The American Dream is comprised of the belief that through merit and hard work, every individual has the equal opportunity to success and prosperity. As a first generation American whose parents realized their own dreams in North America, I am drawn to explore the reality and veracity of this national ethos that is all pervasive throughout American culture. Founded in 1881, Hannibal Square was originally a community on the west side of Winter Park, assigned to African Americans. In the course of this segregation and disenfranchisement, blacks provided labor and service to the wealthy whites of the town. While the town is no longer segregated, the effects of systemic racism are still felt in the community. Similar to other desirable neighborhoods such as Winter Park, its expansion engenders the displacement of its original residents. Redefining the American Dream intends to demonstrate the ways in which the African American community of Hannibal Square has constructed their own American Dream in the face of gentrification. This dream is rooted in history, culture, family, hard work, and faith.

My photographs are composed of symbols and snapshots of what the community of Hannibal Square finds value in. A prominent element of the American Dream is to own a home, thus I juxtapose homes of both the new and old Hannibal Square to demonstrate what “home” means to these communities. I also photograph social spaces that reflect the values of each community such as a historical church to reflect the value of faith for the old community of Hannibal Square. For the new community, I capture social spaces that reflect status and affluence such as the restaurants and shops on New England Avenue. Through these images I intend to create a social commentary that encourages viewers to question the true meaning of the American Dream and what constitutes a good life.

The rapid changes occurring in west Winter Park threaten to replace the micro-narratives of the old community with the dominant narrative that promotes wealth, success and status. The tendency to “other” and devalue other narratives that diverge from the metanarrative is reflected in this series. Mainstream media propagates gentrification as an improvement, while disregarding the implications and reality of gentrification for the communities affected. My objective is for people to reflect, to think critically, and to challenge how their privilege may be contributing to the marginalization of others.