

## Holly Holland

**Title:** “American Dream: Inclusion by Ethnicity and Family”

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**Holly Jean Holland** is studying Secondary Education with a concentration in Social Studies and a minor concentration in Psychology, Government and Citizenship, and a minor in TENOL here at IPFW. She is a first generation college student and part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholarship program. This is her first time presenting at the Annual Undergraduate History Conference. Holly was selected for the Bahrom International Exchange Program with Seoul Woman’s University and studied in Korea for a month in the Summer of 2016. Her historic interests consist of a wide variety of topics, including 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>–century American History, Korean history and development, Native American history after Jackson’s Removal, and the history of revolutions and warfare. After graduating Holly plans to teach English in South Korea for a number of years before returning to America to teach Native American children and engage in politics to further America’s Education.

### **Abstract**

What constitutes the American Dream often invokes concrete goals and objects for many. For some, the American Dream is indicative of financial success, ownership of property, and fulfillment of employment, while for others the American Dream is made up of more abstract ideas. Due to its ever-changing nature, defining the American Dream is nearly impossible. Understanding what the American Dream constitutes, however, is achievable and applicable to today’s cultural and political climate. This paper explores the ways that generations of immigrants have grappled with their interpretation of what the American Dream represents. It locates a connective tissue between interpretations based on inclusion in American society and the process it undertakes.

Analysis of four primary sources from Eric Foner’s reprinted sourcebook titled *Voices of Freedom: A Documentary History, Volume 2*, suggests that the American Dream is contingent upon accepting one’s ethnic identities and the ability to form and enjoy a stable family structure. With accounts from an immigrant named Puwat Charukamnoetkanok, to even former President Lyndon B. Johnson, each presents his or her own notion as to what the American Dream is. Counter-intuitively, only through accepting one’s ethnic identity can the Protestant American Dream, i.e. buying a home and having economic stability, be achieved. Accepting one’s identity, however, is only half the battle to achieving the American Dream; the other aspect to achieving the American Dream involves family structure and stability. Expressed primarily by former President Lyndon B. Johnson, only through maintaining the family structure, which would ensure equality and assurance, could the African American community be included in President Johnson’s ideal American Dream. The family unit is congruent with accepting one’s identity, as identity is often derived from family. It is then only by being accepted by one’s ethnicity and family that one could achieve the American Dream.

Due to the idea of the American Dream and its ever changing presence in both American politics and culture, it is paramount that we are able to understand the nuanced ideas of what the American Dream is: a sense of common identity though ethnically diverse that is felt. It is with this more nuanced understanding that the idea of the American Dream can be applied to the 21st century political and cultural landscape in a viewpoint that will perhaps challenge the idealist notion of the American Dream and gear more positive discussion regarding immigration and terrorism. While many think of the traditional version of the American Dream/ Protestant American Dream, it is essential to understand the core to what the American Dream is, this core being ethnically accepted and the ability to form and enjoy a stable family structure.

### **Bibliographical Note**

This paper primarily used four sources from one reprinted sourcebook by Eric Foner titled, *Voices of Freedom: A Documentary History, Volume 2*. The first primary source is from the point of view of an immigrant in America named Puwat Charukamnoetkanok and was written in 1990 describing his search for identity and conflicting feelings regarding his different identities: Thai, Chinese and American. His reflective search to fit all three together ends with an optimistic saying of America being the land of opportunity. However, as Puwat points out, one can only reap from this land if they put in the hard work. The second primary source is an editorial written by the LULAC, or the League of United Latin American Citizens, that strives for inclusion of Latin Americans in American society written in 1945. Founded in 1929 it is still in operation today and continues to fight for Hispanic American rights and inclusion. The third primary source is an arranged speech by Martin Luther King Jr. and is titled *Meeting at Holt Street Church*. Martin Luther King Jr. is the most recognized civil rights leader and his historic speech titled, *I have a Dream* left a huge imprint on the American conscious. King Jr. often used non-violent protests in accordance with Christian beliefs that took America by storm during the late 1960s. The last primary source is another reprinted speech by former President Lyndon B. Johnson at Howard University. In his speech, he addresses the Civil Rights movement and its successes, but calls for even more progress. Johnson's concerns lie within maintaining the African-American family structure.