

DREAM ON

Director's Statement

As Americans we cling to the belief that our society rewards hard work and permits anyone to climb the socio-economic ladder. This optimistic outlook is an integral part of our collective identity and has inspired countless generations of Americans to pass along a better standard of living to the next generation. Yet, in recent years the venerable American Dream has become an empty promise for an increasing percentage of the population. Millions of middle class Americans are now unable to maintain the standard of living that they took for granted growing up, and more low-income Americans than ever before are unable to lift their families out of poverty. In light of these disturbing trends, DREAM ON could hardly be more timely. Our core beliefs about the value of work, the inevitability of progress, the fairness of the system, and our country's standing in the world are being shaken by a dramatic decline in living standards and economic mobility. As millions of poor and middle class Americans struggle with diminished prospects for the future, restoring the American Dream has become the defining issue of our time.

Rather than taking a conventional documentary approach to this complex issue, I decided to adopt the cherished American film tradition of the road trip. We retraced the journey of Alexis de Tocqueville, whose seminal work, Democracy in America, helped plant the seeds for what later became known as the American Dream. By revisiting the places he wrote about in 1831 and capturing the stories of a diverse group of Americans struggling to climb the economic ladder, we were able to put an intimate human face on the endangered American Dream. I felt that this approach would enable DREAM ON to have greater resonance than another bleak portrait of poverty in America.

I also wanted to draw on the irreverent wit and inspiration of George Carlin, who quipped, "It's called the American Dream, because you have to be asleep to believe it." In order to find the right tone that could add some levity to this serious topic, I recruited political humorist John Fugelsang to be our guide on this unusual odyssey. He was the host of America's Funniest Home Videos and has appeared on CNN, CNBC, MSNBC, Fox News, HBO, and NPR. Fugelsang anchored Current TV's talk show, Viewpoint, and currently hosts a daily radio program called "Tell Me Everything" on the SiriusXM Insight Channel. As a political comedian, actor, writer, talk show host, and pundit, Fugelsang's eclectic background allows him to bring equal doses of wit and wisdom to our search for the increasingly elusive American Dream.