



2026 GLOBAL CONFERENCE

LEADING IN A NEW ERA



PART 3: THE AMERICAN DREAM AT 250

Michael Milken 00:06

So, as many of you know, for 20 years, we were on a mission, a mission to create a Center for Advancing the American Dream. Part of that mission was constantly surveying what the people believed, and not just America, but all around the world. So, we've set off to film 4,000 people to date, and eventually 10,000 people from more than 100 countries and the US to tell you about their American Dream. We, eventually, after 12 years of building, in Washington, DC, opened this center, and on July 3, 2025, we had a laylight bring light back to Washington for the first time since December 7, 1945. That was the day of Pearl Harbor, and you were not allowed to have light in Washington during that period of time. Here is the day that laylight was uncovered.

[Video plays]

Michael Milken 04:20

84 years light was covered up in Washington, DC. A symbol of light to everyone in the world, and in the US, that the American Dream will live, or the Argentine Dream will live, eventually for all of us. There were really three groups we found when we started surveying people. About a third of the people, and John Clifton's going to talk about it in a moment, felt they had achieved their dream in life. About a third of the people felt they were on the way, and about a third of the people felt that they weren't going to make it. We are interested in all groups, but it's really the third group why this center was built, to give them hope. And when you look at the outside of the building, you will see, "Come find your dream in this building." Many people felt that they had so many disadvantages in life or so many challenges that they would never achieve their dream. So, I'd like to show you a short video, for all those people that didn't know their mother or didn't know their father or had some challenge in life, of Freddie Figgers, who is here tonight—Freddie, can you stand up? So, Freddie's story has become a symbol of inspiration to millions of people. Let's see his short video. Thank you, Freddie.

[Video plays]

Michael Milken 07:48

So, we'd like to bring out three American Dream stories for you here. An astronaut, who was born in Iran, a woman that has brought the American Dream to millions of Americans, whose family came from Mexico, and an individual who started as a brain surgeon and became a media expert on health.

Announcer 08:23

Please welcome the panel on "250 Years of the American Dream," moderated by Michael Milken, chairman, Milken Institute.

Michael Milken 08:44

Welcome. So, Anousheh, let me start with you. Your journey from Iran took you from an immigrant to an entrepreneur, to a space explorer. When you look back, what made that journey possible, both inside yourself and in the system you found in America?

Anousheh Ansari 09:14

So, it's interesting to talk about my journey during this particular time where a lot of people in Iran are struggling to gain their freedom back. And I lived through the revolution, and the war, and I had a big dream as a young girl. I wanted to become an astronaut and go to space, and my ignorance about how difficult that could be allowed me to continue to dream and dream big, but I never imagined how my life would change as I got the opportunity to immigrate to United States. And the first thing I learned when I arrived was that there are no limits to what I can do. I don't need to be bound by where I was born or what my society or culture told me, as a woman, I was able to do. Basically, I could dream big in this country, and I did. And as long as I went and pursued that dream, there were resources, opportunities, education, Pell Grants, financial aid, different ways that allowed me to, every step, pursue that dream to become an entrepreneur, to build a successful company, and eventually achieve the dream of going to space.

Michael Milken 10:35

So, we wanted to honor how important immigrants have been to America. And there are many places in the center you will find them. But, over a three-year period, we had a trompe-l'œil painting made of 68 people who were born in 58 countries. You were one of them. Peggy Cherg and many others in the room

are there. Let's take a look at that mural, and thanks to AI, how all the children and the adults that visit over the years will get a chance to hear the people in this mural speak.

[Video plays]

Michael Milken 13:41

So, we're looking forward to millions of people listening to you give them guidance. Was there a moment in your life when you realized that the limitations other people had placed on you didn't define you?

Anousheh Ansari 13:58

Yes, so many moments actually. I think the first one was just going to college, and being able to study what I wanted to do was a big achievement, because, if I had stayed in Iran and wanted to pursue an engineering degree, that would have been impossible for me at the time. And, not only that, I came with my mom and my sister without—I didn't speak English, we didn't have any money, so I didn't even know how I would be able to afford to go to university. So, just that opportunity to get the education I needed to then go and build the company that I built later, that, by itself, was a big opportunity. And then just launching a company and being able to get my first small business loan to finance the company and start growing it was something that I don't think it would have been able at all if I had stayed in Iran. So, that was just start of my dream. And then, later on, the opportunity to give back and through that giving back with XPRIZE Foundation and supporting a competition to open up space, that allowed me to pursue my dream and eventually actually make a journey to International Space Station. So that was so many moments in my life.

