. Not a halo, exactly, but a sustained illumination, a new kind of beauty that the dream had given her. She also thinks about how happy they will surely be once they get there, since just the idea of going has already brought such happiness to her and her husband and the girls and Lola!

"And that is how the work began: the long hours in class at nursing school; those nights spent at the little table in the kitchen with piles of books all around (and perhaps a chicken or two running across the kitchen floor); even when the single bare light bulb hanging from the ceiling began to flicker and dim; even until the shouts of the street vendors began to come in through the open windows in the morning...

"Think about it, *ito na*. We're going to do it, *na*. We're going to America."

Her husband then makes it to Chicago, but not long afterwards he is killed in a car accident.

"Then one day, one of her massage customers turns out to be an old Filipino man from the United States. He sits on the little table in front of her, a small man but with a rather impressive belly that sags downwards towards the floor. His back is covered with bushy plumes of grey hair.

"Come back with me, he says to her.

"They share a laugh, both flirting a little. Oh, if only the queues outside the [US] embassy weren't so long, she says. If she waits for a visa it would take years. 'I'm going to be bigger than what you are now some day, she says, I'm just waiting for my turn'.

"And that's when the old man proposes to her. He's flirting with her. She laughs at his audacity.

"He says: Come home with me. Marry me...

"You really are a dreamer, old man, she says.

Then her gaze falls onto a photo from her wedding day, her poor husband Ernesto and her, dancing together so happily. I could never do that again, no way. Get married again.

"But then she thinks about the girls, who are now working as babysitters. Angela is turning into a *dalaga na*: her maturing breasts covered only by her collection of overly tight T-shirts, her cut-off jeans cut off a bit too short. And those hips! Milagros lets out a sigh and says, "Before we realize it, Lilla will be a young woman too. Working as babysitters and maids".

Later she sees Lola Ani crying as she leans against the ever-present family stew pot. She starts to feel the heat from Ernesto's memory leaving her body. She tries to speak but she has lost her voice. Even the buzzing of the insects on the walls seems to stop. The festival drums in the distance go silent. He's gone, she cries, he's gone now.

“And suddenly everything makes sense, this trip to America, this talent for healing that she has. She seals off the doors to her heart. There's no longer any room for messy emotions. She has daughters to care for.”

Lara Vapnyar was born in 1971. She emigrated from Russia to New York at age 23 when she was three months pregnant. She remembers that “I didn't have many expectations; I hadn't planned out our lives. What I did expect is that it would be fantastic: I would find an amazing job and have a life full of adventure”. She tells her story in *Fischer vs. Spassky* (2012):

“There were so many things in the Soviet Union that just tormented the people. So many lies, so many humiliations, both large and small. The fact that Marina was not accepted into graduate school because they had already accepted another Jew. The fact that Sergey was not allowed to attend a scientific conference in a foreign country because he was not a party member. The fact that they had to wait in a terrible queue just to buy meat, toilet rolls, or socks. White cotton socks – and ugly ones too! When Marina had seen images of foreign life in films or magazines, the colours were what made the biggest impression on her. Painted colours – yellow, blue, green. Pink

houses. Blue swimming pools. Purple bras. Bright red lipstick. She began to lust after these everyday objects, which became a sort of existential torment. She felt like she was trapped in a world of grey, an inferior world, while other people were outside, enjoying their fabulous, brightly coloured lives. Sergey used to have an especially hard time. Ever since he was a boy he had experienced this lack of freedom as a something physical. He used to bend the frames of his glasses a bit to avoid even the most minimal pressure on his temples. He never wore gloves, not even in the middle of winter, because he felt like his fingers were suffocating. Sasha grew up the same way he did. Or maybe it was worse. He never wore a tie or high collar, and his shoes were always at least a half size too big.

In the autumn of 1971, Sergey said they needed to think seriously about emigrating. Some of their friends were already getting ready to go. Some had already gone. They didn't have anything to lose. Marina's parents had died. Sergey's parents had two other children. Sergey was an analytical chemist. He knew he was destined to find a good job in America, where the opportunities are unlimited and success only requires talent and determination. They could get a visa for Israel, he said, then go to Europe, and from there they could try to enter the USA. It would be difficult, but not impossible. The hardest part was getting the visa to leave the Soviet Union. It was very common to be denied. Their friends Andrei and Nina Botkin had been denied, and now they were living in a terrible sort of limbo, outside of the law in the eyes of the Soviet government, both fired from their regular jobs, with Andrei now painting cabins at

some remote complex, and with Nina working as a cleaning woman at a school for the deaf. Their son, Kolya, was expelled from his kindergarten and is now being cared for by his demented grandmother. Marina was terrified of ending up this way, and she realized that Sergey was too.

