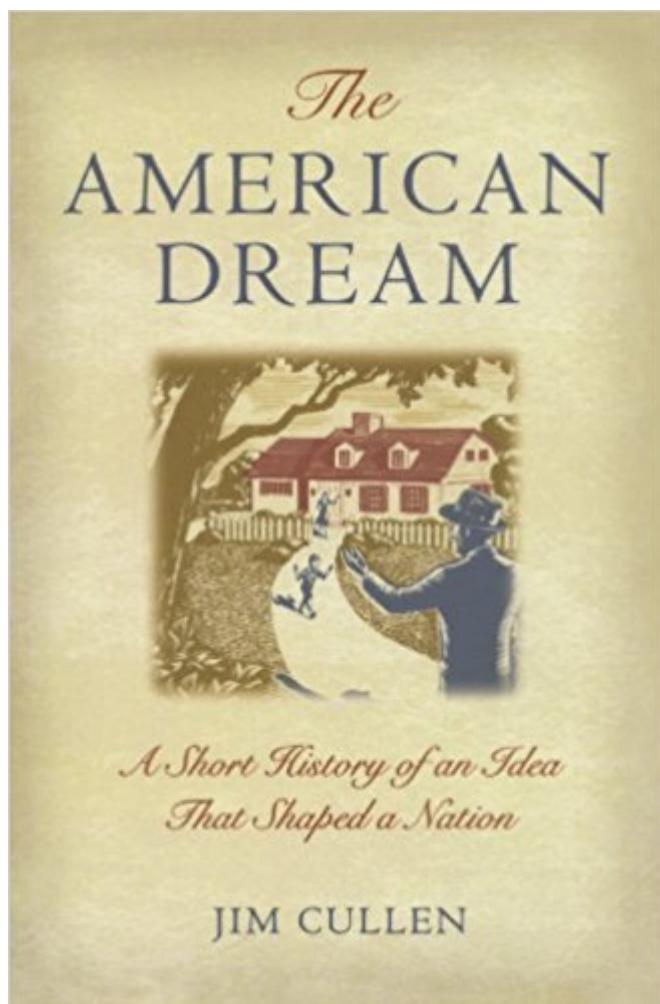


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# The American Dream: A Short History Of An Idea That Shaped A Nation



## **Synopsis**

"The American Dream" is one of the most familiar and resonant phrases in our national lexicon, so familiar that we seldom pause to ask its origin, its history, or what it actually means. In this fascinating short history, Jim Cullen explores the meaning of the American Dream, or rather the several American Dreams that have both reflected and shaped American identity from the Pilgrims to the present. Cullen notes that the United States, unlike most other nations, defines itself not on the facts of blood, religion, language, geography, or shared history, but on a set of ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence and consolidated in the Constitution. At the core of these ideals lies the ambiguous concept of the American Dream, a concept that for better and worse has proven to be amazingly elastic and durable for hundreds of years and across racial, class, and other demographic lines. The version of the American Dream that dominates our own time--what Cullen calls "the Dream of the Coast"--is one of personal fulfillment, of fame and fortune all the more alluring if achieved without obvious effort, which finds its most insidious expression in the culture of Hollywood.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

When a small group of 17th-century English religious dissenters crossed the Atlantic Ocean in search of a place where they could worship God in their own unique fashion, they were following a dream. These early settlers, the Puritans, paved the way for subsequent American dreamers, and, Cullen (Born in the U.S.A.: Bruce Springsteen and the American Tradition) argues, "you'll never really understand what it means to be an American of any creed, color, or gender if you don't try to

imagine the shape of that dream." Subsequent versions of the American Dream have pushed to the fore and, in the process, changed the shape of the nation. Cullen particularly focuses on the founding fathers and the Declaration of Independence ("the charter of the American Dream"); Abraham Lincoln, with his rise from log cabin to White House and his dream for a unified nation; and Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of racial equality. Our contemporary version of the American Dream seems rather debased in Cullen's eyes-built on the cult of Hollywood and its outlandish dreams of overnight fame and fortune. The book desires to be suggestive rather than exhaustive (as the subtitle "short history" suggests), and there are numerous gaps between the chapters where entire half-centuries and important leaders pass without mention. Its straightforward and engaging narrative style ought to appeal to general readers of American history, and its broader exploration of freedom, equality and shared ideals offers a nice dose of depth as well. 8 b&w photos. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Cullen explores American history through its ideals and notions that feed goals from which success and happiness are perceived and secured. At different times the American dream has meant different things. At the founding of the nation, Cullen asserts, the Declaration of Independence embodied the American ideal that all men are created equal. Even with the obvious contradiction of slavery, the essence of this dream allowed for the possibility of racial equality, class mobility, and home ownership--all values that at some point have centered the collective American consciousness. Cullen explores the ideas, hopes, and accomplishments of both native-born Americans and immigrants in developing consensus around the ideals. As the dream varies, Cullen tracks its shifts and the complexities that result in our cultural unity of valued ideals. From the initial ideals of the Declaration of Independence, Cullen moves to the expansion and inclusion of the dream through Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of racial equality to, finally, home ownership as the commonly accepted notion of the American dream. Vernon FordCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A short and very interesting read. I found many thought provoking and profound insights in this short book that explores the various ways in which Americans have defined the "American Dream" over several centuries. Also a good reminder that we are still defining and pursuing that dream, but getting it right requires work and attention by all.

It is a very interesting book that's holds many facts that most Americans should be aware of.

Seller responded and sent quickly. Good condition and good transaction.

Came as review stated.

This is an intellectual history of an important idea in American life. Cullen is a fine historian whose love for the subject matter shines forth on each page.

A simple look at Americas complicated history, highly recommend

It was in good condition

This is a timely addition to my collection. It's an informative, insightful and accessible companion to contemporary discussions of the current state of the collective American experience.

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