



It Was All a Dream: A New Generation Confronts the Broken Promise to Black America

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Young Black Americans have been trying to realize the promise of the American Dream for centuries and coping with the reality of its limitations for just as long. Now, a new generation is pursuing success, happiness, and freedom -- on their own terms.

In *It Was All a Dream*, Reniqua Allen tells the stories of Black millennials searching for a better future in spite of racist policies that have closed off traditional versions of success. Many watched their parents and grandparents play by the rules, only to sink deeper and deeper into debt. They witnessed their elders fight to escape cycles of oppression for more promising prospects, largely to no avail. Today, in this post-Obama era, they face a critical turning point.

Interweaving her own experience with those of young Black Americans in cities and towns from New York to Los Angeles and Bluefield, West Virginia to Chicago, Allen shares surprising stories of hope and ingenuity. Instead of accepting downward mobility, Black millennials are flipping the script and rejecting White America's standards. Whether it means moving away from cities and heading South, hustling in the entertainment industry, challenging ideas about gender and sexuality, or building activist networks, they are determined to forge their own path.

Compassionate and deeply reported, *It Was All a Dream* is a celebration of a generation's doggedness against all odds, as they fight for a country in which their dreams can become a reality.

It Was All a Dream: A New Generation Confronts the Broken Promise to Black America Details

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Amy says

Exquisite sociological memoir. Will share excerpts with my class; a fantastic add for any teachers who cover the American Dream as part of a history or literature unit.

Beverlee says

What does the American Dream mean in 2019? Is it a universal dream for all people or does it depend on race/ethnicity, gender, and/or sexuality? Should this dream be modified if it doesn't work in the manner one expects? These are just a few of the questions I had after reading the first chapter of *It Was All a Dream*. There are no easy answers-the American Dream is thought to be a symbol of success, of "making it" in a world where you're expected to fail. How does the dream manifest itself? This is where one can argue that the dream has been fulfilled if one has the material goods to promote a vision of wealth. In addition to wealth (real or imaginary), there is a social representation to add-the dream includes marriage & children. The children are to be educated at the best elementary and secondary schools, moving on to attend the nation's most prestigious colleges and universities, culminating with landing a coveted position with potential for growth and acclaim. However, this is not the reality for a large number of African Americans. Reniqua Allen challenges the reader to think about how the American Dream or lack thereof has impacted their life. What does it mean to not have access to the resources that make the dream a reality? Who is to blame when one's reality doesn't mirror the dream? Should this even be a cause for concern?

I really, really admire Ms. Allen's writing and research. This is not an easy topic to tackle and it takes a lack of ego to admit their outer appearance is not all good, especially in the age of social media. This book evaluates multiple perspectives from romantic relationships, politics, education/college debt, drug addiction, sex work, and professional career/workplace. The points of view presented are varied between traditional middle class, poor working class, and blue collar. However, their concerns are fairly universal. What really stands out to me is that Allen does not interject her opinion in the text. She lets the research speak for itself loud and clear. The multitude of voices led me to conclude that the American Dream is outdated and not the vision I want for me. That doesn't mean that I or anyone else who isn't in search of a supposed dream is unworthy. It means that we, like previous generations, are fighting to live on our terms rather than under a gaze of inferiority.

One thing I didn't really think about reading-how BLM (Black Lives Matter) has faded from the national news to a large degree. An answer is given.

Quotes to think about-admittedly hard to choose, but I'll share three. "Women were fierce, independent, hard-working, and feminist(without having to announce it, display it or safety pin it). They made clear all too often that marriage and "happily ever after " was for White girls" (245).

"Maybe our mobility shouldn't always be measured like our White millennial peers. Maybe it's measured in joy and pleasure. If this country was never meant for us anyway, maybe we have to look beyond" (314). Speaking about the Black middle class-"These are the folks who "make it." Who often find economic and political "success" in the White world, get so-called approval from larger society, but also suffer from unequal economic, social, and housing conditions. They are found in newsrooms, classrooms, and boardrooms, even the White House, yet they remain as misunderstood as ever" (178-179).

Nicole says

I am disappointed to say that this was a DNF for me about 100 pages in--not because I was not interested in the subject matter (in fact, I was excited to read more about it), but because after a while it felt like a slog to get through it, and because it was poorly written/edited. I am still interested in learning more, so maybe I'll give it another try sometime, or refer to the resources in the bibliography.

Ted Wight says

This a sloppy, ignorant excuse for a "researched" book. Clearly the author has a enormous bias, and this will confirm that bias with most "progressive" readers. But if one were to eliminate references to "African American" and (initial cap) "Black" and sometimes substitute (initial cap) "White" the book would read the same. No, most people will not always reach whatever goals one establishes, no matter what color one's body is. The American Dream was never "promised" by the Founders of the USA or the authors of the Constitution. The American Dream is not any concrete idea anyway it is completely subjective. So the entire premise of the book is fraudulent. But it will sell to those wishing to be thought "progressive" and who cannot stomach reading it. Certainly the "research" cited and the comments of progressives like former president Obama are not anything but opinion as is this book. I wonder who paid for Ms Allen's trip around the country talking.

