

Document 6

A Monticello, les mensonges du rêve américain de 1776

Gilles Biassette, *La Croix*, 13 juillet 2026

[Il y a 250 ans, Thomas Jefferson, installé à Monticello dans l'état de Virginie, a écrit la première version de la Déclaration d'Indépendance. Il a écrit] [d]es mots qui ont fait l'histoire de l'Amérique et du monde, avec cette phrase : « Nous tenons pour vérités évidentes que tous les hommes sont créés égaux, et qu'ils sont doués par leur Créateur de certains droits inaliénables, parmi lesquels se trouvent la vie, la liberté et la poursuite du bonheur. »

Ce texte révolutionnaire a 250 ans, et l'Amérique célèbre cet été sa naissance, le 4 juillet 1776. [...]

De cette époque date la naissance du système à deux partis qui domine toujours la vie politique américaine. A Monticello, fréquentée chaque année par plus de 300 000 visiteurs, a été rajoutée une visite guidée sur la rivalité entre John Adams et Thomas Jefferson, référence évidente aux tensions actuelles. Pour rappeler que la polarisation n'empêchait pas alors une forme de courtoisie et que John Adams, vaincu par Thomas Jefferson à la présidentielle de 1800, avait fini par renouer avec son ancien adversaire. Et que les deux hommes s'étaient éteints le même jour, le 4 juillet 1826.

Mais si Thomas Jefferson incarne l'Amérique sans doute plus qu'aucun autre de ses contemporains, c'est aussi parce que personne ne porte mieux que lui les mensonges du rêve américain de 1776. Monticello ne cache rien des quelque 600 esclaves que possédait le chantre de la liberté. Ni de sa relation avec l'une d'entre elles, Sally Hemings, longtemps un tabou jusqu'à la confirmation par analyse ADN. « Thomas Jefferson n'était pas moins dur que les autres avec ses esclaves, y compris avec les enfants qu'ils avaient eus avec Sally Hemings », poursuit le guide. Dans le sillage de la mort de George Floyd, en 2020, certaines statues de Thomas Jefferson ont été déboulonnées dans le Minnesota.

1. What type of newspaper article is this? Does the journalist simply report facts, or does he also express a point of view? Justify
2. Who was Thomas Jefferson? Why is he an important figure in American history?
3. What is the paradox between Jefferson's ideas about freedom and equality and his personal life?
4. Complete the sentence: "Thomas Jefferson is both a symbol of the American Dream and a symbol of its contradictions because..."

Document 7

After 250 years the American Dream is surviving, but only just

Asma Khalid, *BBC*, 2 July 2026

[...] Survey after survey taken ahead of the 250th anniversary of America's founding shows many Americans feel the "American Dream"- the promise that anyone in the United States can create a bright future for themselves - is fading.

- 5 A recent poll from the Associated Press-NORC found that only a third of the public believes the American Dream still exists. The sentiment is the same across many surveys. One recent study from the Pew Research Center, shows that most Americans say the country's best days are behind it.

America's 250th birthday also comes at a moment of deep polarisation and partisan divide.

- 10 So what does it mean if the Dream - a brand exported around the world in movies, music and pop culture - feels out of reach?

In those early days after the Revolutionary War and well into the 21st Century, what became known as the Dream enticed millions of immigrants to this shiny new nation full of hope, optimism and individualism. Factory workers, farmers, gold diggers, frontiersmen flocked to the US with the belief that they could create a new identity - an "American" - unshackled from the class systems of Europe.

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Historians will tell you that the Dream never included everyone - certainly not Native Americans, slaves, or even women. Nevertheless, the idea of the American Dream persisted.

The concept of the American Dream dates back to the founding of the US, but the phrase wasn't popularised until later, in *The Epic of America*, a book published in 1931 during the Great Depression.

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In it, the historian James Truslow Adams wrote: "It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable."

- 25 Over the years, the slogan has evolved. These days it's often associated with entrepreneurialism, social mobility and, above all, economic opportunity.

"It has always been about doing better in life than before," says Cyril Ghosh, author of *The Politics of the American Dream: Democratic Inclusion in Contemporary American Political Culture*. "For some people, the better in life is simply not being persecuted by the Church of England."

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"It's not only about materialism. It's about security. It's about doing better than a previous station. That's what it's always been about."

Abdi had grown up in Somalia, hiding in dugouts to avoid getting shot by the militant group al-Shabab.

35 "Freedom was a huge priority. Living the next day, breathing next day, was a big, big issue, and I really wanted that," he said, explaining why he had wanted to move to the US.

Researchers say first-generation immigrants, like Abdi, are often more upbeat about the potential of America.

40 "Many are coming from less wealthy nations. And so they really are going to end up doing better than if they had not emigrated," says Elizabeth Suhay, author of *Debating the American Dream: How Explanations for Inequality Polarize Politics*.

"Immigrants, for the most part, are more likely to say that they are achieving the Dream, or they've achieved it," said Mark Hugo Lopez, director of race and ethnicity research at the Pew Research Center who has specifically looked in-depth at attitudes among Latino immigrants.
45 They also tend to be, Lopez said, more optimistic about the prospects for their children.

The American Dream has always been a sell for immigrants. However, fewer of them are coming these days.

President Trump has made curbing immigration a cornerstone of his presidency, after campaigning on a promise to carry out the largest mass deportation programme in history.

50 During his second term, Trump has not only clamped down on the number of immigrants illegally entering via the southern border, he has blocked some legal pathways to come to the US, including the diversity visa programme that Abdi used.

