

Rankin

American Lit.

The Rape of the American Dream

The United States of America was founded when colonists in what is now known as the USA rebelled against their British overseers with a dream of rights, opportunity, and equality. Back in 1776, when this dream was expressed as the fundamental foundation which we should live upon in the Declaration of Independence, it seemed real, even if it was never completely true. However, over the last two centuries, our rights have been violated, opportunities have been taken from us, and there's still a lack of equality among races. The American dream of equal opportunity and rights has become a frail, crippled image of what it once was. The American dream has become scarred and broken by the very people who live by it.

In the Declaration of Independence, one of the main reasons given for splitting from Great Brittan was to protect our individual rights, but in modern times, the Bush Administration has spat in the face of these rights with a little something called the Patriot Act. Passed in 2001, in the midst of the scare about the terrorist attacks on September 11th, this act gives our government the ability to invade anyone's personal phone calls, emails, financial records, medical records and pretty much any record the government may have on any one person, which is probably frighteningly more than you would expect. And the Patriot Act gives the United States government the power to do all that without a court order. In addition to personal rights, the Patriot act also attacked our

civil liberties and our notion of equality by opening the door to racial profiling. This so-called “Patriot Act” destroys numerous rights of privacy that our ancestors – the (arguably) real patriots – fought to gain in the American Revolution.

Although the Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal”, this ideal really didn’t hold true then with the abundance of slavery, and still doesn’t exist to the fullest extent even after the abolition of slavery after the Civil War of the 1860s and civil rights movement of the 1960s. Racial equality has never existed in the United States. Slaves were simply a fact of life in and beyond colonial America, and as sick as it was, slavery is responsible for a lot of the early success of this nation. It would have been too hard to just write them out in the Constitution – also because many of the nation’s founders were in fact slave owners themselves. But slavery remained until 1865. Even after slavery was outlawed, white America still felt that blacks were not equal and as such they were segregated from whites in schools, workplaces, restrooms and pretty much everywhere and anywhere. “Separate but equal” it was not. This went on until the civil rights movement in the 1960s, which was when African Americans truly started to be legally treated as equal to white Americans. But even in today’s world there’s loads of racial discrimination against African Americans, by both civilians and law enforcement officers. Equality has come a long way in America but in the end it will never reach our nation’s founders grand promises of true equality.

America was supposed to be a land of equal opportunity, but has it ever lived up to this promise? The founders of our nation proclaimed that opportunity was “a natural right of all men”, meaning that everyone is born with just as much opportunity as everyone else. However, after the civil war, America’s “manifest destiny”, that is, to

migrate west, took this opportunity and used it as a force against the Native American peoples. The settlers believed that they were taking advantage of grand opportunities by invading the western United States, but as is common in today's world, one man's opportunity is another's destruction. The Native Americans were consistently shoved aside in favor of the settler's selfish desires. More recently, Wal-Mart stores have received controversy for hiring immigrants for lower wages and forcing them to work longer hours, with no days off. So much for equal opportunity.

Over the last 2 centuries, the grand American dream has gradually been raped by the inherent greed and selfishness of the American people, turning America from a nation of fragile dreams, to a home for broken dreams and social inequality. But on an individual scale, there's still plenty of hope left for America. Good Americans are still abundant and happily living day in and day out, while the big picture is still a dismal mess. And if this nation were to someday live up to the ideals which it was conjured up on, then the task of reaching that point rests solely on the shoulders of our own people, and now is a better time than any to start.