

Andrew: (star spangled banner) America the land of opportunity where any man or woman through hard work and determination can climb the ladder to socio economic success. (ladder climbing sounds) Since America's incarnation there has been the idea of the American dream and the possibility of enormous reward for efforts. (snapping of the ladder and the wilhelm scream) But its just that ...a Dream.(star spangled banner ends) (transition music) This dream also goes by another term, it is called social mobility. Many people in the United States understand the idea of the American dream but don't even know what the term social mobility means. I'm Andrew Mueller for the social ladder and I will be talking about social mobility in the United States. So we know that social mobility relates to the American dream but what actually is social mobility? The dictionary.com definition is "the ability of individuals or groups to move within a social hierarchy with changes in income, education, occupation, etc." So basically social mobility is how people from the lower classes move to the upper classes. Now social mobility is a great economic value when a country has a high mobility rate, but unfortunately the United States is lacking a high mobility rate. Tom Hertz from American University outlines mobility in the United States in his report "Understanding Mobility in America". He points out key findings such as "Children from low-income families have only a 1 percent chance of reaching the top 5 percent of the income distribution, versus children of the rich who have about a 22 percent chance. Children born to the middle class of parental family income had about the same chance of ending up in a lower class than their parents as they did of moving to a higher class. Their chances of attaining the top five percentiles of the income distribution were just 1.8 percent. African American children who are born in the bottom class are nearly twice as likely to remain there as adults than are white children whose parents had identical incomes, and are four times less likely to attain the top class. Geography also plays a role in low mobility. In the article "In Climbing Income Ladder, Location Matters, David Leonhardt points out that "upward mobility tended to be higher in metropolitan areas where poor families were more dispersed among mixed-income neighborhoods. mobility was also higher in areas with more [two-parent households](#), better elementary schools and high schools, and more civic engagement, including membership in religious and community groups. And Regions with larger black populations had lower upward-mobility rates." All these statistics point out that mobility in the United States is extremely low which essentially relates to the idea that the American dream is just a... dream. But while mobility is extremely low in the United States, how does mobility compare to other countries? (transition music)

Michael: It's easy to say that economic immobility is a problem with america and then go on to ignore the rest of the world, but is this the right thing to do? While it may be convenient to look at economic mobility and how it affects people from a purely american standpoint, and completely ignore the effect it has on the world and blinds us from the truth of the matter: America is only one country in a world of nearly 200 of them, and they all have problems. Many countries across the globe suffer from low mobility, some even worse than america. we can determine how socially mobile these countries are by looking at a statistic called the "intergenerational elasticity in earnings". According to Miles Corak, a professor of economics with the graduate school of public and international affairs, this statistic is " is the percentage difference in earnings in the child's generation associated with the percentage difference in the parental generation". the way that Corak explains this is by comparing two fathers and their sons. If the intergenerational elasticity in earnings is say, .4, and if one father makes 100% more than the other father then the son of the wealthier father will make 40% more

than the son of the poor father. so the closer the value gets to one, the less mobile the society, and as you get closer to zero, the society becomes more mobile. with this newfound information in hand, let's look at some examples. Denmark, a country bordering the north of germany, is extremely mobile with a value of only .15, and is one of the best countries in mobility terms. germany, just underneath denmark has a value of .32, which while worse than denmark, isn't nearly as bad as the uk and italy, which both have a value of .5, and the us, which is just lower than the uk, having a value of .47. The two worse by far are peru and china, having a value of .67 and .6, respectively. this is especially bad for china to have such a high number because it is such an important country in the global market, and having such low mobility is dangerous for their economy, and as a result, the global economy. These statistics don't paint a very good picture for economic mobility, and since this data only came from a list of 22 countries, we can only imagine what the numbers look like for the rest of the world. I'm sure at this point there are at least a few of you who have been convinced that economic immobility is an issue that needs to be dealt with, and many people would agree with you, but there are some who would not. there are people out there who claim that social mobility isn't as bad as people make it out to be, and there are even some who believe that mobility is actually rising. (transition music)

