



DREAM ON

with
JOHN FUGELSANG

Viewer Guide

GUIDE CREDITS

Writers:

Michelle Fawcett, Ph.D., and Roger Weisberg

Additional Research:

Melody Glynn, Francesca Petronio, and Kelly Beaudoin

Design:

Elin McLain, Dave Garlock

Ink Stained Creative

Photography:

Alan Barker, Sandra Chandler

John Hazard and Jennifer Summer

**For General Information and
to Host a Community Screening:**

Public Policy Productions

PO Box 650, 3 Ludlow Lane

Palisades NY, 10964

Email: pppinfo@pppdocs.com

Phone: 845-398-2119

Web: <http://www.pppdocs.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/dreamonfilm/>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/dreamon_film

To Order the Film for Educational or Institutional Use:

Alexander Street Press

3212 Duke Street

Alexandria, VA 22314

Phone: (703) 212-8520

Email: sales@alexanderstreet.com

Web: <https://www.academicvideostore.com/video/dream-on>

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SYNOPSIS

DREAM ON investigates the perilous state of the American Dream after decades of rising income inequality and declining economic mobility. In an epic road trip, political comedian John Fugelsang retraces the nearly two-hundred-year-old journey of Alexis de Tocqueville. Along the way he explores whether the optimistic spirit of the American Dream that Tocqueville popularized is alive and well in the twenty-first century or whether George Carlin was right when he famously quipped “It’s called the American Dream because you have to be asleep to believe it.”

This timely documentary features stories of hard-working people trapped in poverty; senior citizens who have lost their pensions; blue-collar workers whose jobs have disappeared; working families devastated by illness or job loss; homeowners fighting foreclosure; once-prosperous families struggling with hunger and homelessness; fast-food workers fighting for a living wage; non-violent drug offenders in prison for decades; undocumented immigrants fighting deportation; low-income communities struggling with poverty-related disease; Rust Belt cities recovering from deindustrialization; educators trying to reform our failing public schools; and social entrepreneurs designing new models to reduce intergenerational poverty.

Our goal is to galvanize audiences to envision a revitalized American Dream and to use DREAM ON and this Viewer Guide to spark further discussion and debate about how to achieve it.

[illegible]

“Dream On” brilliantly connects the reality of today’s stunted economy to the human stories behind the mass economic frustrations. John Fugelsang’s journey lays bare what has befallen our country in a way that defenders of the status quo cannot deny or defend. This is a vivid and original documentary that is more powerful than the work of all the policy-wonks combined. It deserves the widest possible audience.”

—ROBERT KUTTNER, Co-Founder and
Co-Editor, *The American Prospect*

★ ★

**Winner,
Best Documentary**
New York City
Independent
Film Festival
October 2015

Winner,
Leigh Whipper
Silver Award
Philafilm: Philadelphia
International Film
Festival
June 2015

**Winner,
Remi Special Jury
Award, Political/
International Issues**
Worldfest Houston
April 2015

**Winner,
Gold Spotlight
Documentary Award**
Atlanta Docufest
December 2015

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

**DREAM ON is written, directed
and produced by Roger Weisberg**

Rather than taking a conventional documentary approach to a film about the vanishing American Dream, I decided to adopt the cherished American film tradition of the road trip and follow the journey of Alexis de Tocqueville, whose seminal work, *Democracy in America*, helped plant the seeds for what later became known as the American Dream. By revisiting the places he wrote about in 1831 and capturing the stories of a diverse group of Americans struggling to climb the economic ladder, we were able to put an intimate human face on the endangered American Dream.

In order to find the right tone that could add a bit of levity to this serious topic, I recruited political humorist John Fugelsang to be our guide on this unusual odyssey. He was the host of America's Funniest Home Videos and has appeared on CNN, CNBC, MSNBC, Fox News, HBO, and NPR. Fugelsang anchored Current TV's talk show, Viewpoint, and currently hosts a daily radio program called "Tell Me Everything" on the new SiriusXM Insight Channel. As a political comedian, actor, writer, talk show host and pundit, Fugelsang's eclectic background allows him to bring equal doses of wit and wisdom to our search for the increasingly elusive Dream.



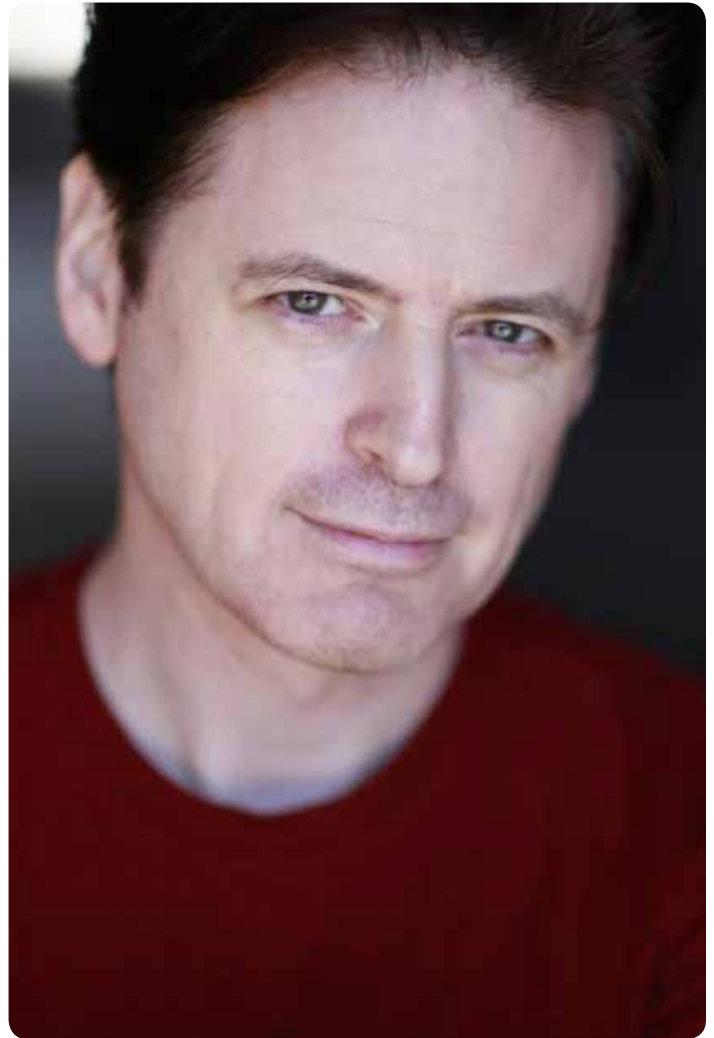
Roger Weisberg's thirty previous films have won over a hundred and fifty awards including Emmy, DuPont-Columbia, and Peabody awards, as well as two Academy Award nominations. DREAM ON represents the culmination of four decades of creating films about ways to remove barriers and expand opportunities for disadvantaged Americans.

JOHN FUGELSANG'S TAKEAWAY

**DREAM ON is written and hosted
by John Fugelsang**

Alexis de Tocqueville's influence on America is like the big bang—it happened all at once and it's still expanding. He traveled this country for nine months in 1831 and documented the people, the politics, the commerce, and the religion of our fledgling nation. He tried to understand what America was and what it might be, and he saw the best and worst that it had to offer—all the cruelty and all the goodness. And, he fell in love with this concept of equality—the idea that anyone from any background could climb the ladder of economic opportunity. To this day, his seminal work, *Democracy in America*, continues to inspire Americans of almost every political stripe. He wasn't trying to entertain or distill America for contemporary consumption; he was exploring how the whole society worked and where it might lead.

I've spent the past few years immersed in political comedy. I've toured across the country, performed overseas for the troops, and appeared on countless cable TV and radio shows. I've met politicians, journalists, activists, diplomats, and citizens of every background. As a professional observer, I honestly didn't know where America was heading. For every reason to feel pessimistic, I saw a reason for hope. I suppose that's why I was drawn to Tocqueville, an aristocrat inspired by class struggle, an author who wrote a prison report that became a treatise on liberty, and a writer who became an inspiration to progressives and conservatives alike. Tocqueville's multi-layered, often contradictory depictions of the character, values, and core beliefs that define us as Americans planted the seeds for the very concept of the American Dream.



I felt like I had finally grasped a piece of the American Dream when I got to host my own political comedy talk show on cable TV. We covered a lot of stories about jobs sent overseas and the plight of unemployed Americans, and then one day that network was sold to a foreign buyer, and I became one of those unemployed Americans. So, at the very moment I was completely disillusioned about the American Dream, I got a very curious offer to hit the road to help make a movie about the current state of the American Dream. The idea was to retrace Tocqueville's journey and try to see in two months what it took Tocqueville nine months to cover on horseback and steamship. We interviewed 200 people in 17 states and over 50 cities.

Tocqueville didn't want to create a simple travelogue, and neither did we. He wanted to understand how America worked, and we wanted to see how America could keep working. We found that the divisions and dysfunction in the areas Tocqueville reported on in commerce, government, religion, and race relations were still prevalent and festering today. We wanted to report on the whole of America in all her imperfect splendor. And by not turning away from her defects, we wanted to find new reasons to hope. We discovered that Americans' pride in their past is often matched by their cynicism about the

future. Sixty-three percent of Americans think that the next generation will be worse off than them, but the majority of Americans also think that their own kids will do better than them. That's the paradox that captures the optimistic spirit Tocqueville loved about us in 1831. He said, "No American is devoid of a yearning desire to rise." The old adage—that hard work will lead to prosperity—may no longer be true for the majority of Americans. Yet, most of the people I met on my Tocqueville journey still believed in the dream, even when their daily struggles made it feel impossibly out of reach.



PLANNING A DREAM ON SCREENING EVENT

Documentaries have the ability not only to educate, but also to generate civic engagement that extends beyond the screening. The first thing a viewer will want to do after watching a film is talk about it. Screening events facilitate meaningful debate, reflection, and subsequent action. The following suggestions will provide you with the tools you need to host the most successful event possible.

CREATE GOALS FOR THE EVENT

What do you hope to achieve as a result of your event? Do you want to increase awareness or knowledge, change attitudes or behavior, or help people network in ways that spark energy and ongoing connection? Being clear about your goals will make it easier to decide how to structure the event, target publicity, and evaluate results.

OUTREACH FOR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

DREAM ON documents the struggles of ordinary people to achieve the American Dream and, therefore, explores many social issues. Consider inviting partner organizations that work in the areas below to co-host your screening in order to reach more diverse audiences, build coalitions, and share possible solutions to the problems addressed in the film.

POTENTIAL SCREENING PARTNERS

- Labor unions
- Political action groups
- Retirement security groups
- Economic policy think tanks
- Living wage campaigns
- Healthcare access groups
- Faith-based organizations
- Housing rights groups
- Immigrant rights groups
- Legislators and staffers
- Anti-poverty organizations
- Education reform groups
- Grassroots community organizations
- Campaign finance reform groups
- Criminal justice reform organizations

PLAN AHEAD

Choose a screening date at least several weeks out to secure the best location, find partner organizations, and publicize the event widely.

MAKE SURE THE STRUCTURE OF THE EVENT FITS YOUR GOALS

Do you need an outside facilitator, translator, or sign language interpreter? Who are the local experts on the topic who should be present? Will you have a panel presentation, a structured Q&A session, or just an open discussion? Try to gather a group of people who have different opinions on the subject. If all sides are fairly represented, the discussion will be much stronger and have more impact.

PUBLICITY

The DREAM ON screening toolkit and electronic press kit on our website at pppdocs.com/dreamon.html have materials to help you publicize your event, including digital flyer and press release templates, social media posts, a sample invitation letter to legislators, feedback form, trailer, key art, film synopsis, credits, director's filmography, film reviews and photos. Here are some tips on using these communications tools:

Email blasts. Make your invitation short and personal; ask recipients to spread the word

Social media. Set up a Facebook event page; invite viewers to attend the event

Press releases. Contact journalists, bloggers and radio hosts who cover these issues

Events listings. Promote the event on newsletters, listservs and online calendars

SELECT A VENUE

Is your screening location comfortable enough for viewers to sit through a feature-length film? Does it allow for an inclusive discussion? Is the building wheelchair accessible and easily reachable by public transportation? Does it have the appropriate screening equipment for the size of your audience? The best locations are those that regularly host film screenings, such as movie theaters, church meeting rooms, public libraries, community centers, and labor halls. Be sure to test audio-visual equipment before the day of your event.

CHOOSE A FACILITATOR

The facilitator plays an important role in creating an environment in which people feel respected, safe, and encouraged to share their opinions about controversial topics. University professors, journalists, and professionals from community organizations can provide background knowledge about the subject matter, maintain a neutral position, and keep the dialogue moving forward.

POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION

Before planning a long post-screening program, consider the length of the film, especially for evening events. Since audiences will passively absorb a lot of information during the film, you may want to open the floor right away to questions, discussion, and next steps. Please use our Discussion Questions below to help structure your discussion.



Geoffrey Canada, founder of Harlem Children's Zone, speaking on a panel with director Roger Weisberg and Tamara Draut, Vice President of Policy and Research at Demos, at the New York Public Library DREAM ON screening.

REMIND PARTICIPANTS THAT EVERYONE SEES THROUGH THE LENS OF THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES

Everyone in the group may have a different view about the film they have just seen. Geography, age, race, religion, and socioeconomic status can all have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles, and prior knowledge.

