

The American Dream- Annotated Bibliography

What is the “American Dream” and how has it changed?

Compiled and annotated by Sara Lachman

The term "the American Dream" has come to represent the dream of financial success, but its original meaning was broader. William Truslow Adams was an American historian and writer. He was an investment banker, a captain in the Military Intelligence division and a delegate to the Paris Peace Conference to draft a resolution to end WWI. In 1931 he published the book *The Epic of America* in which he wrote, "The American Dream is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement...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, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position." The following bibliography includes well-acclaimed books from the late 20th and early 21st century exploring the idea of the American Dream from the perspective of non-Caucasians.

Choose one of the books below and consider the following questions as you read: What does the American Dream mean to the protagonists of the story? What does the American Dream mean to your family and you?

Citation: Alvarez, J. (1991) *How the Garcia girls lost their accents*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. 290 pages. **950L**

Sources in which the book is recommended: Positive reviews in School Library Journal, Library Journal, New York Times Book Review.

Race or ethnicity: Latino-American

Genre: Realistic Fiction, Historical Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: “This sensitive story of four sisters who must adjust to life in America after having to flee from the Dominican Republic is told through a series of episodes beginning in adulthood, when their lives have been shaped by U. S. mores, and moving backwards to their wealthy childhood on the island. Adapting to American life is difficult and causes embarrassment when friends meet their parents, anger as they are bullied and called "spics," and identity confusion following summer trips to the family compound in the Dominican Republic.” This book addresses what it means to be successful in America after coming from wealthy origins in another country.

Source of annotation: amazon.com (School Library Journal Review), Self

Citation: Alexie, S. (2007). *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company. 230 pages. **600L**

Sources in which the book is recommended: National Book Award Winner, 2008 American Indian Youth Literature Award, 2008 ALA Best Books for Young Adults

Race or ethnicity: American Indian

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: Junior is just entering high school as a Spokane Indian living on the reservation. When a teacher tells him he needs to escape reservation life, he makes the controversial decision to go to a non-reservation high school. Junior struggles with the fact that this decision alienates him in the eyes of his community, even though he knows that his decision will help him achieve his goals of success.

Source of annotation: Self

Citation: Davis, T.S. (2009). *Mare's war*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf. 341 pages. **830L**

Sources in which the book is recommended: 2010 Coretta Scott King Author Honor Book, 2010 ALA Best for Young Adults.

Genre: Realistic Fiction, Historical Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: “On a parent-mandated cross-country road trip with Mere, their unpredictable grandmother, 15-year-old Octavia and 17-year-old Tali make the transformation from complaining, self-absorbed teens to observant, supportive family members. Mere's account of her war years is full of historical detail and lively personal anecdotes about the training, treatment, duties, and social life in her African-American regiment of the Women's Army Corps both on assignment in the U.S. and in the European Theater during 1944 and 1945.” This book addresses what it means to be a successful African-American woman.

Source of annotation: amazon.com (School Library Journal Review), Self

Citation: *de la Peña, M. (2008). *Mexican whiteboy*. New York: NY: Delacorte Press. 247 pages. **680L**

Sources in which the book is recommended: 2009 Ten Best Books for Young Adults, A Junior Library Guild Selection: Positive reviews in School Library Journal and Booklist.

Race or ethnicity: Mexican American, African American, Biracial

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: The summer after his sophomore year of high school, half white, half Mexican Danny Lopez decides to spend the summer in National City with his dad's side of his family. After befriending a local kid named Uno, Danny struggles with his love of baseball and his desire to successfully fit in with his dad's Mexican relatives.

Source of annotation: Self

Citation: *Flake, S.G. (2001). *Money hungry*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books for Children. 187 pages. **650L**

Sources in which the book is recommended: 2002 Coretta Scott King Author Award Honor Book: Positive review in School Library Journal, starred review in Booklist.

Race or ethnicity: African American, Korean American, Bi-racial

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: Raspberry Hill is 13-years-old and obsessed with making money. Her friends find her miserly ways frustrating, and Raspberry ends up having to make the ultimate decision between whether it is more important to be monetarily successful, or to be a good friend.

Source of annotation: Self

Citation: Hidier, T. D. (2002). *Born confused*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press. 413 pages. **890L**

Sources in which the book is recommended: 2003 ALA Best Book for Young Adults: Positive reviews in Publishers Weekly, School Library Journal.