Nick P:but the problem of economic mobility isn't as bad as people are making it out to be, and if I may go so far as to say it. It's not even a problem at all, in fact, according to the new york times the odds of moving up — or down — the income ladder in the United States have not changed appreciably in the last 20 years. There are plenty of cases globally and nationally of people moving up and down vastly on the socioeconomic ladder, and nearly in every case they've earned their spot on this ladder. People seem to think that just because they live in america they are entitled to a better life than the generation before them had, that they are entitled to a higher degree of success simply by existing in america. But in reality things shouldn't work that way. You should have to work. You should have to struggle. You should have to fight for your place in the world. Someone who isn't worth a billion dollars has no right having a billion dollars, and will quickly lose it even if they had it. In the case of many poor people winning the lottery we see them poor again within a few years. things that really matter when trying to be successful are gaining knowledge, because the more you know the more value you provide, interruption events, which would be events that change your perspective in life and get you moving forward towards your goals, changing thinking patterns, viewing things as challenges, not barriers, taking action, lots of hard work and dedication, experimentation in your life to figure out what works, generally making yourself worth more as a human by investing in yourself. Things like discipline, focus, risk taking, and not viewing events that didn't necessarily have the desired outcome as failures, but as learning experiences are all things that will help you greatly on a path to success. People have a messed up view that they are somehow worth more than their current status when they do nothing to develop themselves. Like people are just supposed to give them handouts, because they're owed something by society. But what they're doing is attacking the problem with the wrong tool. In the vast majority of successful people they don't look at what society can do for them, but what they can do for society, and how to monetize that. People are trying to hit a screw with a hammer, instead of with a drill, and that's the supposed "problem" with mobility, is that people don't understand how it should be framed. The world has no sympathy for a person's situation in the vast majority of cases. You either provide value and get rewarded, or you go hungry. There are many cases of people becoming successful by grinding away until they win slowly but surely, but I'll use more explosive

examples instead to exaggerate my point. Take NWA as an example, this one's popular right now because of the recent release of Straight Outta Compton. Anyway, they're group of African Americans from the lowest class of society. They decide to do music, they're going to rap. They come out and basically revolutionize the industry, gangster rap becomes a huge genre of music, and they become wildly successful. Even after they split up and all do solo careers in music, they are all still super successful. Dr. Dre, one of the members of NWA continues to be a massive influence in culture to this day. Signing artists like Eminem, who come out and influence more people, making Beats by Dre, not only headphones but something that I would compare to a fancy necklace, something that would show that you're following today's trends. How is it that a man from Compton could come out and become a Billionaire, someone who has an estimated 620 million dollars in yearly pre tax earnings? by using the right tools for success. The issue isn't mobility, it's people's lack of understanding of the system. Take another example Colonel Harland Sanders. He made KFC. He was a notoriously poor businessman. he had created many other failed businesses, but instead of giving up, he would learn from his experiences and at the age of 62 would franchise KFC for the first time. Today KFC is everywhere, and Colonel Sanders is a household name. This was a man that knew something about perseverance, and how to treat what most would call failure. He was a man who provided value to the world and the world gave back. The point of all of this is that social mobility isn't an issue, it's entirely possible, but what's required is different from what most people believe. You aren't required to have vast amounts of luck, although it would certainly help. You aren't even required to work a 9-5 for 30 years to be successful. What you are required to do however, is to make yourself valuable to society, and to give so that you can receive. (transition music)

Nick T: American success stories such as those previously said may fire up the young entrepreneurs in America, but these stories often are beacons of false hope. My name is Nick Thouvenot and all of these hyped news articles describing the hottest new businessman or woman are corrupting our new generation of workers. Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs. All three of those successful businessmen bring dollar signs in people's minds and every young person in America would not be opposed to being them. An interesting case that Nick brought up previously was NWA. In the case of NWA, I will concede the fact that they started off from very shaky foundations, but, they filled a niche in their community, and luck guided them all the way to the top. People today cannot account for luck in America today to be successful. Luck doesn't just allow anyone to kickstart an idea and send it soaring to the top. Even through hard work and perseverance, a lot of companies end up not being as successful as they hoped to be. According to a Washington Post article, one half of all businesses fail during its first 5 years of opening, and after ten years, only one third of all businesses make it through that period.

