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Rental realities

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A new survey from the website, Rent.com, says that 87 percent of U.S. adults "no longer consider owning a home to be the most essential aspect of their American Dream."



So, what IS the new dream?

The site is asking U.S. residents to share their life's essential goal, jumpstarting the thought process with suggestions such as traveling the world, sending kids to college, starting a business or becoming a rock star. Hey, we're dreaming here, right?

The grand prize is free rent for a year, up to \$10,000. Second prize is a weeklong Caribbean vacation and \$3,000 of diamond jewelry. Third prize plummets to a \$100 Visa debit card.

Entrants can submit a 250-word essay or a one-minute video, which then is subject to a "community voting period." Up to 25 top vote-getters then go before the judges who will consider the entry's originality and creativity, clarity of expression, and adherence to the theme of the American Dream.

The point of all this, of course, is to drive more traffic to a website -- no different from what we're trying to do here at Homegirls.

The rules are full of particulars, so it's nothing to toss off on a whim. (For contest information, visit <http://www.rent.com/newamericandream/>. Deadline is May 2.)

It's intriguing to wonder what people will characterize as their American Dream. How big are people dreaming these days? How realistically? How big is the gap between the dream and the possibility of its being achieved?

Home ownership, after all, became inextricably linked with the phrase, American Dream, because it was for the most part something that people could attain. It would take time, and effort, and sacrifice and all that hard stuff, but in the end, you could end up with a home.

Today, it's likely true that no amount of time, effort and sacrifice will get as many people into their own homes as in the past. We say that like it's a bad thing, which is how we approach anything that represents a change from the past.

Fact is, rent may be the best option for some people. Still, it may take a generation or so to let go of owning a home as the definition of being "all grown up." More to the point, such benchmarks are going to be in flux as we navigate a world that's more global, and thus more economically volatile.

But the question lingers: If not owning a home, what is your American Dream?