Daniel Alarcón was born in 1977 in Lima, Peru. After immigrating to the United States, he told his story with an emphasis on what feels like to be so far away. In a section called 'Absence' in his book *War by Candlelight* (2005), he writes:

"Leaving [Peru] is not a problem. In fact it's exciting, it's like a drug. What really kills you is not being able to go back. Any immigrant can tell you this. Those who miss their country after being away for 10 years can tell you this. They can tell you about the euphoria that fades quickly, about how new things lose their novelty, and then a little later, even their ability to surprise you. The language is a problem. You get tired of exploring. Then, the list of the things you really miss starts to multiply beyond all reason, nostalgia starts to form a sort of haze around everything: in your memory, your own country is suddenly clean and free from corruption, the streets are safe, everyone is friendly, and the food is always delicious! The sacred details of your previous life appear and then re-appear, coming back in strange cycles, in a thousand different daydreams. Your pockets may be full of money, but your heart feels sick and empty."

Carolina De Robertis, daughter of a Uruguayan father and Argentinian mother, grew up in England and now lives in California. In her book *No Subject*, she writes:

“You know how it feels when you've been away from your country for so many decades that you start to think that maybe it was all a dream? Or maybe this is the dream-place. This is Los Angeles. With a house just a few minutes' drive from where the Hollywood stars live. You don't need to see celebrities every day to know that they are there, to feel their power – or at least the power they have over your family members back in your own country.

“When I arrived here for the first time, I thought in secret that maybe I would get discovered. You know, by the movie people. They would see me walking down the sidewalk and beg me to appear in their films, like a gift to their cameras, and so I would feel obligated to sacrifice my scientific career at the altar of the silver screen. And why not? You hear all kinds of things about Hollywood, people becoming stars overnight and all that. But that didn't happen. I am still a chemist. Only on rare occasions do we see any celebrities, although you wouldn't know it from the way Marta talks to her family members on the phone. For her sister, her brother, her father, and her cousins, she's the star of her own glamorous life in LA. She's the one who made it, the one who did it.”

3.

The Documentary Film:
When a Dream Comes True

The documentary film *When A Dream Comes True* is directed by Eduardo Antoja and produced by La Diferencia. It incorporates the stories of many people who have at some point felt dissatisfied with their current situation (even while living in a more advanced, welfare-state society). They have dreamed of a better life, and have gone to America in an effort to make their dreams come true. Some of these people have managed to make their dream a reality, while others are still working on their dream and putting in the effort necessary to achieve it. Finally, there those who have failed and who feel bitter about it, as well as those who have learned to accept a life without illusions.

The protagonist of *When A Dream Comes True* is a nonconformist named Ed. From a very young age, Ed learned that life is dangerous and uncertain, that things can change in an instant. He had always been told that his favourite movies came from the USA. He eventually learned how to see the world using just one eye, as if constantly looking through a camera's viewfinder. For Ed, life has always been about making films, and when was able to make his first visit to the United States at age 12, his dream just became bigger. The huge houses, the yellow school buses, the barbecues, the oversized cars, and so on. It was all so new, and yet so familiar. He realized that a huge smile had suddenly appeared on his face. He felt great. He believed that in the USA, anything was possible.

But his family didn't see it that way. Ed was the son of an engineer who used to constantly tell him, "In life you have to do lots of things you don't want to do". Ed had ended up studying telecommunications, which was the most prestigious subject at the time. This was supposedly "the career for him". It was something he had heard in church many times: you must use the talents God has given you in a responsible way. According to the people around him, making films would only be a way of ignoring his family's sound advice. But back at the Department of Engineering, Ed felt like his soul was being crushed. He felt like he was slowly dying, along with his dreams.