But, let's scale this down a bit. Imagine all those people you see working at the little kiosks at the mall. Imagine all those baristas at Starbucks. Imagine all those plumbers getting down to work in those dirty pipes. I cannot see any justification in telling those people "Hey, if you keep at it, you could be extremely successful and soon you'll have your own store, your own coffee shop, or your own plumbing company. In those situations, those people are often stuck in that trade, and are only in those jobs to support themselves or their families, and are not looking to advance themselves, even if they wanted to. All of those multi-million or even multi-billion dollar companies are often started by one person or a small group of people. That percentage compared to all of the workers in America is very, very small. Also, once these people reach the top, there is almost no way for these people to slide down to a lower level. Once these people

start making copious amounts of money, it will just keep snowballing into more and more sources of income. On the opposite side of the coin, people who make peanuts at these entry-level jobs will continue to make peanuts, and the hope of making more than that eludes them more and more everyday. All these media sources glorify all these successful people and put tons of emphasis on their accomplishments, when the harsh reality in America today is that most of the time, people will fail. How can younger generations strive for future success, when the concept of failure surrounds them in their day-to-day lives? (transition music)

Ryan: The future of America is dependent upon those who are trying to help fix our low economic and social mobility. If we continue down this path of low mobility the American dream might become the American myth. There could be a future that American's may no longer even believe that they can climb the ladder through hard work and dedication. We have seen how low social and economic mobility is from the standpoint of America and also on a global level. More and more Americans are becoming stuck in this loop of low class and are unable to make their way out. The future of America is dependent on how we fix this lack of mobility. Now that may seem drastic but it is true. Look at the past 100 years we have seen horrible economic troubles happen in the 1920s and America climbed itself out of the pit through FDR's new deal plans. Without FDR's plan America would not have become the global power it is today. Today however there is no FDR standing up helping the poor and middle class Americans and even if there was it is not like they can be heard through the mess of political parties. There is so much fighting for whose way is the right way. The correct way is the way of fixing this for everyone. Since There is no FDR that can help build this ladder. The fix needs to be from both sides coming together. A plan that helps the poor, the middle class and at the same time does not hurt the rich. It is only fair afterall. With the election coming up within the next year. More and more candidates are taking action by voicing their plan for helping America. For example Hillary Clinton she gave a speech on upward mobility. This is what she said... (add in youtube audio). So basically Hillary is right we need to build community that is strong and through more investments in infrastructure of neighborhoods America can grow back into the vibrant America that we once were. She is not alone with this fight Bernie Sanders, Jeb Bush, Senator Marco Rubio and more are all running for president and all of them acknowledge the issue at hand. They all suggest a way of fixing the lack of mobility. No one person can say that their way is better then another's it needs to be through cooperation that the Government is able to help those who can break free. The first step is out of acknowledging the issue is out of the way. The next steps are the hardest. Cooperation, solving, and implementation are the remaining steps to fix this issue. The future of America is dependent upon those who can succeed at all the steps. Those who want to fix this broken system. Rebuild the broken ladder. So in the end all that matters is how can we fix America to help the future generation succeed?

(outro music)

Everyone: This was The Social Ladder with

Andrew: Andrew Mueller,

Michael: Michael Adair,

Nick P: Nicholas Padilla,

Nick T: Nicholas Thouvenot,

Ryan: Ryan Bettlach

Nick T: Thank you.