Michael Milken 15:22

Giselle, I'm hard-pressed to find anyone that defines the American Dream more than you. So, when we wanted to say, "Who could bring the center to millions of people and describe it?" it wasn't hard to figure out it had to be you. Let's look at a one-or-two-minute video about yourself.

[Video plays]

Michael Milken 16:34

So, Giselle, we've known each other for a number of years here. Your belief in the American Dream, and, also in many ways—the largest group today that's come to our country, is almost 8 to 9 percent of the population, are of Mexican ancestry. How have you bridged your background and the American Dream?

Giselle Fernandez 07:06

I am an example of the possible. I didn't come to this country from Mexico the daughter of a flamenco dancer who wanted to live his dream here in the United States. The daughter of teachers, my mom and stepmom, teachers. We had no connections in media. We had no connections in journalism, but I had a big dream. And my biculturalism, the fact that I could always speak Spanish and understand another culture so deeply, and I also understood the work ethic of our community and those who come here and work so hard and contribute so much, gave me great empathy and understanding of a more global lens on what that dream looks like, and who has built this country, and who deserves the opportunity this country has afforded them. I am a product of that. I had no connections, no real wealth, and through passion and a desire to tell people's story and have an empathy for people's desire to live with health care, and access to capital, and education—I understood that deeply because I wanted those things too, and I saw it in my Hispanic community, and who's built, not just Los Angeles, the City of Angels, but this nation and the world. So, I bridge my American Dream story with just access to open doors and opportunities that all Latinos, and all people of every background and culture long for. I am a product of that. I am that dream.

Michael Milken 18:38

There's a quote you told me once, Giselle, that your mother told you, "Every human being, no matter who they are where they come from, has a story to tell. And those stories reveal who we are and where are we going." How have you incorporated your mom's wisdom into your show?

Giselle Fernandez 19:03

I love that you bring my mom into this. It's so true. My mom used to collect Mexican fairy tales from the pueblitos de Mexico when we were young, when she was going after her doctorate, and I used to watch her interview on a little tape recorder in the very small pueblos, the little towns of Mexico, and I wanted to do that. I wanted to be that reporter who brought people's stories to the forefront, because, if we allow ourself to see ourselves in each other, then we realize we have a shared and common humanity, something that we're losing in today's media landscape. So, I have been so fortunate with Spectrum News 1 to be given the opportunity, and a platform, to share LA stories, California stories, about people who have come to this country, who have built their dream and give back. And I'll just share one story because it's emblematic of what drives me. Jose Martinez, a migrant kid, didn't learn to speak English until he was 12. He was on the picking circuit, up at 12, and one day he saw us land on the Moon, and he said, "I want to be that someday." And his father, who was picking the fields and working hard so that we could have vegetables and fruit on our tables said, "Then get an education and study harder than you ever did." 11 times, that migrant kid was rejected from NASA, and he learned that their International Space Station would be collaborating with Russians, and he said, "I'm going to learn Russian," and he did. Fast-forward,

that kid, Jose Hernandez, became not just Shuttle Commander, but now has a nonprofit that gives back and teaches STEM and teaches science to kids just like him. Those are the stories I tell.

Michael Milken 20:48

Giselle mentioned, for a moment there, the four pillars of the center: education and the educator, access to capital, financial literacy, health and medical research, and the entrepreneur and innovation. So, when we were looking who could represent these pillars that we have in the center, for health, there was one person, Sanjay Gupta, who's been trying to explain what's going on to the world for so many years. But Sanjay, before I go there, as a child in India, your mom read a book about Henry Ford. She went on to become the first female engineer hired by the Ford Company. Tell us a little bit about your parents' story.

Sanjay Gupta 21:45

Sure. Well, first of all, Mike, just thank you for having me here. I think you are the American Dream.