His parents were not at all happy with his decision to drop out of school. And although they would never admit it to them, his friends didn't understand it either. What they were accustomed to was getting their degree, finding a job with a fancy title in English, working for a multinational, launching into their brilliant careers, and so on. Ever since then, and in spite of the fact that his first cinematic production was a success, he was always treated as the Bohemian, the "creative one", the irresponsible one.

His love life was never stable either. Love seems to have been made for people with time on their hands, and Ed's head was always too full of scripts, screenplays, and books he wanted to write. But time went by, and the books and screenplays never got finished. And instead of documentaries, he found himself making corporate videos for companies he didn't believe in. Ed had become what he never wanted to be. The problem

was not that he had changed, but rather that he had put his whole life on hold for 12 years.

The nonconformist Ed was now 39 years old. He had lived in nine different apartments and still had no steady partner. He had never felt completely comfortable with the relationships or homes he had. At the same time, he felt like his dreams had not come true. He had become complacent by making advertising instead of films, by building a company that provided services to others instead of focusing on his own ideas, and by living in a reasonably comfortable manner instead of doing whatever it takes to make his dream come true.

A couple of years earlier, Ed had been at the point of marrying reasonably well. His fiancée was an attractive and well-liked woman from a good family, but he felt like the passion in the relationship was not strong enough, and he broke off the engagement two months before their planned wedding date. Ever since then, he has promised himself that he would never again use logic and reason as a way to suffocate his desires and passions.

Ed now leaves his city of Barcelona behind to start his journey to America, the country where he had always dreamed of arriving to pursue his film career. In the USA, the statement "You can do it!" carries much more weight than "Appreciate what you have". On the road, Ed meets people who are at different stages in their pursuit of the American Dream, and he tries to find out whether a person can learn more by seeing their dreams become tarnished and broken, or if it would have

been better for them to never have tried to make their dreams a reality in the first place.

Ed is never sure whether to follow his dreams or leave them behind, and he wonders whether choosing the second option would reflect his maturity, or would it actually reflect his desire for comfort and convenience or his fear. Ed was afraid, he was afraid that sometimes dreams may just be an excuse used by children and teenagers who don't want to grow up, just a way to avoid the realities they are facing. He also worries that his dreams may just be the result of influences like Hollywood movies, and in reality things are not as attractive and satisfying as they may appear on the big screen. Ed is also afraid that even if his dream does come true, he will still have the same feeling of dissatisfaction. In other words, he is afraid of living his life in a permanent state of transition, always looking for something better.

From Barcelona to New York to Los Angeles

Tourists who visit Barcelona return home talking about what a wonderful city it is: the architecture of Gaudi, the great bars and restaurants, the sun and beaches, and the city's champion soccer team, FC Barcelona. They think that life here must be so exciting. But Ed doesn't see it that way. Barcelona is a small city. Very small. Sure, it has an airport, escalators, and bus stops that tell you when the next bus is arriving. People appreciate the social services they have available, and resist

losing any of the social-welfare policies that took years to develop. Nonetheless, Barcelona is still only a small city. This is because the people of Barcelona have made it that way. Traditions still prevail over the ambition to do something new. The Barcelona Ed knows is the city where you queue up on Sunday morning to buy your pastries, read the newspaper in a sidewalk café, and take your kids to the park. Most of the people Ed knows were born in Barcelona and have lived there their entire lives. And sure, they do love to travel abroad, but they always return to Barcelona after a few days or so.

The Barcelona Ed knows is a grey city, in spite of its modernist architecture, fine weather, free education and health care, famous cuisine, and world-famous soccer team. Grey is the colour of the buildings in its neighbourhoods, the pigeons who have taken over the city, and the souls of its residents. Or maybe all of this is unfair, and the only thing that is actually certain is that Barcelona is the city that would not allow Ed to make his dream a reality. In the end, one thing is for sure: Barcelona is the point of departure (and who knows, it may even end up as the ending point of the documentary as well).

New York is the natural point of entry to the United States for people coming from Europe, and it is also the starting point for Ed's American journey. We see the New York we have already seen so many times in films, but the less charming and attractive parts of the city play a role as well. To get an inside look at the day-to-day life of the New Yorkers, the locations used will emphasize the interiors of the city's lofts, converted warehouses, and art studios. Inside these rooms and spaces in

the city's immense buildings, Ed meets people struggling to become musicians, actors, and artists. He also meets people who think they have a dream, but in reality the only thing they are pursuing is the goal of making money.