END DISCUSSION WITH A PLAN FOR ACTION

After a thought-provoking discussion, your viewers will hopefully leave the event wanting to take action. Please see our Action Steps and Resources on pages 43-68 for a wide range of actions audiences can take in their communities, whether they are new to the subject, have limited time or resources, or are seasoned organizers.

COLLECT FEEDBACK AND SIGN-IN SHEETS

Remind viewers to fill-out feedback forms and sign-in sheets so you can stay in touch, receive a PBS broadcast notice, find out more about community needs, and learn how to improve future events. Please send a copy to Public Policy Productions, PO Box 650, 3 Ludlow Lane, Palisades NY, 10964 or email the form to pppinfo@pppdocs.com.

For more information about planning a community screening of DREAM ON, please visit pppdocs.com/dreamon.html.



THE AMERICAN DREAM

COMPARED to people from countries around the world where class boundaries are cemented at birth, we cling to the belief that America offers unfettered upward mobility to anyone willing to work hard and play by the rules. Millions of immigrants seeking to break free of the shackles of race, class, and religion have been drawn to America as the land of opportunity. This deeply ingrained belief that anyone, regardless of birth circumstances, could attain high social standing and provide a better standard of living for the next generation became known as the American Dream.

It wasn't until 1931, a hundred years after Alexis de Tocqueville's journey to America, that historian James Truslow Adams first coined the phrase "American Dream." In *The Epic of America*, Adams described the "dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."¹

The American Dream is so embedded in our collective identity that historian Emil Reich once

wrote that one could cast "doubts upon the very existence of God," but never betray the "slightest want of faith, in the chief God of America, the unlimited belief in the future of America."²

Yet, just as politicians across the political spectrum continually invoke the importance of the American Dream, it has become more elusive for many Americans. After forty years of stagnating wages for most workers and the worst recession since the Great Depression, millions of middle-class Americans are now unable to maintain the standard of living that they took for granted growing up, and more low-income families than ever before are unable to lift themselves out of poverty. Despite being the wealthiest and most powerful nation in history, the U.S. has lower levels of social mobility and higher levels of income inequality than many other developed countries. As countless Americans struggle with diminished prospects for the future, our core beliefs about the value of work, the inevitability of progress, the fairness of the system, and America's standing in the world are being shaken. Reviving the American Dream has become one of the most critical challenges facing our nation.



ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

IRONICALLY, it was Alexis de Tocqueville, a nineteenth-century French aristocrat, whose ideas planted the seeds for what later became known as the American Dream. Tocqueville was born in 1805 and grew up in a well-established aristocratic Norman family. His father, Hervé Louis

François Jean Bonaventure Clérel, Comte de Tocqueville, an officer of the Constitutional Guard of King Louis XVI, barely escaped the guillotine during the French Revolution. In 1831 Tocqueville was dispatched to America to see what the French could learn from America's penal system, but his observations about our young country were far more expansive during his nine months of travel throughout the U.S. Tocqueville's perspectives about the character, values, and core beliefs that define us as Americans still resonate today. His journey throughout our fifty-year-old republic led to the publication of *Democracy in America*, arguably one of the most prescient books ever written on the American way of life. It was Tocqueville who most clearly expressed the idea of American exceptionalism—the belief that the United States occupies a special place among the nations of the world. Because America was an immigrant nation with no history of an entrenched aristocracy, it never experienced the rigid class divisions that characterized European societies. Unlike Europeans, Tocqueville argued that Americans had access to land, after the conquest of Native Americans, which allowed immigrants from all stations of life to work their way up in the world. Rather than resenting their wealthy neighbors, however, these hard-working Americans felt that they would soon achieve similar fortunes, thus fueling the fire of the American Dream for generations to come.

THE RISE OF INEQUALITY



THE GREAT PROSPERITY

The economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s burnished the American Dream in our collective imagination. Emerging victorious from a devastating world war, the U.S. led a new global order, funding European reconstruction to create new buyers for American products and ensuring the flow of raw materials from the Third World to fuel our industries. Shifting away from wartime production, American workers churned out an endless line of modern consumer goods, driving U.S. productivity and wages, which rose in tandem³: Incomes grew by 2% a year, virtually doubling between 1947 and 1973.⁴ The GI bill opened the door to higher education and home ownership for veterans, anointing the “house with a white-picket fence” as the enduring icon of the American Dream. After years of Depression-era deprivation and war rationing, Americans bought their way into a rapidly growing middle class. With faith in

science, technology, and the open frontier of new markets at home and abroad, even the moon became an attainable destination.

It was a dream not only of material wealth, but of shared prosperity: During this period, the top 1% owned less than 8% of the wealth and paid an average tax rate of 81%.⁵ Labor union membership grew to over one-third of the workforce by the 1950s, resulting in higher wages, benefits and workplace rights.⁶ In the 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs continued to expand the social safety net, and the poverty rate dropped by half in ten years. Soon, the rise of the civil rights and women's movements made the promise of the American Dream appear to be within reach for all. Americans were speeding along the highway of progress with no end in sight.

★ ★

“Amongst the novel objects that attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, nothing struck me more forcibly than the general equality of conditions.”

—ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

★★



Professor Mark Blyth, Brown University

THE GREAT DIVERGENCE

By the early 1970s the economy started to sputter. Billions spent on war abroad and social programs at home made the federal deficit balloon. The loss of the Vietnam War challenged American power, and the OPEC embargo sent oil prices skyrocketing and the stock market plunging. Productivity declined, wages stalled, and the rich lost enormous wealth when inflation outstripped profits on their investments. Solving the crisis with more government spending or by unleashing the free market became the central debate. The latter won out, and in 1980 President Ronald Reagan ushered in a new era of cutting taxes and government regulation and increasing the role of the private sector in the economy that became known as neoliberalism.

Neoliberal policies resulted in the largest tax cuts in history;⁷ the privatization of formerly public enterprises, from schools to parking meters; the decline in labor-union membership; cuts in social safety net programs; the promotion of an ethos of personal responsibility; the deregulation of the airlines, communications, and finance industries; the liberalization of trade policies that contributed to the outsourcing of American jobs; and the growth of Wall Street banks that became “too big to fail.” The core belief was that the invisible hand of the market would create economic growth and wealth would trickle-down to all. However, starting in the late 70s and accelerating



***“This is the gilded age on crack,
and that really doesn’t gel with the
story that America tells itself.”***

—MARK BLYTH, Professor of International Political Economy, Brown University



in the early 80s during the Reagan revolution, the country experienced an explosion of income and wealth inequality.



THE GREAT RECESSION

Wealth soared for the top 10% and wages stagnated for the bottom 90%. To help families get by, women entered the workforce in greater numbers than ever before. Americans also relied increasingly on credit to stay afloat. In the 2000s, low interest rates and easy credit fueled a housing bubble that eventually burst in 2008 when housing oversupply and rising interest rates caused home prices to fall below what homeowners owed on their mortgages, leading to massive defaults. Panic spread throughout the market, causing four major mortgage companies to go belly-up in the fall of 2008 as well as



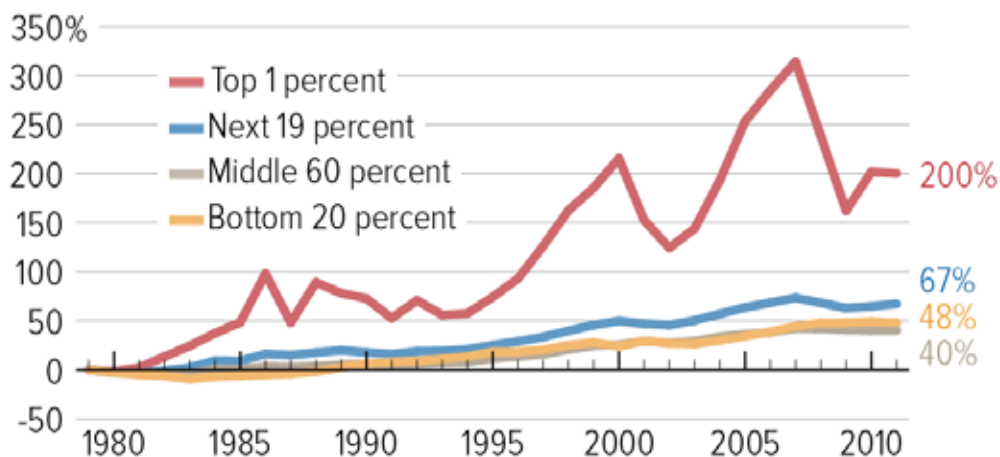
three major financial institutions—Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers and AIG. In the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, the stock market lost half its value; 8.7 millions jobs were lost; unemployment doubled; credit tightened; consumers cut back; and the entire economy teetered on the edge of total collapse.

The government bailed out the banks with \$700 billion in taxpayer dollars to stabilize the econ-

omy. When the economy stopped contracting in the summer of 2009, there were clear winners and losers. The stock market roared back; corporations enjoyed record profits; and by 2012 the top 1% captured 95% of all income gains. Main Street, on the other hand, continued to suffer. By 2012, 21.5 million Americans had income below 50% of the federal poverty level; a third of all homeowners owed more on their mortgages than their homes were worth; 4.1 million had lost their

Income Gains at the Top Dwarf Those of Low- and Middle-Income Households

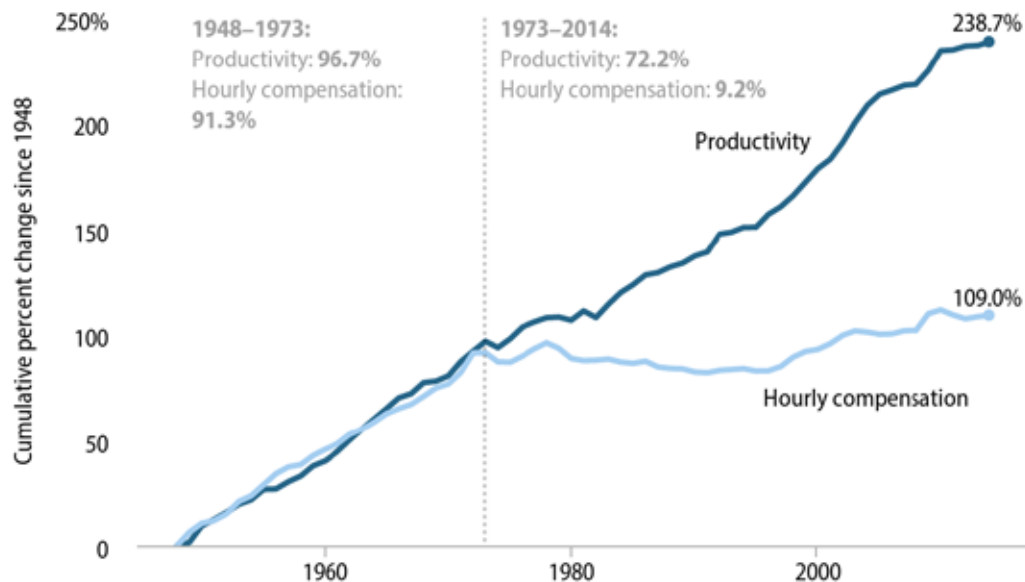
Percent change in real after-tax income since 1979



Source: Congressional Budget Office

CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES | CBPP.ORG

Disconnect between productivity and a typical worker's compensation, 1948-2014



Note: Data are for average hourly compensation of production/nonsupervisory workers in the private sector and net productivity of the total economy. "Net productivity" is the growth of output of goods and services minus depreciation per hour worked.

Source: EPI analysis of data from the BEA and BLS (see technical appendix for more detailed information)

Reproduced with permission from "Understanding the Historic Divergence Between Productivity and a Typical Worker's Pay: Why It Matters and Why It's Real," Economic Policy Institute, September 2, 2015.

ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE

homes to foreclosure since the crisis began; and 47.8 million Americans were unable to feed their families without food stamps, soup kitchens or emergency food pantries.⁸ For the first time in history, more Americans were worse off at the end of a period of economic expansion, leading many to wonder if the American Dream had slipped out of reach.

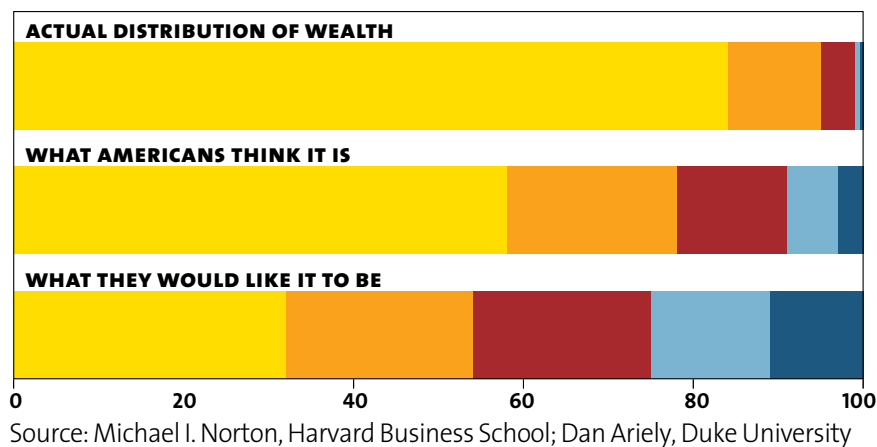
Today, income inequality continues to rise. Out of 32 OECD countries, the U.S. now ranks 30th in income inequality.⁹ As the rich get richer and the poor stay poor, the middle class no longer represents the majority of Americans.¹⁰ Even though many Americans are working harder than ever, they are falling further behind. While the net productivity of American workers grew over 70% since the 1970s, hourly compensation for the median

★ ★

Fifty years ago, General Motors was the largest employer where workers earned the equivalent of \$35 an hour. Today, Walmart is the largest employer where workers earn \$9 an hour.¹⁹

★ ★

Wealth Distribution in the U.S.