Michael Milken 21:52

Well, we have—thank you. Sanjay, thank you for coming, but I want you to know, Sanjay is always here, okay? His hologram is in the center, and millions of people can ask him questions. We'll see it in a sec. But tell us about your parents.

Sanjay Gupta 22:12

Well, thank you for asking about my mom as well. We love to share stories about our parents. And there's so much to say, but I will say that my mom was born in pre-partition India. So, this is before an arbitrary line divided the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. And when that happened, it forced the largest human migration at that time in history, and she was five years old, and she went from what is now Pakistan to India and lived in these refugee camps outside of Mumbai for some time, and, when she was around 12 years old, someone handed her a biography of Henry Ford, which I still have a hard time getting my head around. I'm not sure how that happened exactly. But she reads this book and decides that one day she wants to work for that guy, Henry Ford, work for the Ford Motor Company, which is an audacious thing. That is the dream, right? You're in a refugee camp on the other side of the world, and you read about this person who inspires you, and you say, "I'm going to work for him." There's many stops along the story, but eventually she ends up in the Motor City and starts cold calling Ford Motor Company, in a sari. This is the mid-1960s in Detroit. There aren't a lot of people who wear saris there today. Imagine what it was like 60 years ago. It was remarkable. And just day after day, went in there and said that she wanted to

be an engineer, and they kept telling her, "We don't have any women engineers." And she said, "And you never will unless you hire me." And eventually they gave her the job, and I remember I asked her, I said, "What did you say when they first told you that you were hired? Did you say thank you, the appreciation?" And she said, "No, I said to them, 'What took you so long?'" Which is my mom. That's the mom that I sort of was raised by, and that's something she's infused into us our whole lives. My parents are immigrants. They chose this country, which—I think it's a really important dialogue that we're having right now around immigration, but I do think it's important to acknowledge people who, like my mom, came here, they could only take 400 rupees out of the country at the time, and it was never quite certain they were going to make it. When I was a kid, we were never quite certain we were going to be able to stay in this country. But they made it work, and I think those are the traits that they've infused in me over now 50, 55 years.

Michael Milken 24:41

Sanjay, probably more than anyone in the world, you've seen America and the world at its harshest moments. Leaving the operating room and becoming a journalist, your knowledge, and, whether it was COVID, natural disasters, war zones, what have those experience taught you about the character of the people in the world and America?

Sanjay Gupta 25:12

Well, first of all, I still operate. I'm still a surgeon. I still think that's a fundamental, important part of my life, taking care of patients one at a time. But being able to transmit health messages to a global community, I think has been really important to me. Some of our greatest advancements in medicine, and I think in society overall, have come when we have been truly challenged. Whether it's a conflict, some of our great advances in operative techniques have come from the battlefield, I think COVID, it's difficult to disentangle anything from politics nowadays, but health care workers worked to exhaustion. An mRNA vaccine was created in less than a year. It had never been shorter than five years before that, and it was because of the necessity of getting these things done. So, I think, when I cover these stories in the United States and around the world, and I've covered just about every conflict, natural disaster, and outbreak over the last 25 years, I walk away from those pretty inspired because you see people who, if you had interviewed them a week earlier, they would say, "There's no way that I can get through this. There's no way that I could rise up and potentially be a leader." But those often are the people who do exactly that. So, you see these unlikely heroes, these unsung heroes, who not only rise to the occasion, but I think advance us all as a society.

Michael Milken 26:36

So, we all age over time. But Sanjay is never going to age at the Center for Advancing the American Dream. And why is health so important to the American Dream? We asked Sanjay. Let's see how he answered it.

[Video plays]

Sanjay Gupta 27:19

I had to learn all those languages. *[laughter]*

Michael Milken 27:24

Each of our three that really went out of their way to be here today is sending a signal, whether from Iran, whether a family from Latin America, whether it is from our most populous nation, India, today. They've enriched the United States, but they've enriched the world, each of them today in their own world. I cannot tell you how many hundreds or thousands of people during COVID, or other disasters, told me they slept better at night after watching Sanjay on television, trying to explain it to them and let them know the world is not coming to an end. Or how many young entrepreneurs or people from lower socioeconomic groups felt that they have a chance because they've seen Giselle tell a story that could've been about a person like her. Or how many young girls, after seeing a young girl from Iran come here, not only go to space, but today lead the XPRIZE here in America. Each of them bring peace, bring optimism, and we thank the three of you for coming today.