Race or ethnicity: Indian-American

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: “Dimple Lala has spent her entire life trying to fit in. In India, she is too American, while in America she feels unable to conform, largely because of her parents' efforts to educate and involve her in Indian culture. By her 17th birthday, she feels incapable of making anyone happy and is hopelessly confused as to where she belongs. Teens will be rooting for Dimple and her quest to find her own place in her family and country.” This book addresses what it means to successfully fit in within two very different cultures.

Source of annotation: amazon.com (School Library Journal Review)

Citation: *Jiménez, F. (2008). *Reaching out*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company. 194 pages. **910L**
Sources in which the book is recommended: 2009 ALA Notable Book, 2009 Pura Belpré Honor Book: Positive review in School Library Journal, starred review in Booklist.
Race or ethnicity: Mexican American
Genre: Autobiography
Format: Novel
Annotation: A follow-up to his books *The Circuit* and *Breaking Through*, this book is an autobiographical account of the author's life as a college student at Santa Clara University. Francisco struggles with balancing his academic successes with his guilt over abandoning his family, while trying to decide what he really wants to do with his life.
Source of annotation: Self

Citation: Jones, T.L. (2006). *Standing against the wind*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 184 pages. **780L**
Sources in which the book is recommended: 2007 Coretta Scott King Award, 2007 Notable Social Studies Trade Books: Positive reviews in School Library Journal, Booklist, Kirkus.
Race or ethnicity: African-American
Genre: Realistic Fiction
Format: Novel
Annotation: "In the tradition of Janet McDonald, this moving first novel tells a hopeful story of Patrice, a shy, studious teen who beats the odds in her grim inner-city neighborhood. Patrice, who lives with her aunt, never knew her dad and barely met her mom, who is in jail. When she gets a chance to win a scholarship to a prestigious African American boarding school, pressures in her aunt's home and on the streets threaten to pull her down--until Monty, a gang leader, protects her and loves her. Handled without obscenity, the lively street talk will draw readers to the gripping story of a contemporary kid who works to make her dreams come true." This book deals with the struggle between academic and social success.
Source of annotation: amazon.com (Booklist Review), Self

Citation: Lee, M.G. (1996). *Necessary roughness*. New York: NY: HarperTrophy. 228 pages. **750L**
Sources in which the book is recommended: 1998 ALA Best Books for Young Adults: Positive reviews in School Library Journal, Kirkus.
Race or ethnicity: Korean American
Genre: Realistic fiction
Format: Novel
Annotation: "Chan and his sister Young move from Los Angeles to a small town in Minnesota with their parents who immigrated to the U.S. from Korea when the twins were small. Entering their junior year of high school, the siblings face numerous obstacles. They are the only Asians in town, and the fact that their mother and father practice many of the old-world Korean customs that clash with Chan and Young's more Americanized desires is paramount." This book is about becoming a successful Korean athlete in a predominantly white area of America.
Source of annotation: amazon.com (School Library Journal Review)

Citation: Martinez, V. (1996). *Parrot in the oven: Mi vida*. New York, NY: HarperCollins. 216 pages. **1000L**
Sources in which the book is recommended: 1996 Americas Book Award for Children's & Young Adult Literature, 1996 National Book Award for Young Peoples Literature, 1998 Pura Belpré Award: Positive reviews in Publishers Weekly, School Library Journal.

Race or ethnicity: Mexican American

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: “This contemporary novel, lyrically related in a series of vignettes, tells the story of a Mexican-American family's struggle to maintain its integrity in the face of poverty, discrimination, and cultural alienation. Throughout, the powerful thread of this story is Manny's search for acceptance, laced with the adolescent angst that always accompanies such a quest.” Martinez’s novel deals with what it means to be a success in the eyes of himself and his peers.

Source of annotation: amazon.com (School Library Journal Review)

Citation: Namioka, L. (2002). *An ocean apart, a world away*. New York: NY: Delacorte Press. 197 pages. **780L**

Sources in which the book is recommended: Positive reviews in Publishers Weekly, School Library Journal, and Booklist.

Race or ethnicity: Chinese American

Genre: Historical Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: “Unlike her conservative mother, 16-year-old Yanyan refuses to have her feet bound. Although she dreams of being a doctor, she nearly gives it up to follow the young man she loves in a daring political adventure. Instead, however, she convinces her rich dad to send her to college in America.” Yanyan’s story grapples with how America can help her achieve her dreams to be a successful doctor.

