



Pursuing the American Dream: Opportunity and Exclusion over Four Centuries (American Political Thought (University Press of Kansas))

Cal Jillson

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Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness: these words have long represented the promise of America, and, even before they were penned, this country was seen as the land of opportunity. Touted by poets, pundits, and politicians, the American Dream is the spark that animates American life, the promise held out to youngsters and immigrants that hard work will result in security and prosperity.

The reality of that Dream, however, has long depended on the circumstances of the dreamer, since over the years many have been effectively barred from pursuing it. In this book Cal Jillson examines America's complex and evolving social landscape to show the contexts that have shaped the Dream and the patterns of exclusion that have left some dreaming in vain.

Jillson offers the fullest exploration yet of the origins and evolution of the ideal that serves as the foundation of our national ethos and collective self-image. By placing opportunity and aspiration at the center of the American Creed, the Dream has become a force for expanding opportunity. Jillson traces this ideal to its origins and chronicles its progress to the present day. He explores the Dream's changing content and our broadening sense of who has had the right to pursue it, charting a middle course between viewing the Dream as triumphant ideal and false promise.

Marked by continuity, renewal, and expansion, the image of the Dream, Jillson contends, has been remarkably constant since well before the American Revolution—an image of a nation offering a better chance for prosperity than any other. His book reveals how that Dream has motivated our nation's leaders and common citizens to move, sometimes grudgingly, toward a more open, diverse, and genuinely competitive society.

Pursuing the American Dream not only attests to a lasting vision, it also serves notice to those who govern that our society and economy must remain open to competition and opportunity. Indeed, Jillson reminds us all that it takes action—in the form of policy initiatives focusing on such matters as education, health care, and employment—to ensure that all Americans have a fair chance to compete with their fellow citizens for the good things in life, and to secure the American Dream for future generations.

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