This chart appeared in the March/
April 2011 issue of *Mother Jones*.
See more of our charts on inequality
at [http://www.motherjones.com/
politics/2011/02/income-inequality-in-
america-chart-graph](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/02/income-inequality-in-america-chart-graph).

Mother Jones

worker rose only 9.2%. If the federal minimum wage had kept pace with productivity, it would be \$18.42, rather than the \$7.25 it is today, making its real value today about 25% less than it was three decades ago. Twenty-nine percent of Americans now earn less than the federal poverty level for a family of four.¹¹ Without government programs like tax credits and food stamps, poverty would have increased since the 1960s.¹²

The diminished wealth of the middle class tells an even more troubling story than their declining income. Over the past generation, families in the middle have seen their share of the nation's wealth decline 5%, and those stuck in the lowest 20% have seen their wealth decline 63%. Now, just 20 Americans own more wealth than 152 million Americans combined, or half the U.S. population, and the top 100 wealthiest own more wealth than the entire Black population.¹³ Perhaps most striking of all, the bottom 40% essentially have negative wealth, since their home mortgages, credit card debt, and student loans well exceed the value of their assets.¹⁴

In his 2014 bestseller *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, economist Thomas Piketty analyzed economic data over 250 years to show that

concentration of wealth is endemic to capitalism and can only be altered through government redistribution of wealth.¹⁵ Many studies indicate that inequality is undemocratic, leads to political polarization, and harms the overall growth of the economy, which hurts the rich as well.¹⁶ But, most conservatives argue that the problem is not inequality, but immobility.¹⁷ Taxing the wealth that the rich earn so that the government can give it to the poor is not fair to those who earned

★ ★

*In 1965, CEOs made **20 times** the median income; now they're making **296 times** the median income.²⁰*

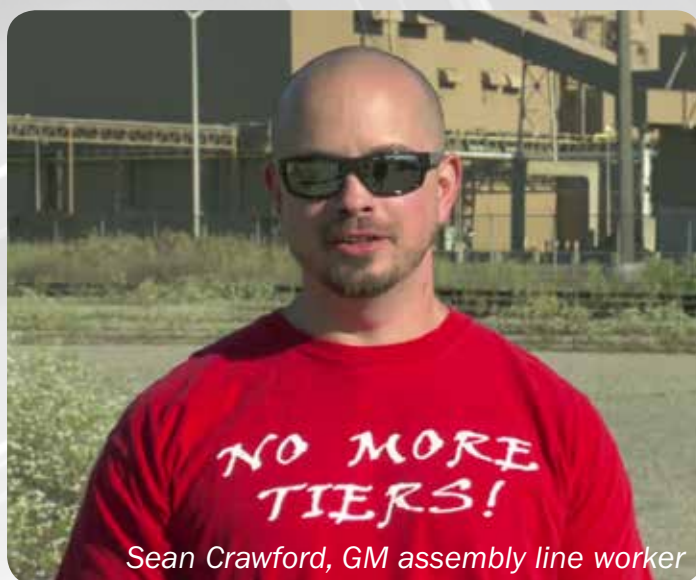
★ ★

their wealth, nor does it encourage the poor to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps to become self sufficient.¹⁸ Thus, many conservatives advocate for more neoliberal policies—cutting taxes, entitlements and regulation. As long as there is equal opportunity for all to rise, they believe inequality is socially irrelevant.

THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY OR IMMOBILITY?

EVEN more than equality, mobility is the driving force behind the American Dream. While economic mobility has remained constant over the last several decades, America, the “land of opportunity,” ranks 10th out of 12 OECD countries in economic mobility.²¹

Sixty-five percent of children raised in the bottom 20% of the income spectrum in the U.S. are unable to reach the middle, and more than 60% of children raised in the middle either stay there or fall to a lower rung of the income ladder as adults.²² A third of Black middle-class children end up in the bottom fifth of the scale as adults.²³ Since growing inequality makes the gaps between the rungs of the ladder larger, more resources are now required to move up to the next rung.²⁴ Despite the central role that the American Dream has historically played in our national identity, 63% of Americans think the next generation will be worse off than them.²⁵



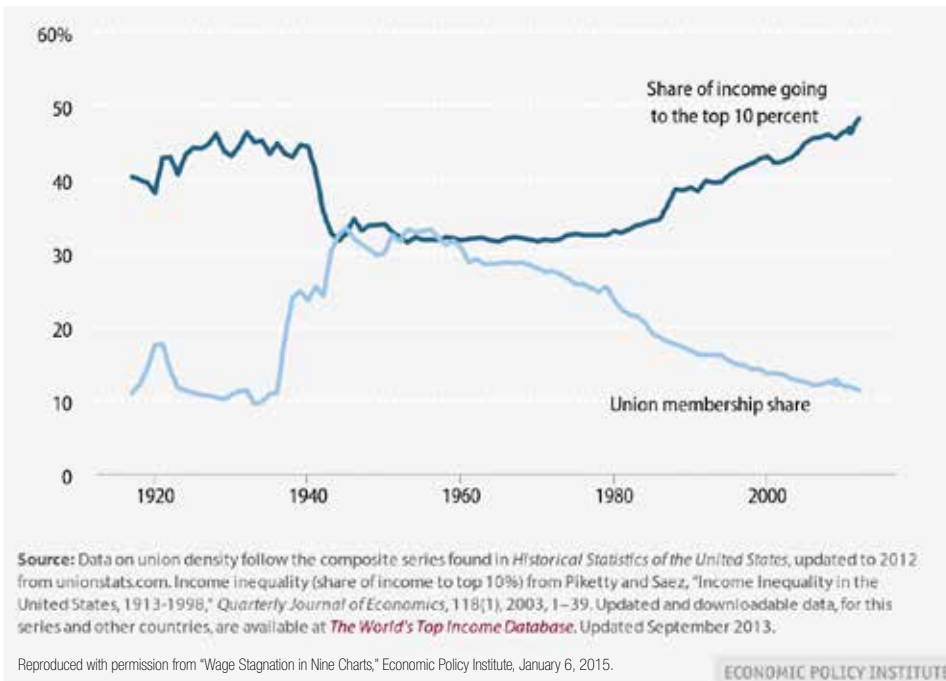
Sean Crawford, GM assembly line worker

People cannot move up the income ladder if they do not earn enough to save. Since the policy of trade liberalization contributed to the outsourcing of millions of jobs, American workers like Sean Crawford have been put into direct competition with lower-paid workers overseas. Wages in the U.S. stagnated in direct correlation to the decline in union membership and bargaining power. While some analysts argue that advances in technology and automation have pushed unskilled and uneducated American workers down the wage scale, technology has not diminished the growing earning power of workers in other industrialized countries.

In addition to wage stagnation, a number of other roadblocks have appeared along the traditional path to upward mobility. Education has traditionally been one of the most effective routes out of poverty. Without a college degree, those in the lowest quintile of the income spectrum have a 45% chance of staying at the bottom, but with higher education only 16% remain there.²⁶ However, cuts in funding for public education have prompted higher-income families to opt for private schools and tutoring for their children, making college acceptance and social mobility more accessible for them and less accessible for low-income students. Furthermore, the cost of higher education has increased twelve-fold since 1978. Fewer young people are able to afford college, and more must take out student loans with onerous repayment burdens that prevent investment in the future.²⁷ To make matters worse for today's college students, wages have fallen steadily for college graduates since 2000,²⁸ and a quarter of the 41 million people who took out student loans are now delinquent or in default on \$175 billion in loans.²⁹

Decline in union membership mirrors income gains of top 10%

Union membership and share of income going to the top 10%, 1917-2012



brackets. Since the American Affordable Care Act (ACA), over 20 million Americans have gained coverage, but 6.4 million remain uninsured in 19 states that refused to expand Medicaid, including Mississippi, where Geraldine Mendoza lost access to affordable care when the Good Samaritan Health Center shut its doors.³¹ Death rates for middle-age white Americans without higher education have increased sharply,³² and there is a widening gap in life expectancy rates between the rich and poor overall.³³

Saving would be one way to absorb the impact of a healthcare crisis, but 57% of Americans

There are many other factors preventing low-income children from rising. Healthcare is strongly correlated with educational achievement: Low-income Americans are twice as likely to have a health condition that can result in cognitive impairment.³⁰ The soaring costs of insurance, and the fact that fewer employers are providing it, make healthcare the leading cause of bankruptcy, often pushing Americans into even lower economic

have less than \$25,000 in savings, including 28% who have less than \$1,000.³⁴ Nearly half of workers nearing retirement age have saved nowhere near enough to retire, and collectively, they are an estimated 6.6 trillion dollars short of the funds needed for a secure retirement.³⁶ Pensions were designed to protect workers, but the percentage of employees covered by a defined benefit retirement plan declined from 62% in 1983 to 17% in 2007.³⁷





Tina McCoy and her daughter, Atlanta, GA

Private employers are on their way to eliminating plans altogether. Even some government employees are at risk of losing their pensions, leading retirees like Donald Smith with the dilemma of having to choose between food and medicine.

A major achievement of twentieth-century government programs was the employment of millions of workers to build public infrastructure. Now, as urban gentrification pushes low-income people out of city centers, the majority of poor people live in the suburbs. The lack of investment in transportation has made commuting time the single biggest barrier to escaping poverty.³⁸ The inability to commute to well-paying jobs has an even greater impact on economic prospects for the poor than crime, elementary-school test scores, or the percentage of two-parent families in a community.³⁹ Atlanta tops the list for commuting distance:⁴⁰ Between 2000 and 2011, the Atlanta suburban poor population grew 159%,⁴¹ and now 88% of Atlanta's poor live in the suburbs.⁴² As we see in the film, Tina McCoy commutes four hours a day to a minimum-wage job just four miles away.

Along with the suburbanization of poverty, another contributor to diminished mobility is deindustrialization, which is starkly evident in many of our nation's Rust Belt cities. As Professor George Galster says, cities like Detroit were once the engine of the American Dream. Now they are the most visible symbols, as President Obama once said, of the "American Dream in reverse."

Mass incarceration is also blocking progress toward the American Dream for millions, especially people of color. The war on drugs, prison privatization, multiple-offender laws, and minimum mandatory sentencing laws have contributed to a 700% increase in our prison population since the 1970s.⁴³ Seven million Americans are now in prison, in jail, on probation or on parole.⁴⁴

Finally, immigration was once the original path to achieving the American Dream. Even though studies show that immigrants pay \$20 to \$30 billion more in taxes than they draw in government benefits, there is growing resentment and demonization of immigrants.⁴⁵ For many who were drawn to this country to lift their families out of poverty, the American Dream has become a nightmare.



Keny Murillo with his father on graduation day, Raleigh, NC

STILL DREAMING

Recent surveys show that the majority of Americans still believe that working hard and playing by the rules will lead to success. Political scientist Cyril Ghosh argues that the American Dream is so deeply embedded in our consciousness that if we give it up, we give up our identity.⁴⁶ Studies also show that Blacks and Latinos believe more fervently in the American Dream than whites.⁴⁷ Historian Lawrence Samuels explains, “Frequently given its last rites, the Dream has always managed to bounce back to life, each miraculous recovery both shaping and reflecting a renewal of the American spirit.”⁴⁸ As John Fugelsang says in his concluding remarks, “It’s going to get better one day because we are hardwired to fight for something better.”

So the key question is how do we reclaim the American Dream when it seems to be slipping out of reach for increasing numbers of Americans? More government? More unfettered free markets? More reliance on personal responsibility?

Rugged individualism and the entrepreneurial spirit are certainly an essential part of the

American Dream. Tocqueville said that “no American is devoid of a yearning desire to rise” and he also observed that Americans “owe nothing to any man, they expect nothing from any man, they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands.”⁴⁹ Despite the endurance of the dream, many structural economic forces seem to be beyond our control, like automation, globalization, and the shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy, which have cast an ominous shadow over the American Dream.

But, if many of our public policies have contributed to diminished equality and mobility, then perhaps our public policies can also change these trends and increase equality and mobility. We hope the struggles of the hard-working families featured in DREAM ON along with the Action Steps and Resources section on pages 43-68 in this Viewer Guide will help galvanize you and your community to envision a roadmap to a revitalized American Dream.

“I have done so much, with so little, for so long, I can do almost anything with nothing. And I believe I can make that American Dream possible, probably not for me, but for my children.”

—DOYLE SLEDGE, DREAM ON

DREAM ON

Stories, Fast Facts, and Discussion Questions

GROWING INEQUALITY, STAGNANT MOBILITY, AND THE END OF THE AMERICAN DREAM



Professor Mark Blyth, Brown University

Mark Blyth is a professor of political economy and faculty fellow at the Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs at Brown University. His most recent book, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*, investigates the return to prominence of the flawed financial orthodoxy of budget cuts rather than government spending to solve the global financial crisis.