Source of annotation: amazon.com (Booklist Review), Self

Citation: *Na, A. (2001). *A step from heaven*. Asheville, NC: Front Street. 156 pages. **670L**

Sources in which the book is recommended: 2002 ALA Notable Books for Children, 2002 ALA Best Books for Young Adults, 2002 Michael Printz Honor Book, 2001 National Book Award Honor for Young People’s Literature: Starred review in Booklist, positive reviews in Publishers Weekly, and School Library Journal.

Race or ethnicity: Korean American

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: “Young Ju's parents don't want her to become too American, and Young Ju is ashamed of them. It's the classic immigrant child conflict, told here in the present tense with the immediacy of the girl's voice, from the time she's a toddler in a small Korean village wondering why the adults talk about America as ‘heaven.’ Young Ju's mother is a strong figure in the background until the girl suddenly sees her as a person, who tells her, ‘In America, women have choices.’” Na’s novel addresses what it means to see America as a place where a woman can choose her own dreams and successes.

Source of annotation: amazon.com (Booklist Review)

Citation: *Na, A. (2006). *Wait for me: A novel*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons. 169 pages. **660L**

Sources in which the book is recommended: 2007 Best Books for Young Adults, Junior Library Guild Selection, a Booksense Pick for Summer 2006, Recommended by Cynthia Leitich Smith: Starred reviews in Kirkus, Booklist, and the Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books.

Race or ethnicity: Korean American, Mexican American

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: To her mother, Mina is the ideal daughter: Harvard-bound, president of the honor society, and constantly working in her family’s dry cleaning business. What her mother doesn’t know, however, is that Mina has been stealing from her family’s business, and lying about her grades. This book perfectly

depicts Mina's struggle between being seen as successful in her mother's eyes, and following her own dreams.

Source of annotation: Self

Citation: Taylor, M.D. (2001). *The land*. New York, NY: Phyllis Fogelman Books. 369 pages. **760L**

Sources in which the book is recommended: 2002 ALA Best Books for Young Adults, 2002 Coretta Scott King Award, 2002 Ten Best Books for Young Adults: Positive reviews in Publishers Weekly, School Library Journal, Starred review in Booklist.

Race or ethnicity: African-American, Biracial

Genre: Historical Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: "Drawing directly on her family history, especially what she knows about her great-grandfather, she goes back to the time of Reconstruction to tell a searing story of cruelty, racism, and betrayal. His dream is to own his own land. It becomes his obsession. The second part of the book is about his work, backbreaking work for months and years to get that land." In this prequel to *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Taylor discusses the historical American dream of being a successful land owner.

Source of annotation: amazon.com (Booklist Review), Self

Citation: Woo, S.J. (2009). *Everything asian: A novel*. New York, NY: Thomas Dunne Books. 328 pages.

Sources in which the book is recommended: 2010 Asian/Pacific American Libraries Award for Youth Literature: Positive reviews in Publishers Weekly, Booklist, School Library Journal, Kirkus.

Race or ethnicity: Korean American

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: "In this charming tale of family, community and the struggle for understanding, young Korean immigrant David Kim learns to acculturate to a new American life." "Cleverly concatenated...recounts with both humor and pathos growing up and gradual Americanization." Throughout the story, David learns what it means to be successful in the new American world to which he has immigrated.

Source of annotation: amazon.com (Publishers Weekly and Kirkus Reviews), Self

Citation: Yep, L. (1975). *Dragonwings*. New York, NY: HarperCollins. 256 pages. **870L**

Sources in which the book is recommended: 1976 Jane Addams Book Honor, 1976 Newbery Honor Book, 1995 Phoenix Award.

Race or ethnicity: Chinese-American

Genre: Historical Fiction

Format: Novel

Annotation: "The story begins as eight-year-old Moon Shadow Lee journeys across the Pacific to join his proud and clever father at the family-owned laundry in San Francisco. The boy recounts their problems with prejudice, as well as the kindness of uncles and cousins. Father and son must leave the protection of the family to move out of Chinatown, but they find refuge with a generous and friendly landlady. Once they have successfully established a repair business, they turn their attention to making a flying machine." Moon Shadow's father's American Dream is to create his very own successful flying machine.

Source of annotation: amazon.com (Publishers Weekly and Kirkus Reviews), Self