But in summation: there is no promise in the United States of America except one once, the freedom to pursue -- not reach -- happiness. Itself a subjective word.

If you are a Democrat or a Republican wishing to look current and with it, buy the book, and give Ms Allen some money.

Anna (never_without_a_book) says

This book was so unique and powerful in so many ways. Allen gives us the stories of young Black Americans(Millennials) who are creating, working, fighting, loving, and surviving. From civil rights movement, the economy, political and racial rifts of the post-Obama era, their stories are both heartbreaking and hopeful. This is a must read.

Sophia says

I think it was a pretty informative book. It really captured different people's experiences as black millennials throughout the US. I had to read this for a class and attend a lecture by the author. If anyone at all is curious about the book or certain parts of it (different chapters talk about different types of millennial situations), I recommend at least reading a chapter or two. I do not read nonfiction at all, with the exception of Night by Elie Wiesel, but now I feel more compelled to read it. A solid 4/5 stars from me!

Ruby says

"My American Dream was to not fuck up. My dream was to defy expectations. To be unpredictable, to do something better and something more than my ancestors. Perhaps I thought that if these dreams came true, I would finally be respected, embraced, so that America would recognize that I too existed and had a voice. In retrospect, I wonder why I even cared about any of that, because again and again America has shown it cares so little about people who look like me."

"The American Dream is one of the most enduring myths in America, yet it is also one of its most prominent falsehoods. The dream, the idea that anyone can succeed and enjoy a prosperous life through hard work, has been around since the founding of the country. But despite the reality that the Dream applies only to a limited number of people, America never seems to grow weary of this idea."

"The idea of the American Dream in our society provides important clues into how Americans see themselves, how we view upward mobility, and what we believe the promise of America is."

"Despite their degrees, interracial partners, and love of Beyonce, White millennials think more like their parents than their fellow Black and Brown millennials. Research by Spencer Piston at Syracuse University found that 51 percent of young Whites think Blacks are lazier than Whites, while 43 percent said Black people are not as intelligent. Equally problematic is that 32 percent of White millennials believe that racism isn't a major problem compared to 24 percent of Asian Americans, 21 percent of Latinx, and 12 percent of Black Americans."

"Sure, I was aware of the shitty sides of America: I gasped when riots broke in Los Angeles, cried when Phillip Pannell, a young Black Man, was killed by cops in my own hood, and watched in horror as Anita Hill was attacked for speaking out against sexual harassment. But it seemed for a while that my generation of Black millennials would actually do better than our parents and prove that for Black Americans, dreams could come true. Looking back, I think perhaps I was just being young and naive, having not fully understood what America often does to young Black kids with dreams of a better life."

"I realized once again that New York is never as progressive as it's made out to be, and often it's downright lonely to be young and Black here."

"Years after the 2016 election, in a country that still feels divided, I can't tell if the red state/blue state differences even matter still. Hatred, fear, and resentment seem to flow through the land."

"For Black kids, who have to work twice as hard, he said a bachelor's degree is just the minimum requirement for even a sliver of the stability that his White peers have, and even that only happens to a lucky few."

Whites are so privileged in our society that the median wealth among White high school dropouts is significantly larger, at \$51,300, than Black families headed by someone with a college degree (\$25,900), according to a 2014 study by the think tank Demos. Most of us don't have intergenerational wealth to rely on, partially because we have systematically been denied any opportunities to accumulate it."

"College tuition has become a challenge for millennials of all ethnicities, who have 300 percent more debt

than our parents, but for Brown and Black millennials, who often don't have the same amount of wealth or security as their White counterparts, the cost can be prohibitive."

"All too often we don't have the financial resources or parental support to pay for college or graduate degrees. So debt becomes our family, our inheritance checks, our stock and oil money, and we try to borrow our way into a dream of education that we've been sold. We aren't going into debt buying rims or paying for expensive weaves; we're going to debt to pay for education. We know that we're held to a higher standard in ways that other young people aren't."

"Instead of revered group, the Black working class is perceived as something else: an underclass. When and if the working class is acknowledged by the media, it's almost always through a lens of Whiteness not Blackness."

"I would say, generally speaking, immigrants are more hungry, have more of a gut, but then you know, a caveat would be it's all based on the individual. Generally speaking, the immigrant has a little bit more of...that craving. Maybe not the fight, but craving in them. That is what being an immigrant is. They are seeking something better. They're extra hungry."

"Either I was going to stay sad living and accept misery around me, or I was going to move on and continue finding the best way to live. I still have moments where I get sad. I still have moments where I still get depressed, but I do know how to put myself in a place where I will have joy."

"Women were the shining stars in my life, and the men, it seemed, always played a secondary role. Women were fierce, independent, hard-working, and feminist (without having to announce it display it, or safety-pin it). They made clear all too often that marriage and "happily ever after" was for White girls."