FAST FACTS ABOUT INEQUALITY AND MOBILITY

🚩 In 2007, the U.S. reached its greatest level of inequality since the eve of the Great Depression.⁵⁰

🚩 Twenty Americans own as much wealth as 152 million Americans.⁵¹

🚩 In the first three years after the Great Recession, 95% of all economic gains went to the wealthiest top 1% of Americans.⁵²

🚩 46.7 million Americans live in poverty and another 14 million live in near poverty.⁵³

🚩 42% of children born into the lowest fifth of the income ladder are likely to remain there.⁵⁴

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Mark Blyth grew up in a welfare household in Britain and became an Ivy League professor in the United States. He calls himself a “shining example” of the American Dream. To what does he attribute his success?
2. How would you describe the forces that have led to 20 Americans owning as much as the bottom 152 million? Is this phenomenon an inevitable result of how the economic system works? Or is it the result of certain policies that can be changed? If the latter, what are those policies?
3. Why did nearly all income gains after the Great Recession go to the top one percent? What could have been done to help spread the benefits of the “recovery”?
4. Why do high levels of inequality stifle social mobility? Why does inequality affect the overall growth of the economy?
5. Some economists throughout history have said that a degree of inequality is inevitable and even desirable in a free society. Do you agree?
6. Is the American Dream a personal desire for individual achievement or a collective yearning for the advancement of society?

HOME FORECLOSURES AND HOMELESSNESS



Olivé Hendricks, welder, Boston, MA

In order to support his wife and newborn daughter, **Olivé Hendricks** became a skilled welder in Boston with a comfortable income. When work dried up during the 2008 recession, Olivé attempted to modify his mortgage, but his house was auctioned off with virtually no warning. His dream of passing his house on to his children has all but disappeared, but he's not giving up. Olivé is bringing Fannie Mae to court.

Lewis Hickson, a former Chrysler plant employee, has worked in the homeless services field for 45 years and currently serves as the Operations Manager of the Tumaini Homeless Shelter in Detroit.

FAST FACTS ABOUT HOME FORECLOSURES AND HOMELESSNESS

There have been 19,152,832 foreclosure filings since 2008, peaking in 2011 at 2,871,891. American families lost nearly six million homes to foreclosure since the financial crisis of 2008.⁵⁵

In January 2015, 564,708 people were homeless on any given night in the U.S. Thirty-six percent of them are families; nearly a quarter are children⁵⁶; and one in five suffers from untreated severe mental illness.⁵⁷

Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness among women.⁵⁸

In the 1980s, the Department of Housing and Urban Development's budget was cut by 70%, resulting in the loss of 10,000 units of subsidized low-income housing every year.⁵⁹

The number of cities criminalizing homelessness is increasing.⁶⁰



Lewis Hickson, Tumaini Homeless Shelter, Detroit, MI



The Mississippi Delta, one of the nation's poorest regions

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Olivé Hendricks says his house “meant everything” to him, especially since his mother never owned anything. Why is homeownership considered the holy grail of the American Dream? Should the Dream be focused on job security, universal health care, or free higher education instead?
2. Are banks, homeowners, or the economy to blame for the foreclosure crisis? What could have been done to prevent it?
3. “Rent stress” or “housing stress” are terms to describe the struggles of Americans who are paying 35% or more of their income for housing due to a combination of rapidly rising rents in urban centers, a decline in home ownership, and stagnant or declining wages. What policies can be put in place to provide secure housing for low- and middle-income people? Are you “housing stressed”? Are there rent control, no-cause eviction policies, or public housing options in your city?
4. Lewis Hickson says there are three times as many vacant houses as there are homeless people in Detroit. What’s wrong with this picture, and how do we fix it? What can be done about squatters in what Lewis Hickson calls “abandominiums”?



Tumaini Homeless Shelter, Detroit, MI

TRADE, GLOBALIZATION, AND THE SHRINKING MIDDLE CLASS



Bill Shields, the Flag Man

Bill Shields, known as The Flag Man, sells American flags out of his truck on the side of the New England Thruway. While Bill used to make a comfortable living at his job at a printing company, the factory closed down, and his job was moved overseas. Now, Bill barely scrapes by selling flags that, ironically, are manufactured in China.



Sean Crawford, GM assembly line worker

Sean Crawford comes from a long line of autoworkers. In fact, his grandfather was the chairman of a landmark sit-down strike in Flint, Michigan, during the early days of the organized

labor movement. Sean initially felt lucky to land a \$19-an-hour job on a General Motors assembly line, but he quickly learned that he was a second-tier worker, meaning his salary and benefits were considerably less than other employees with greater seniority doing the same job.

FAST FACTS ABOUT TRADE, GLOBALIZATION, AND THE SHRINKING MIDDLE CLASS:

✚ Half of American corporations have already sent or are planning to send jobs overseas, resulting in hundreds of thousands of jobs lost in the U.S. each year. Outsourcing also drives down wages and benefits for American workers due to competition with non-unionized, lower-paid workers abroad.⁶¹

✚ During the Great Recession, corporations earned \$30 billion in revenue from offshoring jobs, an increase of 25%.⁶²

✚ Eight out of 10 American consumers would rather buy an American product than an imported one, and 60% would be willing to pay 10% more for it.⁶³

✚ The median income of Millennials in 2015 was \$2,000 less than their parents earned in 1980.⁶⁴

✚ Wages in the right-to-work (RTW) states, where workers are not required to join the labor unions at their workplaces, are 3.2% less than non-RTW states.⁶⁵



A factory worker at the Empowerment Plan in Detroit sewing sleeping-bag coats for the homeless

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Flagman does not want to prevent the rich from getting richer; he wants the “poor to get richer.” Is it possible for both the rich and poor to get richer or is wealth redistribution the only way to offset inequality?
2. Do you think the two-tier wage system is fair? Did the UAW have any other recourse when faced with a choice to accept the two-tier wage system or lose jobs to outsourcing?
3. Sean Crawford says his is the first generation that has had to “accept a lower standard of living than our parents.” Looking at your own parents or children, do you think this is the “new normal”? What has changed that has made it harder for young people to get by today?
4. President Obama says the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement will create a stronger market for American goods abroad, thereby creating more jobs at home. Many labor unions say, however, that the TPP will also encourage corporations to offshore jobs to cheaper pools of labor and increase cheap imports. How can American workers compete with workers overseas who earn far less? What can be done to prevent a “race to the bottom” where jobs always go to the lowest bidder?
5. Sean Crawford says, “globalization came down on us all; they pretty much have us at their mercy,” yet he is organizing against the two-tier wage system. What are things you can do to keep jobs secure and wages fair at your workplace?



Worker on the GM assembly line in Detroit, MI

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND THE BATTLE FOR A LIVING WAGE



Fior Vasquez and her children

After surviving an abusive childhood, **Fior Vasquez** became a teenage single mother. Recently, her 15-year-old daughter had a child of her own. With only part-time wages from McDonald's, Fior must struggle to raise the four children now under her care. While Fior acknowledges the perpetuation of the cycle of poverty in her family, she doesn't see any way out.



Tina McCoy

Tina McCoy is a single mother and earns the minimum wage at Church's Chicken. While the restaurant is just four miles from her home, Tina must commute by bus over two hours each way. Because the unreliability of the bus occasionally makes her late, her job is in jeopardy. When Tina works the late shift to earn extra money, she has to walk several miles to get home, because buses don't run after midnight.



Threasa and Doyle Sledge

In 1996 **Doyle and Threasa Sledge** were profiled in the PBS film *ENDING WELFARE AS WE KNOW IT* when they were living with their three small children in a rusted-out trailer. Twenty years later, their oldest child is serving 15 years in prison for armed robbery; their middle son is struggling to finish high school; and their youngest daughter recently had her own child at age 15, just like her mother. But Doyle has a steady job with the Animal Control agency, and they are far better off than when we last met them. The Sledges fervently believe their children will have an easier life.



Rebekah Phillips and her children

Rebekah Phillips was also featured in the film *ENDING WELFARE AS WE KNOW IT* in 1996. Rebekah was recovering from an abusive relationship and struggling to provide for her four young children on her wages as a gas station cashier.

Today, Rebekah earns \$12 an hour working at a call center in Jackson, MS. One of her children serves in the military; another is pregnant and unemployed; and her other two work at low-wage jobs. Rebekah worries that her children are permanently stuck in low-wage jobs without any prospect of financial security.

FAST FACTS ABOUT INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND THE BATTLE FOR A LIVING WAGE

🚩 Forty-four percent of new jobs added between 2000 and 2014 have been low-wage jobs paying on average \$9 to \$13 an hour.⁶⁶

🚩 The average wage of fast-food workers is \$8.69 an hour.⁶⁷

🚩 The percentage of fast-food workers 25 and older is 40%.⁶⁸

🚩 The percentage of fast-food workers with benefits is 13%.⁶⁹

🚩 Fifty-two percent of fast-food workers rely on taxpayer-funded public assistance programs, such as food stamps or Medicaid, which cost taxpayers nearly \$7 billion per year.⁷⁰

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. For working poor people like Fior Vasquez, there has been no economic mobility for generations. Thomas Brooks says, “Is there really an American Dream? ‘Cause I don’t know anybody who’s been through it [...] I think everybody gave up on that now.” Fior adds, “That’s all it is, a dream. It’s not actuality.” Do you think the Dream is an empty promise or an aspiration that endures despite the hardships people experience?
2. Why does Fior feel responsible for her daughter’s pregnancy? Why does Rebekah feel she is to blame for her kids being trapped by the low-wage cycle? Why does Doyle say he is to blame for his son’s crimes? To what extent are these parents personally responsible for their children’s situations?



Doyleasa Sledge and her daughter



3. Nigel Travis, the CEO of Dunkin' Donuts who earns \$4,889 per hour, says that \$15 an hour for fast-food workers is "absolutely outrageous." What should the minimum wage be?
4. After visiting Tina, John Fugelsang says we pay for fast-food twice, once at the cashier and again on April 15 when our tax dollars help fund food stamps and Medicaid for fast-food workers who don't earn a living wage. Yet, fast-food companies claim the only way to pay workers more is to raise prices for consumers, many of whom are low-wage workers themselves. Are there other ways to pay workers a living wage without raising prices?
5. Because her \$320 bi-weekly paycheck is not enough to cover the basics, Tina has to accept food stamps, Medicaid, and childcare assistance. She says, "People look down on me like I'm the bottom of the barrel." What accounts for the widespread perception that accepting help means one is lazy or unworthy? What can we do to change this perception and help people like Tina feel a greater sense of dignity and self worth?
6. Tina's American Dream is not a home with a white-picket fence, but a "living wage." She joined Jobs With Justice to be a "voice for the ones that are afraid to speak out" and went on strike for \$15 an hour and the right to form a union. What impact can people who become activists like Tina have?
7. Statistics show that Blacks and Latinos in the U.S. believe more fervently in the American Dream than whites, even though they experience greater poverty and immobility. What does this phenomenon tell us about the American Dream?



Threasa and Doyle Sledge

MASS INCARCERATION, PRISON PRIVATIZATION, AND PRISON EDUCATION



Sean Pica was 16 years old when he was convicted of murder and sent to prison in 1986. He thought his life was over until a prison education program at Sing Sing called Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison gave him an opportunity to earn a Bachelor's Degree. After serving 16 years, he was released, but unlike most paroled prisoners who reoffend and quickly return to prison, he came back to Sing Sing to run their college program. Sean is currently the Executive Director of Hudson Link, which provides college education, life skills, and re-entry support to incarcerated men and women. He serves on the Board of Career Gear and on the Service Providers Advisory Committee (SPAC), which collaborates on policy issues with the NYS Department of Corrections. He also is a Senior Fellow for Social and Criminal Justice at Mercy College, where he is currently pursuing an MBA degree.

Jermaine Archer, a former drug dealer who was sentenced to 22 years to life for murder, graduated from the Hudson Link program with a B.A. in 2013. Jermaine talks about how his prison reputation changed from being a feared gang leader from the streets of Flatbush, Brooklyn, to being a role model for students attending college at Sing Sing. We attend Jermaine's



college graduation ceremony and watch as he, for the first time in his life, brings tears of joy to his mother's eyes.

Bryan Stevenson is a professor at New York University School of Law and the Founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit organization based in Montgomery, Alabama, that provides legal representation to those denied fair and just treatment. A graduate of Harvard Law School and Harvard School of Government, Stevenson holds 16 honorary doctorate degrees and his *New York Times* bestseller, *Just Mercy*, was named one of 2014's ten best nonfiction books by *Time* magazine.





Nimesh Patel, inmate at the Blackwater Correctional Facility

Nimesh Patel is serving a 20-year sentence for drug trafficking at the Blackwater Correctional Facility, a prison run by the nation's largest for-profit corrections company. Although he was a first-time offender, the state's minimum mandatory sentencing guidelines left the judge with little discretion about how much time Nimesh would have to serve.

