Is the American Dream Imploding?

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by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

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My middle name is Dwight.

That name symbolizes a great American story.

My grandparents, born in Turkey and the island of Rhodes, arrived in the United States in the first decades of the 20th century. They settled in Seattle, Washington, in the emerging community of Judeo-Spanish-speaking Sephardic Jews.

My mother’s father was a barber. My father’s father had a shoe shine stand. They arrived in America with little money, little formal education, but great courage and hope. They left impoverished communities in the old world to raise their families in the land of freedom and opportunity.

Like most immigrants of that time, my grandparents wanted their families to adapt to America. Their children attended public school and grew up as a transition generation between the old world and the new. My generation were full-blooded Americans.

I was born in July 1945 and named after my maternal grandfather Marco Romey. But my mother added a middle name, Dwight, after General Dwight David Eisenhower. I was named after an American hero. I was an organic part of American life.

In school, we daily pledged allegiance to the flag of the United States. We learned about Washington and Jefferson and Lincoln. They were our forefathers. Our relatives served in the American military. Our mothers and aunts knitted clothes for American soldiers. We were in America not as guests but as equal members of society,

By my generation, almost all the grandchildren of immigrants, were well educated, hard-working and sincere believers in the American Dream. We were better educated and more affluent than our grandparents — exactly as they had hoped would happen. Our goal was to be constructive members of society and to contribute to the ongoing flourishing of America.

The virtues of America are often under-appreciated while the sins of America are

highlighted and exaggerated. America is undergoing a spiritual, social and political implosion. It has become difficult to feel that we are “one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

With our children and grandchildren, we thought that the American Dream would continue to thrive and expand. But it seems that American society is increasingly marred by antisemitism, racism and violence. The virus of hatred has infected political life, universities and businesses. The virtues of America are often under-appreciated while the sins of America are highlighted and exaggerated. America is undergoing a spiritual, social and political implosion. It has become difficult to feel that we are “one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” The forces of hatred and divisiveness have become more brazen.

My middle name is Dwight, and I am proud to be a bearer of the American Dream. My name symbolizes the dream of immigrants to identify with America, to become full-blooded Americans. America is at risk of losing that dream. It needs to restore confidence and pride in America as a bastion of freedom and opportunity, a land where people of all religions and races can feel safe and secure, where everyone can work together for the betterment of society as a whole.

Let us not forget the American struggles for freedom, democracy and opportunity. Let us build on the American Dream for ourselves and for our future generations.

I want to believe in that future, sure as my middle name is Dwight.