

For Some, ‘the New American Dream Is to Leave’

An online debate began when a European man lampooned the concept of American culture. Then a lot of Americans began agreeing with him.

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[...] The litigation of the American dream ramped up last week as a result of a TikTok video posted by Janis Groß, a German content creator. His video, in which he lampooned the concept of the American dream, took off on Reddit. In the video, Mr. Groß described the reality of the American dream as “working 60 hour weeks so your boss can buy a yacht, being more afraid of a medical bill than climate change, fast food on every corner and fresh food behind a paywall, and half the country fighting over who’s dumber: Trump or the people who worship him.”

The video led to heated discussions on Reddit and TikTok, where Europeans and Americans debated the validity of Mr. Groß’s claims and argued over whose lifestyle is better.

And what do American TikTok users have to say?

While plenty of Americans objected to Mr. Groß’s take, some clearly agreed with him. Many of the Americans turned to audio pulled from a TikTok video that was posted by a travel influencer in 2023 — long before the current debate. “I think the new American dream is to leave,” Bryn Elise, the influencer, said at the start of that video, which received more than 75,000 likes on its own, and served as the soundtrack for numerous other videos.

In the video, she added that the new dream was “to pack up and head to a quiet European town or a beachside village in Asia, somewhere where we aren’t being poisoned by our food, we don’t need two to three jobs to survive and where health care isn’t a luxury but the norm.”

In an interview, Ms. Elise said she was inspired to make her video by the frustration she was seeing everywhere she looked. “In the U.S., the old idea of the ‘American dream’ feels unattainable now,” she said. “People are overworked, struggling to make ends meet, and feeling like we can’t even get basic things like health care or quality food.”

As a traveler, she said she routinely meets people who have moved abroad and regained balance in their lives. She added that the video was intended to be a reminder that Americans had the freedom to pack and live wherever they wish. She said her video most likely resonated because so many people felt stuck and the concept of changing things gave them hope. “It inspired people but also struck a nerve because it’s sad that we all feel this way,” she said.

In another video that has racked up nearly 300,000 likes, the filmmaker Baron Ryan offers his own take on the new American dream, saying it is “to go to Hemingway’s Paris, say ‘goodbye to all that,’ live somewhere walkable where a busted arm won’t kill your credit score.”

So what does all this mean?

The theme of many of the videos, posted by Americans and others, indicates a frustration with what the United States once promised, and the belief many now have that that promise no longer exists. They also reflect a trend in which many Americans are moving abroad.

Of course, a move abroad in the age of social media comes with its own set of culture shocks to examine — perfect fodder for another set of videos on the differences between the United States and Europe. And the content mine churns on.