FAST FACTS ABOUT MASS INCARCERATION, PRISON PRIVATIZATION AND PRISON EDUCATION

✦ With 5% of the world's population, the U.S. has 25% of the world's prison population; half are imprisoned for nonviolent drug-related offenses.⁷¹

✦ Mandatory minimum sentences are automatic sentences for certain crimes; judges cannot lower the sentence to fit the circumstances of the crime.⁷² Even though the crime rate has declined about 45% over the past twenty-five years, there has been a 700% increase in the prison population between 1970 and 2005.⁷³

✦ In 2010, the U.S. spent more than \$80 billion on corrections expenditures, an amount that has more than quadrupled over the past twenty years.⁷⁴

✦ Black males are six times more likely to be imprisoned than white males; one in three black males born today can expect to spend time in prison over a lifetime.⁷⁵

✦ While 75% of released prisoners return to prison within five years, inmates who participate in college education programs were 43% less likely to return.⁷⁶

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jermaine Archer says, "One of these days, I'm going to be sitting in the Louvre, and I'm going to be talking to someone in French, and they're going to be surprised when I tell them I learned French in a maximum-security prison in America." What would Tocqueville think of Jermaine's story? What does Jermaine's story tell us about the American Dream?
2. Nimesh Patel says people "come to prison on a non-violent offense, get put in a violent environment" and end up "committing violent crimes to keep themselves safe." What is the purpose and impact of mandatory minimum sentencing laws? Do most penitentiaries warehouse prisoners instead of rehabilitating them? Is mass incarceration keeping society safer?

MASS INCARCERATION, PRISON PRIVATIZATION, AND PRISON EDUCATION

3. Tocqueville came to America to study our penal system, and the first prison he visited was Sing Sing. He wrote: "If the system, instead of reforming, should only tend to corrupt him still more, this would not any longer be a penitentiary system but, rather, a bad system of imprisonment." What would Tocqueville think of mass incarceration in general and Nimesh's situation in particular?
4. How does mass incarceration block the path to the American Dream for prisoners, their families, and their communities?
5. What are the causes of the increase in the prison census, and what criminal justice reforms should be implemented to decrease the prison population?
6. Should prisons be operated for profit?
7. After witnessing the abuse of slaves in 1831, Tocqueville wrote, "Oppression has, at one stroke, deprived the descendants of the Africans of almost all the privileges of humanity." Since Black and Latino males are far more likely to be imprisoned than white males today, to what extent does mass incarceration represent the legacy of slavery and racial injustice, as Bryan Stevenson argues?



EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY AND INEQUALITY



One of the pre-K students at the Harlem Gems program

Harlem Children's Zone® is a cradle-through-college network of education, social-service and community-building programs to give 13,000 children in Harlem a real shot at the American Dream. *The New York Times Magazine* described the Harlem Children's Zone as "one of the most ambitious social-policy experiments of our time."



Geoffrey Canada, Harlem Children's Zone

Geoffrey Canada is the visionary founder of the Harlem Children's Zone and a nationally recognized advocate for children and education reform.



Amanda Uhry, Manhattan Private School Advisors

Located just twenty blocks south of the Harlem Children's Zone, Manhattan Private School Advisors is an admissions counseling service that helps place students in top-tier private schools nationwide. Its founder and president **Amanda Uhry** explains the pressure and difficulty affluent parents face getting their toddlers into the city's elite private pre-schools.

FAST FACTS ABOUT EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY AND INEQUALITY

- ✦ Charter schools are publicly-funded schools that have regulatory freedom from state and local rules to experiment with education reform.⁷⁷ As of 2013, there are 2.3 million students enrolled in 6,100 public charter schools nationwide.⁷⁸
- ✦ Less than 12% of charter schools are unionized,⁷⁹ and 30% are now run by for-profit entities.⁸⁰
- ✦ Charter schools have fewer teacher accreditation requirements and spend less of their budgets on teacher salaries than traditional public schools.⁸¹
- ✦ Charter schools in general have no better student achievement results than regular public schools.⁸² Some have come under fire recently for using admissions testing or harsh punishment in order to weed out difficult students and improve their achievement ratings.⁸³

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Amanda Uhry says many successful parents who went to public school now want their children to go to the elite private schools. Why is there a loss of faith in public schools in urban areas?
2. Geoffrey Canada knows that poor kids lack access to quality education. What is the answer to his question: "How can we really change this environment so kids think there is an American Dream?"
3. How can we strengthen the public school system so all children have access to a decent education? Does the charter school movement represent an opportunity to improve public education?

SMALL BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURS



Phil Cooley, Ponyride

Phil Cooley is one of the leading young entrepreneurs hoping to revitalize Detroit with small, creative, and diverse new businesses. In addition to opening his now famous restaurant, Slows BarBQ, Phil renovated an abandoned building he calls Ponyride and filled it with enterprising, socially conscious entrepreneurs.



Veronika Scott, Empowerment Plan

As a fashion designer and Detroit native, **Veronika Scott** hopes to reinvigorate her hometown through the Empowerment Plan, a business that employs formerly homeless women to make free winter coats that double as sleeping bags for the homeless.



Linda Green, the Yaka Mein Lady

For 25 years, **Linda Green** worked in a public school cafeteria and barely made enough money to support her children. After Hurricane Katrina, Linda lost her job, so she started making her family's "Yaka Mein" recipe for rescue and cleanup workers. Now widely known as the Yaka Mein Lady, Linda has diversified her cuisine and runs a catering business, food truck, and pop-up restaurant. She recently won the Food Network's "Chopped: Pride of New Orleans" competition.



Eric Larson, Quicken Loans

Eric Larson works at Quicken Loans headquarters in downtown Detroit. Through their affiliated Bedrock Real Estate Company, the company is buying and renovating abandoned buildings in Detroit's urban core. One of their newly-renovated buildings houses dozens of tech start-up companies run by young people who moved to downtown Detroit.



Veronika Scott and John Fugelsang at the Empowerment Plan, Detroit, MI

FAST FACTS ABOUT SMALL BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURS

As of 2013, there were 28 million small businesses in the U.S. and over 22 million have no employees. Fifty percent of the working population works in a small business.⁸⁴

The average amount of capital used to start a small business is \$30,000.⁸⁵

Fifty percent of small businesses fail within five years.⁸⁶

A “social entrepreneur” is a business person who seeks to generate “social value” and not just profit, using traditional business methods to solve social problems.⁸⁷

Most social enterprises are funded by government or charity, but some attract private investors.⁸⁸

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What explains the success of Veronika Scott and Linda Green? Luck? Innovative ideas? Persistence and hard work? What lessons can be learned from their success that can be applied to others? Are stories of individual success sometimes used to blame the poor for their poverty?
2. Do successful nonprofits like the Empowerment Plan serve as an argument for reducing the role of the government in helping the poor or homeless?
3. Do private-sector investments such as the Quicken Loans’s investment in downtown Detroit lift all boats and “radiate out?” Is gentrification part of the American Dream? Who does it tend to benefit, and who does it harm?

IMMIGRATION, WHITE NATIONALISTS, AND THE AMERICAN DREAM



Keny Murillo, immigration reform advocate

Undocumented immigrant **Keny Murillo** made five attempts to get to the U.S. from Honduras to join his family before he was successful. Even though the harsh immigration laws recently passed in North Carolina put Keny's entire family at risk of deportation, Keny remains committed to his immigration reform work. He also works several jobs and attends college full-time with plans of becoming a doctor.



Heidi Beirich, Southern Poverty Law Center

Heidi Beirich is the head of the Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Project. Beirich monitors hate groups and other extremists in the U.S. and exposes their activities to the media, the public, and law enforcement agencies. Her goal is to put these hate groups out of business.



Jared Taylor, American Renaissance

Jared Taylor, a founder and editor of American Renaissance, believes the only way to restore the American Dream is to strengthen Anglo-European culture in America. He believes that Blacks are genetically less intelligent and more prone to violence than whites, and he opposes all forms of racial integration. Because Taylor also fears mass Hispanic immigration will reduce white Americans to a minority, he advocates for immigration laws that would seal our borders and deport millions of immigrants.



Reverend William Barber, North Carolina NAACP

Reverend William Barber, the head of the North Carolina chapter of the NAACP, is one of the leading forces behind the North Carolina Moral Monday protests. Through civil disobedience, community development projects, job training, and voter organization, Barber has galvanized the progressive community of North Carolina to challenge the state's conservative policies, which have reduced funding for public education, family planning clinics, unemployment insurance, and safety net programs such as Medicaid and food stamps.

FAST FACTS ABOUT IMMIGRATION, WHITE NATIONALISTS, AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

More than 40% of Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or the children of immigrants, and they employ 10 million people, generating annual revenue of \$4.2 trillion.⁸⁹ Twenty-five percent of all children in the U.S. are the children of immigrants.⁹⁰

Immigrant tax payments total \$20 to \$30 billion more than the cost of the government services they use.⁹¹

For more than a century, studies have confirmed that immigrants are less likely to commit serious crimes and less likely to be incarcerated than those born in the U.S.⁹²

There are 892 hate groups operating in the U.S.⁹³

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Keny Murillo says, “I have pledged allegiance to the flag, to this nation, for over nine years. And I’m not taking that with a grain of salt. It’s embedded in my heart.” Should young immigrants like Keny be allowed to stay in the U.S. even if they arrived illegally? Should they be allowed to become citizens?
2. What explains the current backlash against immigrants today?
3. A few days before Thanksgiving in 2015, during the Syrian refugee crisis, comedian John Oliver said, “There was only one time in American history when the fear of refugees wiping everyone out did actually come true, and we’ll all be sitting around a table celebrating it on

Thursday.” Why do many fail to acknowledge their own history of immigration to the U.S.?

4. Heidi Beirich says Jared Taylor’s anti-immigration sentiments are shared by many mainstream politicians. Compare the candidates’ positions on immigration. Who offers the best solution to the problem of undocumented immigration?
5. Critics have blamed President Obama’s policies for the recent surge in the number of unaccompanied minors from Central America coming to the U.S. Others point to the increase in extreme poverty, drug and gang violence in three of the five most dangerous countries in the world (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador). What is the root cause of this immigration crisis, and how can we best address it?
6. Jared Taylor says, “If somebody is going to be violent, he’s going to be violent whether or not he’s heard of me.” Do you agree that the statements of white nationalists have no impact on violence against immigrants or people of color? Do you think all hate speech should be protected under the First Amendment?
7. What is the connection between grassroots movements like Moral Mondays, 15 Now, and Black Lives Matter to the idea of the American Dream? What role do grassroots movements and civil disobedience play in effecting change?



Keny Murillo, Moral Monday protest, North Carolina

HEALTHCARE ACCESS



Dr. Richard deShazo,
University of Mississippi Medical Center

Dr. Richard deShazo is a professor of medicine and pediatrics at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. At the state's foremost tertiary-care hospital, Dr. deShazo sees the acute-care crises that stem from complications associated with obesity. The costs of treating these diseases could be dramatically reduced with better access to healthcare, which he is working to promote.



Geraldine Mendoza receiving care at the
Good Samaritan Health Center in Greenville, MS

Good Samaritan Health Center was located in the heart of the Mississippi Delta. Since it opened in 2006, the clinic served the uninsured, charging \$25 per visit along with subsidized or free medications and lab tests. Due to funding cuts, Good Samaritan closed two days after we filmed. Many

local patients, such as **Geraldine Mendoza**, will now have to go without medical treatment.

FAST FACTS ABOUT HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Mississippi has the lowest per-capita household income at \$20,956.⁹⁴ It also has the highest percentage of residents below the poverty line at 21.5%.

In 2013, research at the Harvard School of Public Health suggested that the refusal of federal Medicaid funds could result in the deaths of 27,452 uninsured Americans in 2014.⁹⁵

The states that have not yet expanded Medicaid will lose \$423.6 billion in funds between 2013 and 2022, lessening economic activity and job growth, and leaving a projected 6.4 million people uninsured in 2016 as a result.⁹⁶

Since the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), 20 million uninsured people have gained health insurance coverage, and the cost of health care has risen at its slowest rate in 50 years.⁹⁷

Discussion Questions

1. Why have 19 states refused to expand their Medicaid programs and rejected billions of dollars of federal funding? What can we do to expand access to healthcare and keep clinics like Good Samaritan from closing?
2. Dr. Richard deShazo describes a “real paradox” in his state where “people are hungry yet obese.” What policies might have led to the lack of fruit and vegetable farming in the fertile Mississippi Delta, the paucity of grocery stores, and the crisis of obesity-related disease? What other parts of the country suffer from the “food-desert” problem?
3. The University of Mississippi Medical Center has one of the largest pediatric critical care units in the U.S., where each baby born prematurely to mothers with obesity and diabetes costs taxpayers well over \$100,000 and often as much as \$1,000,000. What would be a more efficient way to spend these healthcare dollars, and how can such a plan be implemented?
4. Geraldine Mendoza says, “I’ve worked hard since I was fifteen. I paid into the system. I’m forty-nine and I have nothing. We’re the ones that work hard to make life easier for the wealthier people. And then they cut your hours because they don’t want to give you insurance.” What healthcare options does a low-wage earner like Geraldine have?
5. Compare the positions of the 2016 presidential candidates on healthcare reform. For the Republicans who want to repeal the Affordable Care Act, what options for healthcare reform do they provide? Why is there skepticism about a “Medicare for All” plan?
6. Dr. deShazo says, “I really do think healthcare is a basic right for a society as wealthy as ours.” Do you agree? If so, how can we realize this basic right?



A mother and infant at the Neonatal ICU at the University of Mississippi Medical Center

RETIREMENT INSECURITY



Donald Smith, municipal retiree

Donald Smith worked for the city of Detroit for 29 years. Now, at the age of 68, his pension is reduced because of Detroit's bankruptcy. With \$800 a month from his pension and \$1,000 a month from social security, Donald is barely able to make ends meet. Every month his bills exceed his income, leaving him with the dilemma of whether to pay for food or medicine.