New York can also be a very tough city. Most people who live in New York have had to re-define their dreams, or else leave them behind entirely in order to survive in the Big Apple. Ed didn't want to let the same thing happen to him.

Ed's next destinations are small towns in rural America, which he visits driving the across the country, always heading west. Ed wants to have the authentic American experience, so he takes special interest in the residents of some of the less-glamorous states – the ones that Americans who fly between the two coasts sometimes refer to as "the fly-over states" (i.e., not worth visiting, better just to fly over). Ed's personal search for answers is closely linked to his desire to experience images that, for him, represent the "real" America. So he looks for people with a wide range perspectives and dreams, like maybe an auto mechanic, a waitress at a roadside diner, a truck driver, a farmer, a police officer, a prostitute in Las Vegas, a cowboy, a biker, etc. A special importance will also be placed on visiting some of America's most spectacular natural landscapes (including some more secluded corners of them), most of which would be impossible to find anywhere in Europe.

Paradoxically, Ed's journey ends in Los Angeles, just where Ed's dreams of and many others' dreams begin, in the place all the movies are made. In LA, Ed meets with a film studio executive and also a filmmaker or screenwriter. But in

the City of Angels we also see homeless people who once believed in the American Dream, including some who surely believed that if they risked it all they could have a shot at being a winner.

Traveling both east-to-west and north-to-south in the states, the film will include people who have not yet been able to make a break with their regular life to pursue their dream; others who are already some way down the road towards achieving their goals; and some whose journey has already come to an end (either because they found what they were looking for or because they were unable to succeed). This documentary hopes to inspire viewers and encourage them not to give up on their hopes and aspirations. It encourages them to get to know themselves, and also to recognize when it might actually be better to give up on their dreams.

The film will document a road trip through the land of opportunity, in search of people at different stages of making their dreams come true. The question to be answered is this: Is it possible for a dream to come true just the way the dreamer had imagined it? Yes, this documentary is a journey. But it is a journey inside of ourselves as dreamers, to try to determine whether, when you change the things around you, and instead surround yourself with the images you used to see only in your dreams, do you really become happier? Or to put it another way, to find out whether happiness depends on whether or not you are able to achieve what you wanted to.

Narrative and Visual Treatment

The documentary's point of departure is the life of Ed, a man who leaves his familiar surroundings behind to begin a journey in pursuit of his dream. The main character and his dream are presented using first-person narration, with a visual shots cut in to illustrate the things Ed is explaining (sometimes more subjectively, but also by appearing on the screen), or animated clips, or fragments of conversations with the people around him, which he will be recording himself.

For example, a person who is dissatisfied in spite of having a comfortable life is shown, using an ironic tone (both in relation to the narration and the type of images used to describe his life). However, this tone will gradually become more reflexive over the course of the film.

Although the character of Ed is the narrator, and his story and his journey are used as the thread that ties the whole documentary together, it is not a documentary about him. Instead, it is about his evaluation of the dreams and experiences of numerous additional characters.

The trip begins in Barcelona, Ed's city of origin, then continues after he arrives in the USA. Most of the documentary will therefore revolve around images from the trip (in the style of a road-trip movie): set-up shots used to visually illustrate the content of the narration, and dialogue and scenes that revolve

around the everyday lives of the people Ed comes into contact with.

During the journey the shots will alternate between some from Ed's perspective (handheld camera), and a much more traditional camera language, with a sort of photographic feel (in other words, in many cases the camera will be fixed and the actions will just take place in front of the lens without the camera moving at all.

There will also be shots showing the vastness of the landscape, which will make Ed and his dreams seem like something rather insignificant.

Some of Ed's reflections will also be displayed on top of a frozen image of what the viewer has just seen.

When Ed appears on-screen he will always be wearing the same T-shirt. This will make him more easily identifiable, since he may often be quite far away from the camera in scenes where the role of the protagonist is the landscape or the surrounding environment.

In terms of the editing, quick image and sound cuts will be used to splice in Ed's reflections, before returning to the more conventional images being presented to the viewer. There will also be fragments of voicemail messages that Ed's mother has left for him, as well as images based on the calls he is making by Skype to people back in Barcelona.

