

Introduction

For over one hundred and fifty years the United States of America has provided each of its citizens, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, place of origin, or religious belief, the opportunity to do more than just succeed; this country has given each person the chance to excel. Not limited to those who are affluent, wealthy or come from royalty, the opportunity America provides is instead based on each individual's own abilities, allowing everyone a fair and equal chance to become a doctor, politician, professional athlete or take on any number of other professions. America has become known as the land where all have a chance to make a better, richer and more abundant life for themselves. This opportunity is what Samuel Francis Smith referred to in 1831 when he crafted the patriotic song "My Country 'Tis of Thee." Invoking the freedom that the founding fathers sought, this song lauds America as being a "Sweet Land of Liberty." Freedom, combined with the equal opportunity to achieve, is often referred to as "the American Dream." Without the American Dream, even individuals with many natural gifts—such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Henry Ford,

Thomas Edison and Charlie Chaplin—would never have left their distinct mark in history. They, along with countless others, likely would have remained unknown had they not been given the chance to pursue their dreams.

All generations of Americans have dreamed of finding success. Each generation has many models of self-reliance and determination among its members: pioneers and problem-solvers who inspire others to dream. From the founding fathers' desire for independence, to the early settlers who ventured west, the people of the United States have always been forward thinkers who desire to broaden their horizons. This spirit of exploration lent momentum to innovators/heroes like the Wright Brothers as they reached for the skies, and risk-takers like Neil Armstrong, as he stepped foot on the moon.

As a result of the Dream, the United States of America has become more than just a country or a geographic location on a map. *America* is instead an idea that embodies the human spirit of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. But along with this opportunity that America provides, there is another attribute that has made America the greatest nation on earth. As retired four-star General Colin Powell once remarked, "The defining strength of America is our people." It is therefore both the opportunity and the people who have come to define this country. From one generation to the next, the act of offering someone else an opportunity is a mark of pride among Americans for their country's greatness.

In some respects, the American Dream is not limited to those of us living in this country. Indeed, every year the Dream draws millions of immigrants from all corners of the globe to this country seeking the same hope, fulfillment and abundance citizens sometimes take for granted. While the American Dream has never promised anyone an automatic right to a richer, fuller

or happier life, everyone in America is given the same platform and opportunity to find joy--no matter what we wish to pursue in our lives. For many who live elsewhere, American society and its way of life is so appealing that they consider risking certain danger to migrate to this country.

Simultaneously, this country has welcomed immigrants with their creative ideas to help build a better and more advanced America for all. Some of these notable immigrants include Alexander Graham Bell, Guglielmo Marconi (inventor of the radio) and Albert Einstein. Each of these innovators played a unique part in shaping the society we now live in. Had it not been for the opportunities these individuals were given and the success each of them achieved, we would not have the modern amenities we now use on a daily basis.

Jakob Schleicher was an immigrant who came to the United States in 1876. He too helped shape America during this country's Industrial Era, though his story is not well known. At the time of his arrival, America relied heavily on the steam engine, with the locomotive and steam ship being the primary ways of traveling long distances. But as a result of the ingenuity of two Germans, Nicholas Otto and his business partner, Eugen Langen, the steam engine faced a new competitor: the gas-powered engine. Jakob Schleicher played an important role in the development of this new technology. He introduced the first internal combustion (gas-powered) engine to America in 1876. It was for this purpose that Jakob traveled to America.

Jakob's Story and the American Dream is a literary non-fiction account that explores Jakob Schleicher's life story, his journey to America and his experience of living the American Dream. In an effort to fully capture the challenges he experienced as an immigrant pursuing the American Dream, this story also delves into the many moving parts occurring within the United States

during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

Beginning with his days of being raised in the old country of Belgium, follow along as Jakob became one of the many entrepreneurs who seized the opportunity to display their creativity and new ideas to the American public, arriving in America just in time to take part in the six-month Great Centennial Exhibition of 1876. Hosted in Philadelphia, the exhibition not only celebrated America's 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, it also highlighted the technological advancements that had been made in the world over the past one hundred years. Traveling thousands of miles from home, this exhibition marked the beginning of a successful business venture in America for Jakob Schleicher.

As any business owner today will avow, change is the only constant. At the turn of the twentieth century, as technology advanced, Schleicher decided to end his first business venture and repurpose himself in a new field. Initially he would find the same level of success in marketing confections as he originally had found in the production of gas-powered engines.

Then, when his beloved Germany looked to expand its empire and its influence in Europe, the Great European War (World War I), set off a chain of events around the world. Jakob, with his unpopular loyalties to the Fatherland, was not untouched. In fact, his world collapsed.

So, why tell Jakob's story? If his collaboration on the gas engine and success in the candy industry weren't enough on their own to make him a household name, why bother?

Because Jakob Schleicher's story, with all of its twists and turns, is our story. Early in the twenty-first century we now find our society searching for the *what now?* Just as industrialization brought about advancements in technology and trans-

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portation, social roles (such as male dominance in lawmaking, business ownership, and most everything else) were rapidly changing. Likewise today, social, economic and world issues influence an entire generation—including its little-known innovators. They, like Jakob Schleicher might launch and excel in one moment, but fail the next. It is important to note that freedom to fail is the other side of the opportunity coin, and one's social capital is a thing to be managed, as carefully or more carefully than, say, one's inventory, property, or skill bank.

This account not only narrates Jakob Schleicher's life story, but in the end it will also illustrate the risks the American Dream presents. Is it worth pursuing the American Dream if achieving it doesn't look the way we thought it would? Were he alive today, Jakob Schleicher might say yes, it's worth it. He would probably argue that dreaming the Dream is part of what it means to be human. For it is in our humanness that we leave behind a lasting legacy.

This is the essence of his story.