Giselle Fernandez 28:51

Thank you. Thank you.

Anousheh Ansari 28:52

Thank you. Thank you, Mike.

Announcer 29:02

Please welcome to the stage CEO Gallup, Jon Clifton.

Michael Milken 29:16

So, the Center for the American Dream. There is this promise that we had, but is it an actual effect to the people of the world? We know when they leave, they're more optimistic. We know they feel more

responsibility, but who better to ask—the leading polling, surveying firm in the world, Gallup—to do the work? Jon, tell us about your work.

Jon Clifton 29:54

Thank you, Mike. Our founder, George Gallup, had a famous saying, and he said, "If democracy is about the will of the people, someone should go out and figure what that will is." And, over the past 91 years, my colleagues and I have taken a lot of pride in the fact that we've been following up and doing exactly what it is that our founders set out to do, which is report on the will of the country. Except that today, the will of America, and that report, is pretty sobering. One of the things that we've been tracking for over 50 years is Americans' confidence in various institutions—how they feel about the military, how they feel about public schools, how they feel about big labor, big business, newspapers—and what we find is that it is at a 50-year low. In fact, if you ask Americans how they feel about democracy, that's at a 40-year low. We even ask Americans about their pride in the country, and what we find is that today, that too is at a 25-year low. When we look at that sobering report, it made us at Gallup wonder, as well as Mike, are these concerning trends actually eroding the very idea of America, the American Dream?

So, in partnership, we went out and we asked Americans, "What is the state of the American Dream?" And today, we can tell you definitively what it is. And we find that seven in 10 Americans believe that they will achieve the American Dream, and, in fact, eight in 10 Americans believe that the American Dream is something that you should strive for. So, again, you could argue that the American Dream is alive and well, but there is a place where there's a bit of debate, or where we are evenly split, because half of Americans right now believe that the American Dream is available to anyone in this country, but the other half, and this is where it's contentious, disagrees. Now, on each side of those halves, there's one side that believes the product of the American Dream is finished, it's perfect as it is, and there's another extreme that believes it's fundamentally broken. But what is so inspiring is that the majority of Americans today actually believe that the American Dream is unfinished, and that we are still building it together. But that's not the most inspiring thing from our entire report. Because there's one group of individuals in this country where the American Dream is not just alive, it's thriving. The one group of individuals in this country where they still believe deeply in the American Dream is immigrants. You could actually argue that we are importing the American Dream more than we are inheriting it right now.

Jon Clifton 33:31

But, actually, the most fascinating discovery is a place where it's really thriving. Every single year at Gallup, we conduct interviews in over 140 countries around the world. We have a network of 5,000 to 6,000 interviewers that conduct interviews with about 50,000 people on the phone. But 100,000 people, we show up at their homes. And in over 140 languages and dialects, we have a conversation with them about what they want in their lives. And two of the questions that we ask people is, number one, "Would you like to leave your country permanently?" And we find that 15 percent of the entire world says that they actually would like to leave their country permanently. In fact, it's very high in countries like Sierra Leone or Liberia, where almost half of the entire adult population says that they would like to leave their country permanently. But to those individuals who say that they would like to leave their country, we ask them a

follow-up, "And where is it you would like to go?" Because for 20 straight years of this tracking that Gallup has done globally, we find that there is one country, more than any other country in the world, that people tell us that they want to move to, which is the United States. And, so, you could argue it's not just thriving within immigrants in this country. The American Dream is thriving with people all over the world, and we find that 130 million people would like to permanently relocate to this country. It's a reminder that of all the millions of people around the world who aren't giving up on the American Dream, it should be an inspiration to all of us that maybe we shouldn't give up on it either. Mike, thank you for being such a great partner to us and keeping the American Dream alive.

Michael Milken 35:29

Thank you. So, in closing, we're going to give you a little, short two-minute video on the center, your center, the world center, and see some of the people that have made it a reality. And thank you for joining us today.

[Video plays].

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