FAST FACTS ABOUT RETIREMENT INSECURITY

🚩 The median retirement account balance for all Americans is \$3,000 for working-age households and \$12,000 for near-retirement households.⁹⁸

- 🚩 Half of households with members age 55 or older have no retirement savings.⁹⁹
- 🚩 Ten percent of seniors (4.6 million adults 65 and older) lived below the poverty line in 2014¹⁰⁰; without social security, 41.5% of seniors would be in poverty.¹⁰¹
- 🚩 Between 1990 and 2010, the percentage of private-sector employees who had traditional pension plans fell by half.¹⁰²
- 🚩 In 2014, the median private pension benefit for those 65 and older was \$9,227 per year¹⁰³; the median government pension was \$14,158 per year; and the average social security income was \$14,580 per year.¹⁰⁴

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Donald Smith worked for the city of Detroit for 29 years and paid into a pension plan. "I earned that. Now you're gonna just take all that money from me. That's flat-out evil." What options do people like Donald have to provide some measure of retirement security.?
2. What roles should the government, the private sector, and individuals play to ensure a secure retirement for Americans? Do you have the means to retire without any financial worries?
3. Politicians across the political spectrum talk about "entitlement reform." Do private pension plans, Social Security, and Medicare programs need to be reformed to ensure that today's workers can retire with security?

DEINDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE RUST BELT

George Galster is the Clarence Hilberry Professor of Urban Affairs at Wayne State University in Detroit. He has written extensively about the causes and consequences of this once-mighty city's decline. His most recent book, *Driving Detroit: The Quest for Respect in the Motor City*, explores the transformation of Detroit with an analysis of the social forces that have contributed to growing inequality in the metropolitan area.

FAST FACTS ABOUT DEINDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE RUST BELT

🚩 Once the nation's fourth-largest city and center of the U.S. auto industry with as many as 1.8 million residents, Detroit has lost 63% of its population since the 1950s.¹⁰⁵

🚩 Detroit is the most impoverished major city in the U.S. Thirty-nine percent live below the poverty line¹⁰⁶; it has the nation's highest unemployment rate at 24.8%¹⁰⁷; and since 2005, more than 30% of its properties have been foreclosed.¹⁰⁸

🚩 In 2013, Detroit experienced the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history with debts claimed to be \$18 to \$20 billion. The crisis was caused by a severe decline in tax revenue due to unemployment and depopulation.¹⁰⁹

🚩 There are about 50 "legacy cities," nearly all in the northeast and midwest, characterized by severe deindustrialization, massive job loss, out-migration of population and services, redlining and disinvestment in inner cities, declining tax revenues, and rising crime and corruption.¹¹⁰

🚩 Since 2008, 13 cities have declared bankruptcy.¹¹¹



Professor George Galster, Wayne State University

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Professor Galster points out how Detroit went from a symbol of international productivity and prosperity to a symbol of dysfunction and decay. What are the reasons for this remarkable transformation?
2. Cities along the Rust Belt suffering from similar problems as Detroit are known as "legacy cities." What will it take to bring these cities back to prosperity?
3. What explains the fascination with what John Fugelsang and others call "ruin porn"?

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DREAM ON

Action Steps & Resources

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ACTION STEPS

If you would like to take action to help revitalize the American Dream, we offer a range of action steps below, including educational resources, creative activities and opportunities to volunteer and organize in your community.

LIGHTS!

Shed light on the endangered American Dream by learning more about it

ASK YOUR CHURCH GROUP, LABOR UNION, LIBRARY, NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION OR TEACHERS TO SCREEN DREAM ON

Invite experts, elected officials and affected communities to address the audience. For further information about coordinating a screening event, email pppinfo@pppdocs.com. Refer to the DREAM ON Screening Toolkit at <http://pppdocs.com/dreamon.html> for tips on planning, facilitating and publicizing the event.

HOST A STUDY GROUP ON THE CURRENT STATE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Assign each member a topic from DREAM ON to research using our Resources section. During each study session, screen the related clip from the film and have the designated member present

potential solutions to the problems raised by the film. Consider inviting a speaker from a local organization each week to share its work and to build connections within your community.

EDUCATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Many people feel the economic system is too large and complex to change. Use and share these tools to improve your understanding of the forces that have undermined the American Dream and the policies that might be effective in restoring it. **The organizations listed below reflect a broad political spectrum, and their appearance here does not constitute an endorsement of their policies or perspectives. We encourage you to conduct your own background research to make sure your goals are aligned with the missions of the organizations before getting involved.*



Fior Vasquez, fast food worker, Central Falls, RI

- 🚩 Chasing the Dream: Poverty & Opportunity in America is WNET's multi-platform public media initiative, including news reports and a documentary, which aims to provide a deeper understanding of the impact of poverty on American society: <http://chasingthedreamproject.org/about/>
- 🚩 The Economic Policy Institute's State of Working America provides charts, fact sheets and other data on living standards: <http://www.stateofworkingamerica.org/> Their overview on how income inequality was created, and how it can be fixed, is one easy entry point to understanding the problem: <http://inequality.is/>
- 🚩 Find campaigns dedicated to ending poverty, as well as other news and resources, at Spotlight on Poverty: <http://spotlightonpoverty.org/resources/campaigns-on-poverty/>
- 🚩 In a series of short videos, Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor and Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley, explains current economics topics in layman's terms: <http://robertreich.org/>
- 🚩 Richard D. Wolff, Professor of Economics Emeritus, University of Massachusetts, explains why the U.S. became more unequal starting in the 1970s in this animated video: <http://rootsofhealthinequity.org/how-class-works.php>
- 🚩 Tune in to Talk Poverty Radio, a project of the Center for American Progress, to hear untold stories from some of the forty-five million Americans living below the poverty line: <http://talkpoverty.org/>

- 📌 The Institute for Policy Studies provides the basics on wealth and income inequality for the general public at this portal: <http://inequality.org/>
- 📌 The Center for Popular Economics hosts workshops to demystify the economy and put the tools of economics into the hands of those working for social justice: <http://www.populareconomics.org/resources/>
- 📌 Dollars & Sense challenges mainstream media accounts of how the U.S. economy works by publishing popularly written, critical articles: <http://www.dollarsandsense.org/>
- 📌 Against the common perception, a group of conservatives is making the case that conservative policies can address poverty: <http://www.caricaturechallenge.info/>. For more on a bipartisan approach, please see the consensus plan to reduce poverty and restore the American Dream prepared by the Brookings Institution and American Enterprise Institute: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports2/2015/12/aei-brookings-poverty-and-opportunity>
- 📌 For those who could use a little levity to enhance their understanding of the current state of the American Dream, show this clip of the comedian George Carlin as he famously explains the American Dream in a few minutes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acLW1vFO-2Q>
- 📌 An anonymous individual by the name of Politizane created this viral video based on research from economists. It helped millions understand inequality in clear terms: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPKKQnijnsM>



Activist from City Life in Boston protesting no-fault evictions

CAMERA!

Tell your own story about the pursuit of the American Dream

DO A FAMILY ORAL HISTORY

Interview your grandparents, parents, siblings, children or grandchildren about their definitions of the American Dream. Then, share the interviews with family members and discuss how the dream has changed, or not, for each generation. Talk about the meaning of the American Dream for more disadvantaged Americans.

DESIGN A “SAFETY NET” FOR YOUR FAMILY

If you could not make ends meet and lost your home, what would your safety net look like? What can we do to make a stronger safety net for all Americans?

SHARE YOUR OWN STORY

The Center for Community Change offers an online tool where people can share their personal stories of struggle. The aim of “Our Stories, Our Power” is to empower storytellers to advocate for every American to have enough—not just to survive but to thrive: <http://ourstoriesourpower.org/>

CREATE EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS FOR OTHERS

- 🎬 If you are a writer or artist, consider applying for an Economic Hardship Reporting grant to write stories and produce art that highlights the struggles of low-income communities around the country: <http://economichardship.org/>

- 🎬 If you are in the communications field, refer to the Center for Community Change’s toolkit on how to communicate effectively about poverty: <http://www.communitychange.org/real-power/focus/poverty-message-research-tool-kit/>
- 🎬 The Opportunity Agenda is a social justice communications lab that shapes compelling narratives and messages to advance the impact of social justice organizations: https://opportunityagenda.org/our_initiatives
- 🎬 If you feel the best way to communicate about serious issues is through humor, consider teaming up with the Yes Lab, whose mission is to help progressive organizations and activists design and carry out creative actions to gain media attention and impact public debate on critical political, social and environmental issues: <http://yeslab.org/>



John Fugelsang interviewing homeless residents in Washington, DC

ACTION!

*Take the next steps to
revitalize the American Dream*

We feature a few organizations by issue below. Please see the Resources section for additional organizations that welcome your participation.

ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMS

Find basic services, donate goods or volunteer time to assist those in need near you.

✊ If you are hungry or would like to donate goods or coordinate a food drive in your neighborhood, find your local food bank by entering your zip code at Feeding America: <http://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank/>

✊ If you are in need of temporary housing or would like to volunteer to help others who do not have a home, use this directory to find your nearest homeless shelter: <http://www.homelessshelterdirectory.org/>

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Defend homeowners against foreclosure and take action to address the continuing housing crisis in the U.S.

✊ The Home Defenders League and Occupy Our Homes offer petitions, letters and steps to protect homeowners from wrongful eviction: <http://www.homedefendersleague.org/action> and <http://occupyournhomes.org/resources/>

✊ Invite members of the Homeless Speakers Bureau to talk to your community during Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week through the National Coalition for the Homeless: <http://nationalhomeless.org/taking-action/>

✊ For an illustrated step-by-step explanation of the sub-prime mortgage crisis, see: http://www.alternet.org/story/102672/financial_meltdown_101

DISPEL MYTHS ABOUT RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE

✊ The U.S. Department of Labor: A raise in the minimum wage does not hurt the economy or small businesses: <http://www.dol.gov/minwage/mythbuster.htm>

✊ The National Employment Law Project: A raise in the minimum wage does not result in job loss: <http://www.raisetheminimumwage.com/pages/job-loss>

✊ The University of California at Berkeley Labor Center: A raise in the minimum wage would cut costs for the public: <http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/the-high-public-cost-of-low-wages/>

START OR JOIN AN EFFORT TO RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- ✊ Fight for 15 provides 15 steps to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour: <http://fightfor15.org/>. Start a 15 Now chapter and use their tools for \$15 an hour now: <https://15now.org/>
- ✊ Start your own worker-justice campaign with these resources from Interfaith Worker Justice: <http://www.iwj.org/resources>
- ✊ Use the Smartphone apps and other resources to find and patronize businesses that provide better pay and working conditions for their employees at Food Chain Workers Alliance: http://foodchainworkers.org/?page_id=2660

EXPAND ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

- ✊ If you are uninsured or know someone who needs healthcare services, visit Single Stop USA, a site that connects people to the resources they need: <http://singlestopusa.org/>
- ✊ If you are interested in trying to expand Medicaid at the state level, the National Association of Community Health Centers provides this comprehensive list of resources: <http://www.nachc.com/MedicaidExpansion.cfm>

IMPROVE THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

- ✊ Learn more about the differences between public schools and private charter schools funded by public dollars.