In terms of the audio track, the universe of sounds from the various locations along the trip will be given significant importance. For the music, recordings made by one of the characters appearing in the documentary will be used.

It is also worth pointing out that the narrative voice-over will be originally recorded in three languages (Catalan, Spanish, and English), and the interviews with the characters appearing in the documentary will take place in English as well as in Spanish and Catalan.

Storylines

Interwoven narrative lines.

The documentary is made up of multiple narrative lines:

NARRATIVE LINE A: ON THE NEED (OR LACK OF NEED) TO HAVE A DREAM AS A DRIVING FORCE IN LIFE

Are people with no goals to achieve actually happier?

The crisis that Ed is experiencing based on his desire to hold onto his American Dream inspires him to make a journey. During this journey, he will meet a variety of people who will provide him with some key insights into the questions he is asking about dreams, and whether or not dreams are something that people NEED to have.

Even though this is a physical journey through many different American states, this narrative mostly has to do with Ed's internal search and personal growth.

Through this storyline, as well as through other reflections that Ed will express throughout the documentary, the film will make progress as the various characters Ed meets contribute new elements to the discussion.

However, this more philosophical narrative line will not be immune to points of reversal, crisis, and resolution. The characters do not appear in any logical order; in other words, we don't first see someone who hasn't started pursuing their dreams, then later see someone who has. Some of the interviewees will also be sceptics or people who don't believe in dreams, which will help provide for a counterpoint to the film's thesis.

NARRATIVE LINE B: ON THE CONVENIENCE (OR INCONVENIENCE) OF MAKING YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE

What price are people willing to pay to make their dreams come true? In addition to looking for answers, Ed also has a more specific goal to achieve: he wants to make it to Los Angeles and its film studios in Hollywood, so that he can make his dream of working there a reality.

This storyline has more to do with external conflicts. At one point, Ed considers giving up on his journey and going back to Barcelona to re-start his company. In another scene, Ed is talking with his mother on Skype, and she tells him that his life should be there in Barcelona.

This narrative line also includes all of the unexpected and inconvenient events that take place during the trip, often caused by Ed's fascination with horses, his amusement by things like the sound of the car's air conditioning controls, or his refusal to ride in the passenger seat.

SUB-LINES (C, D, E): THE DREAMS OF THE OTHER CHARACTERS

Is it possible for a dream to come true just the way the dreamer had imagined it?

The third narrative thread is made up of three sub-threads, which correspond to three characters whose dreams the story will follow.

The film therefore includes a re-encounter with a musician from New York but in a different state, on the premise that he has gone there to play a gig. A re-visit is also given to a person who left the Midwest for Los Angeles to pursue a dream, in order to find out whether the dream is closer to being made true.

THE LANDSCAPE

Finally, the landscape becomes a storyline in itself, an important character that changes over the course of the documentary. The sun and rain, the flora and fauna of each place will influence the type of dreams being depicted.

Structure

FIRST ACT: BARCELONA

Introduction of the theme and narrator.

The starting point. DISSATISFACTION.

INTERVIEWS: Family members, psychologist, mother, Ed's friends.

Conflict: The need to escape, even if most people around don't understand it. Goal: Will making the dream come true provide real satisfaction, or will it only generate more frustration afterwards?

SECOND ACT: In the USA

The second act is the fieldwork. This is a coast-to-coast road trip across the USA, where Ed meets various characters who are at different stages of making a dream come true.

Multiple stories will be linked together. For example: one character will accompany Ed on his trip, so that this person can reflect upon his dreams with Ed. The film will also follow three other characters as they try to achieve their dreams.

THIRD ACT: USA or Barcelona?

Nobody really knows whether this trip will end up in the United States or in Barcelona. What is clear, however, is that whatever happens, it will have been worth the effort. The story will have educational value. It will be an example of how you have to

either overcome your obstacles, or learn to be content with what you already have. In any event, IT WILL BE USEFUL AND INSPIRATIONAL.

MESSAGE: It is better to pursue your dream and fail, than to fail by not even trying. Making a dream come true, or at least trying to, always results in personal growth.

