

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

--Langston Hughes

I dream it.
I work hard.
I grind 'til I own it.

--Beyoncé

Dream Big!

Worrying about daily needs can seriously impact our ability to visualize better circumstances and different possibilities but dreaming is necessary and healthy, whether we are sleeping or awake. Not all dreams are equal, though. Those all-to-common imaginings of becoming an extraordinary and revered person who overcomes challenging circumstances to achieve *personal* fame, often for the sole purpose of stardom, are a dime a dozen.¹ Those dreams have not been enough to transform our communities. We need

¹ It is critically important to have multiple dreams and to be knowledgeable about your prospects. Be sure you are able to envision yourself as a surgeon, physician, registered nurse, engineer, construction superintendent, or personal-care business owner because it is statistically more likely that you will be needed in your community and able to achieve success in those fields than as a superstar in sports or entertainment. The dream of the rare young person who overcomes challenging circumstances to achieve success as a sports or entertainment star is overstated in popular cultural depictions from “Sparkle,” “8 Mile,” and “Straight Outta Compton,” to “Hoop Dreams” and “El Play,” a documentary chronicling young Dominicans with dreams of baseball stardom. Take note of the fact that there were only 1,804 black NFL players and 350 black NBA team members while there were 59,776 physicians and surgeons, 14,958 pharmacists, and 23,0404 Civil Engineers in the black community in 2012. It should be recognized that the United States Department of Labor projects 5.3 million new jobs in the fields of healthcare, healthcare support, construction, and personal care between 2012 and 2022. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Why Are There So Many Black Athletes?,” *The Root*, September 1, 2014, http://www.theroot.com/articles/history/2014/09/why_are_there_so_many_black_athletes.html; “Occupational Employment Projections to 2022,” *Monthly Labor Review*, December 2013, United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2013/article/occupational-employment-projections-to-2022.htm>; For an example of claims that minorities do not imagine alternate visions of reality or the future, see the discussion of why so few African Americans are involved in such fields as science fiction in Sergio, “Kevin Grevious Has a Theory on the Lack of Black Sci-Fi Filmmakers,” *Shadow and Act: On Cinema of*

more of the dreams that help us identify needs in society, envision ourselves as part of a solution, and inspire us to work hard to achieve our own goals while making a better world. When considering aspirations, it is important to ponder the present and future while not forgetting about the past.

Our people have long histories of foreseeing the best possible outcomes for ourselves, society, and the world despite the challenges they have faced. Multicultural histories have been part of the American Dream, but have also gone beyond that storied vision, challenging it to be more democratic, inclusive, and generous.² Knowing our world *can* and *will* be better has helped us persevere despite histories of alienation and violent, systematic exploitation. We have not only survived in a society that challenges our very existence, many of us have also thrived. Our ancestors left a legacy of dreams, which are an important part of who we are.

Our forebears were bold enough to dream of better circumstances even during bondage and the brutal Middle Passage. For example, Olaudah Equiano was an enslaved African who assisted abolitionists by writing about the terrors of bondage. His words revealed that, while suffering through horrific conditions, our ancestors still knew the importance of dreaming a better world for everyone.³

the African Diaspora, October 19, 2013. <http://blogs.indiewire.com/shadowandact/kevin-grevioux-has-a-theory-on-the-lack-of-sci-fi-filmmakers>.

² For an opinion on the meaning of the American Dream, see “*Seeing the World Differently: Maya Lin Interview, Artist and Architect*,” *Academy of Achievement*, June 16, 2000,” <http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/lin0int-1>.

³ For an example, see Olaudah Equiano, who was an enslaved African. He assisted those in the struggle to abolish slavery by publishing a book about the horrors of the system. His words revealed the fact that, while suffering through horrific conditions, our ancestors still knew the importance of dreaming. Equiano remembered that he hoped for liberty and dreamed of joy, even on a ship packed with other people who were bound and suffering. Through his narrative, he pointed to the importance of dreams in helping us endure traumatic experiences and allowing us to overcome hardships; The Middle Passage was the brutal sea voyage from Africa to the Americas during the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Most of us are familiar with the “I Have a Dream” speech. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s was a trailblazing vision for a better future, and there were other dreamers like him. Leaders, from Jamaican-born nationalist Marcus Garvey to farmworkers’ rights advocate Cesar Chavez, have gone before us revealing to the entire world their daring visions for a better society.⁴ Writer Maya Angelou suggested that we have the power to reach our greatest potential, not in spite of our history, but distinctly *because* of the gifts our ancestors have given us. She urged us to think about how *we are* the hopes and dreams of those who have gone before us.⁵

The ancestors bequeathed us a heritage emphasizing the significance of dreaming and the importance of working hard to bring our dreams to life. Be inspired. Dare to do the hard work of fulfilling your visions while also helping make the world a better place. Plan for a better tomorrow. Never give up. Do not forget to shine by serving. Dream big. It is your birthright!⁶

⁴ Mirian Pawel, *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez: A Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 370; *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey or Africa for the Africans*, compiled by Amy Jacques Garvey (London: Routledge, 2006), 52.

⁵ Excerpt from Maya Angelou, “Still I Rise,” in *Dreaming with the Ancestors: Black Seminole Women in Texas and Mexico* by Shirley Boteler Mock (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 157.

⁶ Many thanks to Professors Antoinette Waithe and Christy Garrison-Harrison as well as Drs. Harry Akoh and Yvette Joy Harris for their insightful feedback on this essay.