

Book Review: Luke Winslow, *Economic Injustice and the Rhetoric of the American Dream*. Lexington Books, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-4985-4414-6 (Hardcover). 165 Pages. \$90.00.

Reviewed by Tarunika Anand¹

[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Web-site: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2017 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

The “American Dream”, an infamous tale glorifying the capacity of the individual, has been told time and time again as the success story of hardworking, thriving Americans. Although the American Dream has functioned in the past as a rhetorical symbol that provided hope for economic mobility and explanation for our economic arrangements, its distortion of structural issues as individual flaws has created distrust and division among Americans over time. What implications arise when a story that filled the hearts of people with blind hope is found to be nothing more than a well-told myth?

In *Economic Injustice and the Rhetoric of the American Dream*, Luke Winslow implores us to find our inner “ideological critic” to uncover the detrimental and darker implications of perpetuating the existence of the American Dream. Leading up to Chapter Six, “Trump’s Rapture in the Ashes of the American Dream”, Winslow explores the consequences of ideologically charged rhetoric throughout our religious and political past. Tracing the origins of what we now call the American Dream through the course of Calvinist-Puritan predestination, the Protestant ethic, prosperity theology, and evangelicalism, Winslow demonstrates how language embedded in religious life came to reflect secular messages of individual responsibility. Winslow adeptly conveys the entwinement of secular and religious rhetoric through the ages of neoliberalism, the Great Recession, and the surge of apocalyptic rhetoric like premillennial dispensationalism. This detailed and enlightening account of America’s famous historical events builds up to the criticism and questioning of the American Dream after the Great Recession of 2008, when it was clear to many that equal

¹ Tarunika Anand, Emory University, e-mail: tarun.anand@emory.edu.

opportunity was a disillusioning myth.

Enter Trump—a man who rejected previous rhetoric of individual capacity and instead concentrated on apocalyptic language in order to win the 2016 Presidential election. According to Winslow, Donald Trump presented himself as misaligned from the American Dream, purposefully exposing himself as an outsider to the political faction in order to appeal to defeated and fearful voters. With the election of Trump, a constant racial offender, self-proclaimed sexual assaulter, and wealthy businessman with no political experience, many Americans were confused and shocked by the votes of their neighbors. Using the shattered American Dream as a backdrop, Winslow effectively provides a clear explanation for those who have been perplexed and frustrated by the election results. Ultimately, Winslow successfully illuminates why our justifications for inequality persisted until the collapse of the American Dream and the rise of Donald Trump by explaining the ability of ideologically charged discourse to impact our perception of economic arrangements.

Perhaps the most controversial section of Winslow's piece is the shortest, as he ends his book with a few pages of constructive advice on how we may combat economic injustice and the rhetorical ploys of the mythical American Dream. Pointing to the Millennial generation as a source of hope, Winslow attributes Millennials with a justified distrust in traditional institutions and desire for collective impact that has equipped them with the ability to enact social and political change. Winslow, a Communications professor at San Diego State University, has ample experience interacting with Millennials on a daily basis and sees potential in the first generation of Americans left with economic conditions worse than those of their parents. Finally, Winslow inquires his readers to cast away their surface-level assumptions of Millennials and envision how they may construct an alternative vocabulary that dispels the harmful remnants of the American Dream.

Although somewhat repetitive at times, particularly in Chapters Two and Three, Winslow's constant emphasis on providing context helps the reader follow along throughout the whole piece, which is unlike many other academic works. His pacing and chronological walkthrough dissecting the American Dream allows the reader to understand Winslow's thesis through a step-by-step process. Furthermore, one can appreciate Winslow's candor in acknowledging his intentions and biases, allowing the reader to formulate his or her own opinions from the book instead of forcing them to read overly preachy material. Recognizing the saliency of his book's topic, Luke Winslow does a phenomenal job writing in a manner that is accessible to most people. *Economic Injustice* is not only

relevant to multiple academic disciplines, such as Sociology, Political Science, and Communications, but is also a significant contribution to the public. This book provides a timely look into America's journey to the election of the unorthodox Donald Trump for people of all different political affiliations. As Winslow addresses the Millennial generation in his last chapter, it may be most important for students and older Millennials to examine Winslow's words and decide whether they feel inspired to take part in the reformative ideological revolution he proposes. *Economic Injustice and the Rhetoric of the American Dream* should be at the forefront of every bookstore and in the hands of every student, academic, and member of the American public for a sobering glimpse into the past and future of American democracy and inequality.