- ✊ The Network for Public Education, an advocacy group whose mission is to protect, promote and strengthen public schools for current and future generations of students, has a toolkit to help organize your community to defend the public education system: <http://www.networkforpubliceducation.org/npe-tool-kit/>
- ✊ The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is the leading national nonprofit organization committed to advancing the public charter-school movement: <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/>
- ✊ The National Education Policy Center debunks myths about charter schools in this report: <http://nepc.colorado.edu/thinktank/review-separating-fact-and-fiction>



Nimesh Patel at the Blackwater Correctional Facility in Florida

END MASS INCARCERATION

- ✊ Rather than imprisoning people, Critical Resistance believes providing basic necessities and ending inequality are what make us safe. See their toolkit as a starting point to curb mass incarceration and prison privatization: <http://criticalresistance.org/resources/the-abolitionist-toolkit/>
- ✊ The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) is dedicated to advancing and protecting rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Use their toolkit to educate others about criminal justice reform: <https://ccrjustice.org/home/get-involved/tools-resources>
- ✊ The Marshall Project is a nonprofit news organization that focuses on the American criminal justice system, featuring investigative reports as well as voices from inside the justice system: <https://www.themarshallproject.org>

- ✊ The Sentencing Project works for a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities and practices, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration: <http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/index.cfm>

REFORM THE IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

- ✊ Journalist and filmmaker José Antonio Vargas spearheads two new projects about immigration: Define American is a media and culture organization that uses the power of stories to transcend politics and shift the conversation around immigrants, identity and citizenship in a changing America: <http://www.defineamerican.com/>. #EmergingUS is a digital magazine launched by *The Los Angeles Times* to tell stories and explore questions at the intersection of race, immigration and identity: <http://www.emergingus.com/>

- ✊ The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) works to defend and preserve individual rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the U.S., which apply to every person, regardless of immigration status: <https://www.aclu.org/issues/immigrants-rights>
- ✊ The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) envisions a society in which all people are treated fairly and humanely and provides this set of community education materials including “Know Your Rights”: <https://www.nilc.org/communityed.html>

COMPARE THE WHITE HOUSE FACT SHEET ON IMMIGRATION WITH FAIR’S POSITION BELOW

- ✊ The White House produced this Fact Sheet to show how immigration will help the economy and benefit all workers: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/immigration/economy> and this infographic: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/share/immigration-economic-benefits>
- ✊ The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) is a national, nonprofit, public-interest membership organization of concerned citizens who share a common belief that excessive immigration harms American workers, taxpayers and our most vulnerable citizens. FAIR provides a toolkit with fact sheets and instructions on how to join a local chapter to limit immigration to the U.S.: http://www.fairus.org/action/activist_toolkit_2015

PROVIDE A SECURE RETIREMENT FOR ALL AMERICANS

- ✊ The Community Advocacy Network of the Alliance of Retired Americans encourages the senior population to become more active to secure a dignified retirement for all Americans. They provide a “how-to” packet at <http://retiredamericans.org/members/community-advocacy-network>
- ✊ Learn about how pensions work with the Pension Toolkit, developed by the National Institute on Retirement Security, the National Retired Teachers’ Association (NRTA) and AARP’s Educator Community: http://www.nirsonline.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=831&Itemid=202
- ✊ The National Committee to Protect Social Security and Medicare offers ten ways to get involved in protecting these programs that are essential to retirement security: <http://www.ncpssm.org/TakeAction/GetInvolved/10WaystoGetInvolved>

REDUCE THE INFLUENCE OF MONEY IN POLITICS

- ✊ Sixteen states and over 700 cities and municipalities have passed resolutions to overturn the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision. Move To Amend is one organization calling for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that states “corporations are not people, and money is not speech” with this how-to community toolkit: <https://movetoamend.org/toolkit/local-organizing-build-national-movement>



Public Citizen is part of a large coalition of national organizations pressuring the President to sign an executive order that requires federal contractors who do business with the government to disclose their political spending. Sign the petition along with over 1,000,000 other Americans at: <http://www.citizen.org/disclosure-petition>

Over 155 organizations nationwide have joined forces for Democracy Awakening, a mass mobilization of concerned voters to take place in Washington, DC, in April 2016, to demand an end to the corruption of the American political system: <http://democracyawakening.org/>

Find out who is funding politicians at the Center for Responsive Politics, the nation's premier research group tracking money in politics and its effect on our elections and public policy: <http://www.opensecrets.org/resources/learn/>

CHANGE THE TAX SYSTEM

Compare and contrast the tax policies supported by the following organizations to see which offers a better plan to stimulate upward mobility.

- 👉 A leading voice for Wall Street accountability, Americans for Financial Reform is a coalition of over 200 organizations formed in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis to lay the foundation for a strong, stable and ethical financial system: <http://ourfinancialsecurity.org/>
- 👉 Formed in 1985 at the request of President Ronald Reagan, Americans for Tax Reform advocates for a national, single-rate, flat tax and opposes all tax increases: <http://www.atr.org/>

GET INVOLVED IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

- 👉 Most of the organizations listed here and in the Resources section offer opportunities to petition elected officials to adopt policies that support low- and middle-income families. Use this tool provided by Common Cause and the Sunlight Foundation to find your elected officials, bills they have introduced, committees on which they serve, and political contributions they have received: http://act.commoncause.org/site/PageServer?pagename=sunlight_advocacy_list_page

NEW ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

In recent years, in response to the scale, persistence and increasing frequency of global economic crises, locally-based economic initiatives—such as land trusts, worker-owned cooperatives, and local food systems—have sprung up in cities nationwide.

- 👉 The Democracy Collaborative's Community Wealth site offers a wealth of information about these local institutions: <http://community-wealth.org/about>
- 👉 The New Economy Coalition is a network of organizations that is imagining and building a future where people, communities, and ecosystems thrive by placing power in the hands of people. Visit and join the coalition here: <http://neweconomy.net/members>

ENGAGE IN ACTIVISM

Many of the organizations featured here offer opportunities to join others in public protest to amplify voices, gain the attention of the media and elected officials, create networks of solidarity, and encourage other community members to get involved.



RESOURCES

Think tanks are not just for policy wonks. Many provide regular analyses of current economics news written in accessible language. Sign up for their newsletters to stay informed about the issues in the headlines that affect our daily lives. Compare and contrast their recommended policies and pathways to decreasing income inequality and increasing social mobility.

LIBERAL THINK TANKS

The American Constitution Society (ACS)

works to shape debate on important legal and constitutional issues to improve the lives of all people by developing high-impact ideas, building networks and countering the activist conservative legal movement: <http://www.acslaw.org/>

The Brookings Institution is a nonprofit public policy organization that conducts independent research to strengthen democracy, foster the economic and social well-being of all Americans, and secure a more open, safe and cooperative international system: <http://www.brookings.edu/>

The Center for American Progress is an independent nonpartisan policy institute dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans through bold, progressive ideas: <https://www.americanprogress.org>

The Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR)

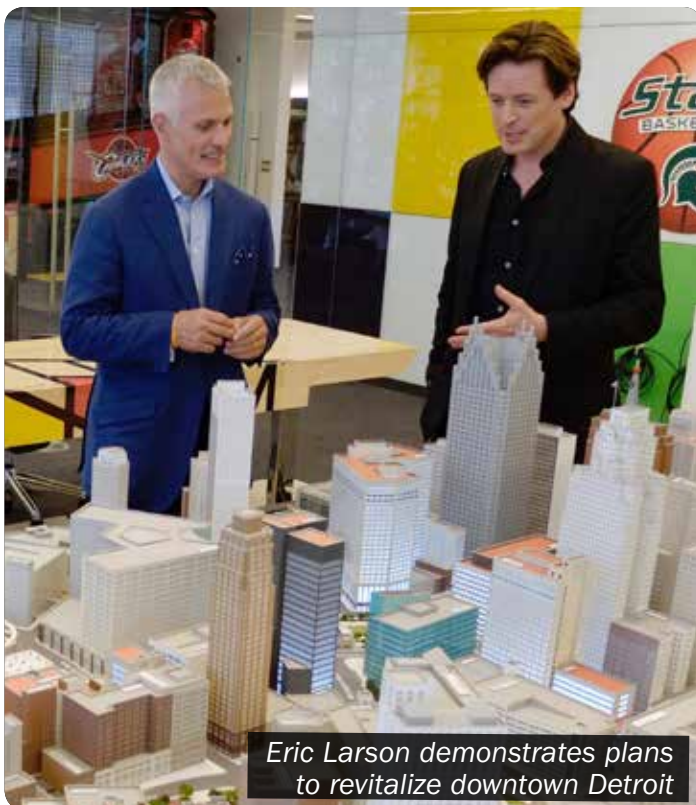
promotes democratic debate by conducting professional research and education on social and economic issues so the public knows what is at stake in major policy battles: <http://cepr.net/>

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

seeks to improve the lives of low-income people by developing and advocating for federal, state and local policies to strengthen families and create pathways to education and work: <http://www.clasp.org/>

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP)

is a nonpartisan research and policy institute that pursues state and federal policies designed to reduce poverty and inequality and restore fiscal responsibility in equitable and effective ways: <http://www.cbpp.org/>



Eric Larson demonstrates plans to revitalize downtown Detroit

CONSERVATIVE THINK TANKS

The American Enterprise Institute is an independent, nonpartisan research institute committed to expanding individual liberty and opportunity by strengthening the foundations of a free society: limited government, competitive private enterprise, vital cultural and political institutions, and vigilant national defense: <https://www.aei.org/>

The Cato Institute is a libertarian public policy organization dedicated to the principles of individual liberty, limited government, free markets and peace. To learn about their projects in healthcare, education, and other areas, visit <http://www.cato.org/projects>

The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institute whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values and a strong national defense. Learn about their approach to poverty and inequality here: <http://www.heritage.org/issues/poverty-and-inequality>

The Hoover Institution at Stanford University is a public policy think tank promoting the principles of individual, economic and political freedom. To sign up for their news analyses, visit <http://www.hoover.org/get-involved>

The Economic Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan institute whose mission is to inform and empower individuals to seek solutions that ensure broadly shared prosperity and opportunity: <https://www.americanprogress.org>

The Institute for Policy Studies is a community of public scholars and organizers linking peace, justice and the environment in the U.S. and globally to promote true democracy and challenge concentrated wealth, corporate influence and military power: <http://www.ips-dc.org/>

The Urban Institute tries to open minds, shape decisions and offer recommendations through economic and social research to expand opportunities for all people, reduce hardship among the most vulnerable, and strengthen the fiscal health of governments and effectiveness of public policies: <http://www.urban.org/>

ANTI-POVERTY ORGANIZATIONS

The American Political Science Association's Task Force on Inequality and Democracy published a report on the impact of inequality on democracy and governance as well as college-level syllabi to provoke discussion and debate: <http://www.apsanet.org/PUBLICATIONS/Reports/Task-Force-on-Inequality-and-American-Democracy>

The Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunities Program works closely with community organizations, community colleges, local governments, employers and financial institutions to help lower-income Americans succeed in today's economy through workforce training and education, micro-enterprise development, and financial services and asset building: <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/economic-opportunities>

The Coalition on Human Needs (CHN) is an alliance of national organizations working together to promote public policies that address the needs of low-income and other vulnerable populations: <http://www.chn.org>



Part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, **Community Action Partnership** is a national, nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening, promoting, representing and serving its network of member Community Action Agencies (CAAs) to assure that the issues of poverty are effectively presented and addressed: <http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/>

The Poverty and Race Research Action Council (PRRAC) is a civil-rights policy organization convened by major civil rights, civil liberties and anti-poverty groups to connect advocates with social scientists working on race and poverty issues and to promote a research-based advocacy strategy on structural inequality issues: www.prrac.org

FAITH-BASED SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that promotes peace and justice as a practical expression of faith in action: <http://afsc.org/>

Catholic Charities USA is a national organization serving poor and vulnerable persons and families by offering support to 164 member agencies, providing disaster relief and promoting poverty reduction through research and legislative reform: <https://catholiccharitiesusa.org/>

Franciscan Action Network is a grassroots organization amplifying the justice efforts of Franciscans nationwide, following the movement that endures from St. Francis of Assisi and his call for compassion for the poor and all creation over 800 years ago: <http://franciscanaction.org/>

PICO is a national network of faith-based community organizations working to create innovative solutions to improve healthcare access, public schools, neighborhood safety, affordable housing and democracy: www.piconetwork.org

The Union for Reform Judaism supports nearly 900 congregations in their efforts to enrich and energize worship, deepen Jewish learning, pursue social justice, nurture strong leaders, and expand community, in the synagogue and beyond. The URJ believes Judaism must meet people where they are today to thrive tomorrow: <https://www.urj.org/>

The Unitarian Universalist Association Social Justice groups use grassroots community organizing, interfaith state, national and corporate advocacy, and protest marches and vigils to honor the interconnectedness of life and to promote economic, environmental, racial, immigrant, LGBT and reproductive justice: <http://www.uua.org/justice>

CHILD ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

The Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count program provides state legislators, public officials and child advocates with reliable data, policy recommendations and tools to advance sound policies that benefit children and families: <http://www.aecf.org/work/kids-count/>

The Children's Defense Fund provides a strong, effective and independent voice for the children of America, who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves, paying particular attention to the needs of poor children, children of color and

those with disabilities. The CDF educates the nation about the needs of children, encouraging preventive investments before children get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown: <http://www.childrensdefense.org/take-action/>

The Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness is an independent nonprofit public policy analysis and research organization focused on illuminating the complex issue of family homelessness to inform public policy and help families transition out of homelessness: <http://www.icphusa.org/>

The National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University is one of the nation's leading centers dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America's low-income families and children. Their Data Tools include budgets, calculators and trackers to determine how much families are earning and what policies and programs are in place in every state to help struggling families meet their basic needs: <http://www.nccp.org/tools/>

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS ORGANIZATIONS

The American Bar Association Commission on Homelessness and Poverty is committed to educating the bar and the public about homelessness and poverty and getting the legal community and advocates to assist those in need: http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_services/homelessness_poverty.html



Olivé Hendricks speaks out about his eviction.

