



Editorial Introduction to the Volume: Re-Imagining the American Dream

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Social science researchers have directly challenged and problematized the ideology of the "American Dream" by critically analyzing and exposing the fallacies and consequences of neoliberalism, the instability of the nuclear American family structure, and the dire consequences of marginalization and colonization. Critical analysis only takes us so far; social scientists also have a role to play in developing solutions for imagined futures. In this volume of *Social Thought and Research*, graduate and early career scholars have analyzed the "American Dream's" ideological premise and conceptualized possibilities for imagined futures.

The volume begins with Christopher Brown's exploration of Habermas' theory of the public forum and how modernization has problematized the operation of the public forum in our everyday lives. Brown traces the historical roots of Habermas' ideas and analyzes how they now operate within the context of the age of social media. Technology, he argues, has both promoted public discourse and zombified it into a shell of its former self, stripping away the human element of organic connection. This article asks important questions about communication, connection, identity, and how technology alters the notion of free speech in the modern age.

The next article by Nicole Lounsbery and colleagues demonstrates how efforts to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education have not necessarily improved enrollment, retention, or academic success for historically marginalized students. Using interview and focus group data at a Tribal College or University (TCU), the authors incorporate the Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) process to understand how DEI goals are reached through bottom-up strategies and top-down institutional policy changes. These initiatives resulted in efforts to include students as experts on their own lives and needs, confronted implicit bias among faculty and staff, and challenged historical ways of thinking and doing. By adopting these lessons and implementing these efforts, universities can begin to meaningfully reach diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts on their campuses.

Concluding this volume are two interviews conducted in 2023 with guest lecturers to the Department of Sociology at the University of Kansas. Dr. Tahseen Shams presented research at the department's *Blackmar Lecture* from her most book, "*Here, There, and Elsewhere: The Making of Immigrant Identities in a Globalized World*." Dr. Sharmila Rudrappa presented her ongoing research which analyzes the commodification of women's bodies and human reproduction in connection to the techno-pastoral management of the natural world.

This volume has been three years in the making. The articles and interviews in this volume were written and conducted prior to the current U.S. federal administration led by President Donald J. Trump in January 2025. This administration has made concerted efforts to eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts on University campuses and impose control over journalism and the media. Additionally, the administration has carried out initiatives to reign in illegal immigration resulting in both legal immigrants and U.S. citizens being caught in the cross-fire. Due to delays in publishing this volume until 2026, the authors in these articles have *not* directly addressed the challenges we face in this present political moment. Nevertheless, the editors at *STAR* hope that these ideas will invoke further critical analysis of the problems and possibilities inherent in American idealism. It is only through critical evaluation of taken-for-granted assumptions that we can design improvements to meet the needs of our society now and in the future.