Examples:

Micha was born in Germany, but as an adult he bought a ranch in Colorado. However, he later had to sell it because his wife did not share his cowboy dreams. After talking to Ed, Micha decides to accompany him on his journey as far as Colorado to show him the old ranch. On this pretext, Micha (who has already accomplished his dream, even though his wife vetoed part of it) comes into contact with other characters who are planning to follow their dreams. Specifically, this will be reflected in a conversation between Micha and one of the characters at a scenic lookout stop along the highway.

We will also see Brian again, a musician from New York who is now in Los Angeles or Chicago to play a gig.

Another point that will be made is that in our era of high-tech telecommunications, leaving behind your whole environment and place of origin is not as easy as it may seem. The calls from Ed's mother or other conversations by Skype with friends and colleagues in Barcelona will also be a recurring device used in the second act.

THE ROAD TRIP

Sometimes, Ed himself will react to disagreeable aspects of the landscape. For example, finding so many churches advertising like stores at a shopping mall to get more customers, or a fast food chain that promotes its own special facility for spiritual revival. Aspects like this were never part of the original dreams he imagined. However, as Ed will learn during his journey, the USA is a land of great contrasts: landscapes, communities, and cultures.

Character sketches

Ed is only the thread that holds the story together, providing the perspective that will allow the viewers to get to know him, but also to get to know themselves.

In addition to Ed, who is the main character, viewers will encounter three types of characters during the documentary:

1) Fragments of interviews with people who are important in Ed's life in Barcelona (neighbours, family members, or friends). This provides some key elements for defining who the narrator is and for establishing his initial situation. In some cases, these characters will appear again in the second act by telephone or Skype.

2) There will have to be a series of characters who Ed meets during his trip across the United States, and who are at different stages of pursuing their dreams:

- One who has never had a dream;
- One who is giving up on his dream;
- One who has a dream but who has not started to pursue it;
- One who has begun taking steps towards pursuing a dream;
- One who is living a dream; and
- One who pursued his dream, but failed to achieve it.

In some cases the stories of the characters will be more deeply developed, including their actions and lifestyles or their conflicts and contradictions, while in other cases the characters simply serve as a way to provide reflective elements on the theme, based on the these characters' own experiences and words.

Some of these characters will be related to the main characters, while others will just appear along the road being travelled by Ed. Most of the people Ed will meet during his trip through the United States represent some sort of icon or archetype, since Ed's pursuit of his dream has to do with the image he has formed of the United States based largely upon Hollywood films. Although in many cases the characters will appear more spontaneously during the trip itself (and therefore, during the documentary's production process), some characters and their stories have already been identified.

3) Other characters will appear only as short cut-ins that will serve as a counterpoint to the perspectives of the main characters. For example, someone who doesn't understand this obsessive failure to appreciate what you have; or someone who feels content with the way things are; or someone who has the

opinion that anyone who is unsatisfied with their life will continue to feel that way, even if their circumstances change, etc.

CHARACTERS

TERESA, Ed's mother:

"Son, it seems like every day you want something different... I guess I didn't raise you right, but I don't know where I went wrong..."

CLARA, Ed's ex-fiancée:

"You wouldn't go if you had a wife. All you're really searching for is love.

JOAN, one of Ed's co-workers:

"You should be thankful for what you have. Not everyone owns a company that's actually making money. Appreciate what you have!

PEDRO, Ed's friend:

"It's easy to leave when you have nothing to lose, but you're losing so much, look what you're giving up! It's commendable I guess – or have you finally become as stupid as you look?!"

BRIAN LAZARUS, New York

Originally from Boston, Brian thought that by the age of 25 he would be a rock star for sure. But now he's pushing 40 and the

only stardom he has tasted is by playing at a small clubs around Brooklyn. His dream of being a famous musician is long gone.

NATALIE SAIBEL, New York

Natalie's dream was to become an actress, and that's why she moved to New York in the first place. But she would never admit that now, because doing so would mean admitting that she failed.

MICHA MERGET, Marble Hill, Missouri

Micha left Germany to live in the USA, where he had dreams of buying a ranch. He made his own dream of being a cowboy come true, but his wife was not as happy with that lifestyle.

SCOTT KENNEDY, Silicon Valley, CA

Scott broke up with his partner back in Kentucky and headed for California's Silicon Valley region. He ended up living in his car for a few weeks after arriving, but it was a small price to pay to pursue his dream of creating his own tech start-up.

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