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty is the only national legal group dedicated to ending and preventing homelessness. They use the power of the law to put homeless children back in school, win new affordable housing resources, overturn laws that criminalize homelessness and protect renters: <http://www.nlchp.org/homeless>

The National Low-Income Housing Coalition offers a resource library to strengthen advocacy work at the local level: <http://nlihc.org/library>

LABOR AND MINIMUM WAGE ORGANIZATIONS

The National Alliance of HUD Tenants preserves and improves affordable housing, protects tenants' rights, develops tenant empowerment, promotes resident control and ownership, improves the quality of life in HUD-assisted housing and makes HUD accountable to its constituents: <http://saveourhomes.org/>

The National Community Reinvestment Coalition and its grassroots member organizations create opportunities for people to build wealth and champion fairness in banking, housing and business development. The NCRC provides tools and resources for organizations and policymakers seeking to understand how financial services impact communities nationwide here: <http://www.ncrc.org/resources>

The National Fair Housing Alliance helps victims of housing discrimination know their housing rights and how to pursue redress: <http://www.nationalfairhousing.org/>

Business for a Fair Minimum Wage is a national network of business owners and executives who believe a fair minimum wage makes good business sense: <http://www.businessforafairminimumwage.org/>

Interfaith Worker Justice mobilizes people of faith and work advocates in support of economic justice and worker rights through a network of over 70 organizations: <http://www.iwj.org/>

Labor Notes is a media and organizing project that has been the voice of union activists who want to put the "movement" back in the labor movement. Its magazine, website, books, conferences and workshops promote organizing, aggressive strategies to fight concessions and alliances with workers' centers and unions: <http://www.labornotes.org/>

The Main Street Alliance provides small businesses with a voice on the most pressing public policy issues across the nation; they support raising the minimum wage: <http://www.mainstreetalliance.org>

The National Employment Law Project fights for policies to create good jobs, expand access to work and strengthen protection and support for low-wage workers and the unemployed: <http://www.nelp.org/>

Small Business Majority is a national small-business advocacy organization, founded and run by small-business owners to focus on solving the biggest problems facing small businesses today: <http://www.smallbusinessmajority.org/>

Worker Centers, such as the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) who won better wages and working conditions for tomato workers through a four-year national boycott of Taco Bell, are community-based organizations that provide service, advocacy and organizing support to low-wage workers who are not part of traditional labor unions: <http://www.epi.org/publication/bp159/>

Working America, a community of the AFL-CIO, is an organization of three million members fighting for good jobs, affordable health care and education, retirement security, corporate accountability and a real democracy by door-to-door organizing and providing research and tools to make life better for working people: <http://www.workingamerica.org/>

The United Workers Congress is a strategic alliance of workers that are either by law or by practice excluded from the right to organize in the U.S. but who are organizing for better working conditions through networks nationwide: <http://www.unitedworkerscongress.org/>

HEALTHCARE REFORM ORGANIZATIONS

To find out how the effort to expand Medicaid and its benefits is doing nationally, visit **Families USA**, which has been monitoring the movement here: <http://familiesusa.org/product/momentum-medicaid-expansion>

The National Association of Community Health Care Centers serves as a unified voice for the 9,000 community health centers providing affordable healthcare for over 23 million people nationwide: <http://nachc.com/resources-helpful-links.cfm>

The Physicians for a National Healthcare Program offers a set of tools, including how to write to the press, lobby elected officials, and organize for a national single-payer healthcare program: <http://www.pnhp.org/action/activism>

EDUCATION REFORM ORGANIZATIONS

The Center for Education Reform is trying to accelerate the growth of the education reform movement in ways that make available to families new and meaningful choices in their children's education: <https://www.edreform.com>

The Center for Public Education is a one-stop shop for clear, concise and trusted information about public education. To read the research on charter schools, as well as information on standardized testing, teacher performance,



A pre-K student at Columbia Parc in New Orleans

college access and more, visit: <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/FunctionalNav-Menu/Top-Right-Nav-2/The-public>

The Progressive magazine's Progressive Education Fellows are uncovering the stories behind the defunding of public schools that is fueling the growth of large, charter-school chains, including a video series by cartoonist Mark Fiore: http://progressive.org/news/2015/11/188410/shake-those-charter-chains?mc_cid=6917c97d7e&mc_eid=91e5e4c4bd

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM ORGANIZATIONS

#BlackLivesMatter is a call to action in response to anti-Black racism: <http://blacklivesmatter.com/getinvolved/>

The Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law is a nonpartisan law and policy institute that seeks to improve systems of democracy and justice through research and innovative policies, including ending mass incarceration: <https://www.brennancenter.org/issues/ending-mass-incarceration>

The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is to reduce society's reliance on incarceration as a solution to social problems: <http://www.cjcj.org/about.html>

The Drug Policy Alliance is the nation's leading organization promoting sensible drug policies that are grounded in science, compassion, health and human rights to roll back the excesses of the War on Drugs and its damaging consequences, especially on the young and communities of color: <http://www.drugpolicy.org/>

Families Against Mandatory Minimums is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that advocates for smart sentencing laws that are fair, reduce incarceration rates and protect public safety: <http://famm.org/>

The Justice Policy Institute is a national nonprofit organization whose research identifies programs and policies that change the conversation around justice reform: <http://www.justicepolicy.org/index.html>

Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP) is an international nonprofit organization of criminal justice professionals who are speaking out about the failure of the War on Drugs and existing drug policies: <http://www.leap.cc/>

Mothers of Incarcerated Sons is a nonprofit group formed by the mother of an incarcerated son in 2001 to offer support to parents whose children are in the prison system: <http://www.mothersofinmates.org/>



John Fugelsang gets a tour of Sing Sing Prison from Sean Pica

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund

is the nation's premier legal organization fighting for racial justice through litigation, advocacy and public education to expand democracy and achieve racial justice for all Americans: <http://www.naacpldf.org/>

Safer Foundation is one of the nation's largest not-for-profit providers of services for people with criminal records to help them secure and maintain jobs: <http://www.saferfoundation.org/>

The Stanford Justice Advocacy Project (formerly the Three Strikes Project) represents individuals who are serving unjust prison sentences for minor crimes, helps them re-enter their communities, and advocates for a more fair and effective criminal justice system: <https://law.stanford.edu/stanford-justice-advocacy-project/>

The Vera Institute for Justice combines expertise in research, demonstration projects and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for justice and safety: <http://www.vera.org/>

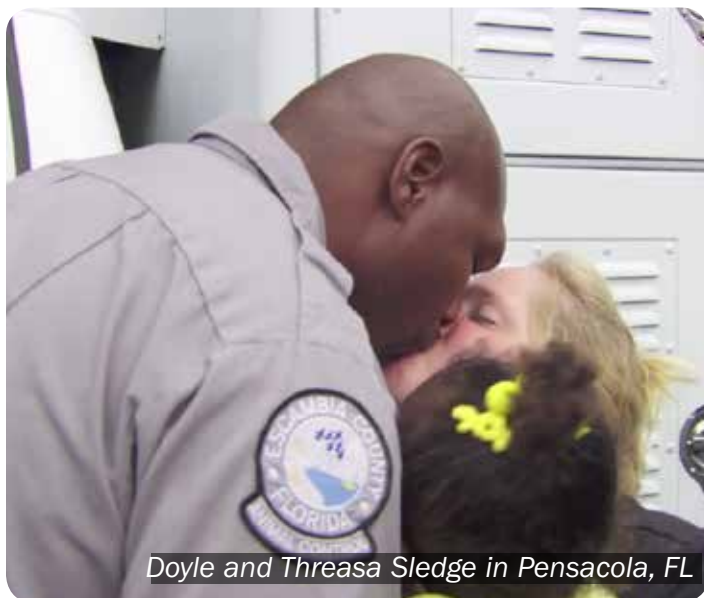
IMMIGRATION REFORM ORGANIZATIONS

iAmerica provides information on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) legislation: <http://iamerica.org/>

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights works to defend and expand the rights of all immigrants and refugees, regardless of immigration status: <http://www.nnirr.org/drupal/get-involved/training>

No More Deaths is a coalition of organizations based in southern Arizona to stop the deaths of migrants in the desert and achieve a set of Faith-Based Principles for Immigration Reform: <http://forms.nomoredeaths.org/about-no-more-deaths/faith-based-principles-for-immigration-reform/>

The ONWARD Project features a collection of films and articles about immigration today and can be used in discussion settings: <http://www.onwardproject.net/LandingPage.html>



Doyle and Threasa Sledge in Pensacola, FL

RETIREMENT SECURITY ORGANIZATIONS

The Alliance for Retired Americans is a nationwide grassroots organization with more than 4.3 million members that seeks to ensure social and economic justice and full civil rights for all citizens so that they may enjoy dignity, personal and family fulfillment and security. The Alliance is working to protect Social Security and Medicare: <http://retiredamericans.org/>

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations is a coalition of nonprofit organizations that serve older Americans and is dedicated to strengthening the well-being of America's older population: <http://www.lcao.org/>

The Pension Rights Center is a nonprofit consumer organization committed to protecting and promoting the retirement security of American workers, retirees, and their families: <http://www.pensionrights.org/take-action>

Social Security Works advocates for protecting and improving the economic security of disadvantaged and at-risk populations by expanding the Social Security system. See their fact sheets, polls, and talking points at <http://www.socialsecurityworks.org/resources>

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM ORGANIZATIONS

Parts of the 1965 Voting Rights Act have been dismantled in some states, making it more difficult to vote now than fifty years ago. Get involved in strengthening voting rights, among other methods of expanding democratic access to the political system, with **Common Cause** at <http://www.commoncause.org/issues/>

Follow the lead of Tallahassee, Florida, and a growing number of cities nationwide that are passing anti-corruption acts with this toolkit from **RepresentUS**: <https://represent.us/action/pass-a-local-anti-corruption-act/>

Public financing of elections can reduce the influence of big money in campaign financing. **USPIRG** is working toward small-donor incentive programs, along with other campaigns to return democracy to the people, at <http://uspirg.org/issues/usp/democracy-people>

PUBLIC OPINION POLLING ORGANIZATIONS

Pew Research Center Fact Tank is a non-partisan, non-advocacy, real-time platform dedicated to finding news in the numbers from public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis, and other data-driven social science research: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/09/22/the-many-ways-to-measure-economic-inequality/>

The Pew Economic Mobility Project provides comprehensive data on social mobility and shows how the financial well-being of American families relates to short-term financial stability and longer-term economic mobility: <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/archived-projects/economic-mobility-project>

The U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) provides vital information on a yearly basis about our nation and its people that helps determine how more than \$400 billion in federal and state funds are distributed each year: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>

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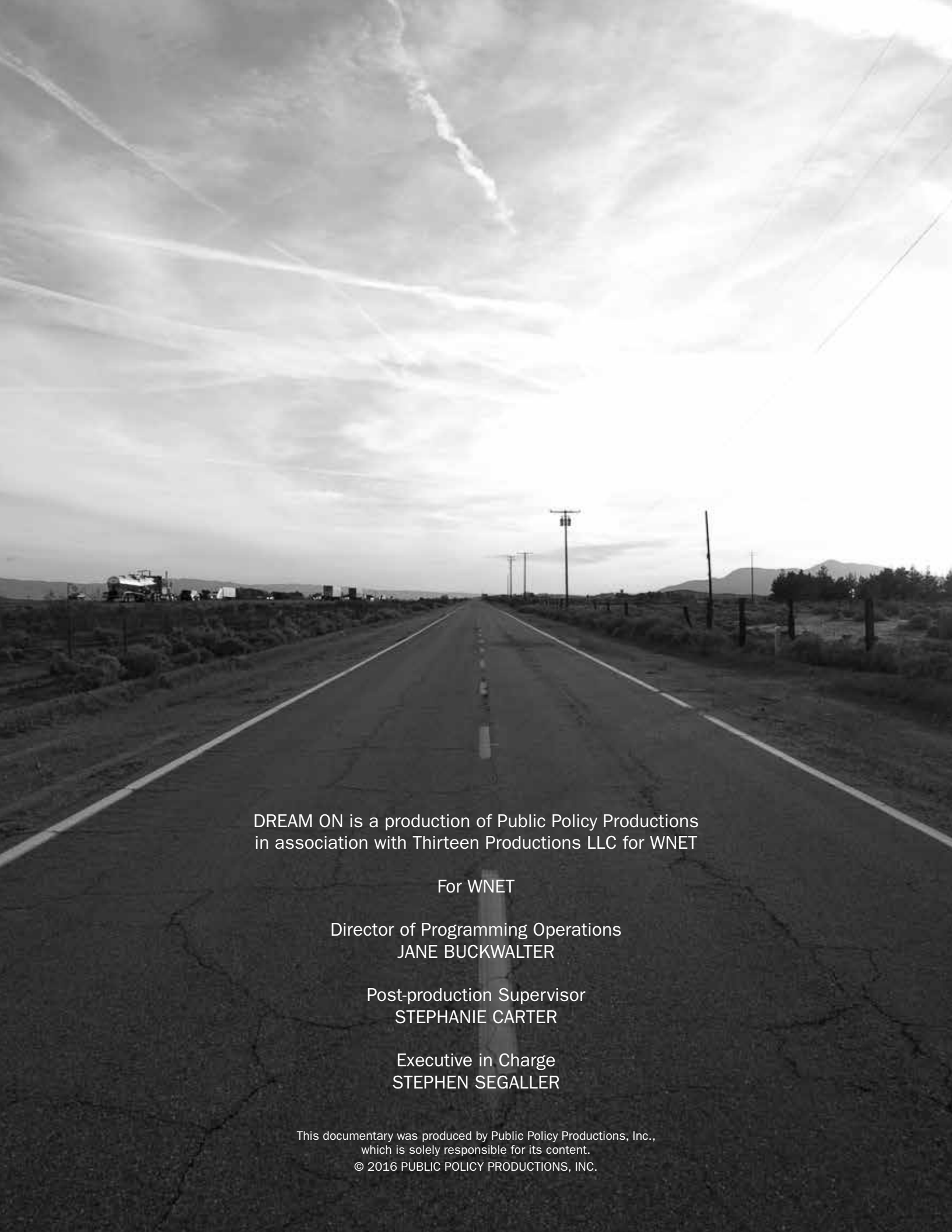
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For WNET

Director of Programming Operations
JANE BUCKWALTER

Post-production Supervisor
STEPHANIE CARTER

Executive in Charge
STEPHEN SEGALLER

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