

The American Dream: Relevant Excerpts

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

*Excerpted from **The Declaration of Independence***

“The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions [...]. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world [...]. An [immigrant] when he first arrives [...] no sooner breathes our air than he forms new schemes, and embarks in designs he never would have thought of in his own country [...]. He begins to feel the effects of a sort of resurrection; hitherto he had not lived, but simply vegetated; he now feels himself a man [...] Judge what an alteration there must arise in the mind and thoughts of this man; [...] his heart involuntarily swells and glows; this first swell inspires him with those new thoughts which constitute an American.”

*From **Letters from an American Farmer**, 1782, by Hector St. John de Crevecoeur*

“This is free ground. All the way from here to the Pacific Ocean. No man has to bow. No man born to royalty. Here we judge you by what you do, not by what your father was. Here you can be something. Here’s a place to build a home [...] It’s the idea that we all have value, you and me [...].”

*Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, 20th Maine, as represented in the novel **The Killer Angels** by Michael Shaara, 1974*

“America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming! Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups with your fifty languages and histories [...] into the crucible with you all! God is making the American [...] the real American has not yet arrived. He is only in the crucible, I tell you—he will be the fusion of all the races.”

*Excerpted from **The Melting Pot**, 1909, by Israel Zangwill*

“You see for me, America is an idea. It is a stage for transformation. I felt when I came to Iowa City from Calcutta that suddenly I could be a new person [...] What America offers me is romanticism and hope [...] Suddenly, I found myself in a country where—theoretically, anyway—merit counts, where I could choose to discard that part of my history that I want, and invent a whole new history for myself. It’s that capacity to dream and then try to pull it off, if you can.”

***Bharati Mukerjee**, novelist, in an interview with Bill Moyers, 1990*

“The American Dream [is] one of the greatest ideas in the history of human achievement [...] It thrives today in an age when its core components of freedom and opportunity are open to more Americans than ever before. It holds a real, identifiable place in the American heart and mind, and it informs the aspirations of everyone from farmers to software developers, from detectives to bankers, from soldiers to social workers [...] It defines us as a people, even as we add to its meaning with each new chapter in our national experience and our individual actions.”

*News commentator and reporter **Dan Rather**, on the research behind his book *The American Dream*.*

“I still have a dream. It is deeply rooted in the American dream [...] I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood [...] I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character [...].”

***Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, 1963*