But today it's not just that the US is welcoming fewer immigrants, it also appears a record number of people may be leaving.

55 The current administration's immigration crackdown has helped reduce migration numbers

One suggestion is that many Americans who grew up in the US don't think the country has held up its end of the bargain - that if you work hard and you play by the rules, you should have a decent, comfortable life.

60 Last year, in a historic reversal, the number of Americans moving to Ireland was higher than the number of Irish moving into the US. The US government doesn't track the number of Americans voluntarily leaving the country, so there aren't official statistics, but reporting suggests it's not just Ireland.

A record number of Americans are applying for UK citizenship, and The Wall Street Journal reported that the number of Americans arriving to live and work in nearly all of the EU's 27
65 member states is rising.

Why are people leaving? Some point to current US politics, others to healthcare costs and the overall standard of living. In most cases it is likely to be for a variety of reasons, some of them personal. [...]

70 These days, the consensus among sociologists and political scientists is that financial success has increasingly become a central tenet of the Dream – the belief that my children or grandchildren will have a better life than me.

"Roughly speaking, the American Dream is the idea that if you work hard, you ought to achieve a comfortable life, what we might call a middle-class lifestyle - a house, healthcare, the ability to take care of your kids, a car, college," said Suhay.

- 75 Statistics also suggest that over the last 50 years, the idea that every generation will do better than the one before has been eroded.

Research by the Harvard University economist Raj Chetty found that among children born in 1940, 90% of them grew up to earn more than their parents. Today, only half of children born in the 1980s are on track to do better than their parents economically.

- 80 This perception of economic abundance spread in the 1950s with the post-WWII boom, perhaps best symbolised through the growth of single-family homes adorned with white picket fences. The Dream became particularly popular in political rhetoric, Ghosh says, in the mid-60s with the civil rights movement and more expansive immigration policies.

- 85 "It is a core part of America," said Suhay. "Almost everybody agrees that this is an important ideal. But... we have huge debates about whether or not the United States actually delivers the American Dream."

The Dream started to decline some 50 years ago, beginning in the 1970s, with globalisation and wage stagnation, according to Mark Rank, co-author of *Chasing the American Dream: Understanding What Shapes Our Fortunes*.

- 90 "It's become much harder to attain the American Dream - this idea of an economic bargain that if you work hard and you play by the rules, you should have a decent, comfortable economic life," he said. "That idea of each generation doing economically better than the past generation is a key component of the American Dream. And that had been the case up until about the 1970s," he says.

- 95 And experts say that in the subsequent years, the Dream began to experience a prolonged decline as socioeconomic inequality increased.

Then, some experts say, there was another tipping point: the financial crisis of 2008 and the aftershocks that meant home ownership and job stability were increasingly out of reach.

- 100 And many Americans never recovered that economic optimism. Despite this, American wages remain much higher than ones in the UK, and across much of Europe.

Irrespective, wide partisan divides persist over whether the Dream is achievable. Surveys show more Republicans still appear to hold the faith, as do older Americans. Young adults seem particularly cynical. One poll found only a fifth of adults aged 18-29, people like Luke, think the Dream remains a possibility.

- 105 That being said, the Dream has never been entirely about financial success. For many, it's a dream of freedom and individual rights that trace back to America's founding documents, such as the Bill of Rights.

110 And in that vein, it's worth noting that many black Americans have long thought the Dream was a myth built upon lofty rhetoric from the Founding Fathers that didn't mesh with the reality of American slavery and segregation.

Black people have long been more cynical about the Dream

Martin Luther King Jr described America as manifesting a "schizophrenic personality" long before the nationwide disillusionment with the Dream began.

115 "In a real sense America is essentially a dream - a dream yet unfulfilled," he said in a 1960 address in North Carolina. "Slavery and segregation have been strange paradoxes in a nation founded on the principle that all men are created equal." [...]

1) Vocabulary

- a) Find in the text the two words that can be translated into “sondage”.
- b) Find in the text the translation of “respecter ses engagements”. Do you know how to say “tenir une promesse”?
- c) Give a definition of “social mobility” (1.26)
- d) "For some people, the better in life is simply not being persecuted by the Church of England. (1.29-30): Who is the writer implicitly referring to when he mentions “some people”?
- e) Using the context, would you say “upbeat” (1.37) is more positive or negative?
- f) Using the context, give a synonym to the words “curbing”, “cornerstone” and “clamped down” (1.50).
- g) What is the Bill of Rights (1.107)?

2) Understanding the text

- a) What type of newspaper article is this? What is its main purpose: to inform, to persuade, to entertain, or to analyse? Justify your answer.
- b) Does the journalist explicitly give her own opinion? How does she make her point without directly stating her own opinion?
- c) Underline all the elements that attempt to define the American Dream. Then give your own concise definition of the concept in one or two sentences.
- d) What evidence suggests that the American Dream is becoming harder to achieve?
- e) What factors explain the decline of the American Dream according to the people interviewed?
- f) Why does the American Dream still appeal to some people?
- g) Has the American Dream always been accessible to everyone? Give examples from the article.

3) Going further

- a) “America's 250th birthday also comes at a moment of **deep polarisation** and **partisan divide**.” (1.9): explain the meaning of the expressions in bold character. Give examples to illustrate.

250 years after the Declaration of Independence, to what extent is the American Dream still a reality rather than a myth? In your own words, compare and contrast the ideas presented in the two texts (documents 6 and 7). 220 words + or – 10%

