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**The Concept of the American Dream in the Politics  
of the United States of America**

Bachelor Thesis

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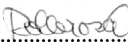
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## **Introduction**

Anybody can dream their own dreams. However, the citizens of the United States of America share one single dream. And this dream is called the American Dream.

The American Dream represents the whole concept which has been developing through the centuries of the American history. The idea of the American Dream began when the foot of the first settler touched the shores of the future United States of America. Some of the arrivals sought wealth, the others religious freedom. The latter drew up the document called the Mayflower Compact to represent their vision of living there and also their own idea of the American Dream.

More significant documents that described the ideas of the American Dream in legal way were drawn up later. The Declaration of Independence and its predecessor the Virginia Declaration of Rights arranged the political ground to get rise to the United States Constitution and its first amendment The Bill of Rights. These documents had made from the idea of the American Dream the legal legacy which has shaped the political path of the United States of America onwards.

More and more people were interested in the idea of the American Dream with respect to their own personal success or the general welfare. Benjamin Franklin was one of them. He emphasized the abilities and dedication of a common man which seemed necessary for promotion of general welfare and becoming a respectable man. And Horatio Alger supported Benjamin Franklin's idea in his book *Ragged Dick: Or, Street Life in New York With the Bootblacks*.

Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King were other politically important figures that influenced the perception of the American Dream. Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King fought for the ideas of equality, mutual cooperation and equal opportunity. So the idea of the American Dream could become the idea of anybody without regard of sex, denomination, age, ethnicity, etc.

The beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century provided us with the picture of jazz age when the importance of morals as a part of the American Dream is tested. Francis Scott

Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* describes in detail the nature of the American dream in jazz age.

The idea of the American Dream is nicely presented in Robert Penn Warren's novel *All the King's Men*. The plot of the novel describing the American Dream in political field is set at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The author tried to catch the nature of the American Dream and brought it closer to the reader using the character of Willie Stark. The idea of the American Dream is described with respect to Willie Stark who determines the form of the American Dream throughout the whole novel. Different ideas of the American Dream are discussed with respect to Willie Stark. The idea of equal opportunity, the idea of general welfare, the importance of morals and the idea of equality play major roles in the novel and influence significant affairs in the novel.

Moreover, the character of Willie Stark is based on the real political figure of Huey P. Long who was a major political leader not only in Louisiana but also in the whole United States of America. The ideas of the American Dream can be more deeply discussed when the comparison of Willie Stark and Huey P. Long is made.

The final part of the thesis is devoted to the idea of the American Dream in the presidential background. Different ideas of the American Dream are shown how they work in practice and how they influenced the lives and the presidencies of the presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama.



## 1. The Concept of the American Dream in the Political Background

The notion of the American Dream has been evolving and changing since the first settlements were established on the territory of the future United States of America. While the term American dream was coined much later—in 1931 by the American writer and historian James Truslow Adams—the idea of the American Dream has shaped the mentality of American nation from its early beginnings until now.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 The Early Beginnings of the American Dream

The first written mention of the notion of the American Dream can be traced to the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers to North America in 1620, when they settled down in Plymouth, Massachusetts. A document known as the Mayflower Compact was signed on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1620 on their ship Mayflower.

[A]nd combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, offices from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony: unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.<sup>2</sup>

The Pilgrims decided to create a civil political body and to obey laws for the welfare of their own colony. This act implies that they wanted happiness and fortunes for every member of their colony. For them the idea of American Dream was the idea of “communitarian bliss”<sup>3</sup>. The idea of communitarian bliss seems to be a complex idea. It is not only about happiness and fortunes, but it also includes the purpose of the Pilgrims' voyage that should be highlighted.

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<sup>1</sup> James T. Adams, *The Epic of America* (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown, 1933).

<sup>2</sup> *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Mayflower Compact.”

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mayflower-Compact> (accessed October 2, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12.

The Pilgrim Fathers left their homeland, because they longed for the religious freedom which they thought to find in North America. Religious freedom became an essential part of their idea of communitarian bliss.

However, the settlement of the Pilgrim Fathers in Plymouth was not the first one in North America. The Colony of Virginia was the first permanent English settlement in North America when Jamestown was founded in 1607. Unfortunately, the settlers there did not draw up such document as the Mayflower Compact, but their notion of the American Dream can be derived from the intention of their settling there. The founders of the Virginia Colony took advantage of the abundance of local vegetation and started exporting local crops. They traded in potatoes, maize but mostly in tobacco. This activity made them richer and richer. As Jim Cullen states: “The Puritans were not the first people to have a dream, even in North America. Virginia was founded before New England, and its founders also had a dream: to get rich.”<sup>4</sup>

Plymouth Colony and Virginia Colony were founded in the same period but for completely different purposes. The idea of the American dream of the Plymouth Colony was tightly connected with terms of equal laws, religious freedom and communitarian bliss, whereas the idea of the American Dream of Virginia Colony was much more material, it meant to get rich and was connected with the bliss of individuals rather than the whole community of the Virginia Colony.

However, these two colonies shared an opinion. This opinion concerned the fact that their version of American Dream involved just them. The idea of American Dream was just for them. They did not take Native Americans into account. They only traded with Native Americans and exploited their own martial skill in political conflicts.

The colonists came to North America and claimed the land, but they were fully aware of the fact that the land was the property of the Native Americans. The story of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 33–34.

the Paspahegh tribe could serve as an example. The Paspahegh tribe “became the first victim of English expansion”<sup>5</sup> in Virginia in the 1610s.

The reasons why the colonists wanted to settle down in Virginia were their fascination with the abundance of wildlife and the hospitality of the Native Americans as the following illustrates: “the people in all places kindly entreating us, daunsing and feasting us with strawberies, Mulberies, Bread, Fish, and other their Countrie prouisions wherof we had plenty.”<sup>6</sup> However, the relations between the colonists and the Paspahegh tribe remained strained which resulted in the Paspahegh's demise: “they killed from 65 to 76 Paspahegh before burning their homes and destroying their corn crop.”<sup>7</sup>

Colonists started to clear the land, cut down trees and were enjoying the abundance of resources. And this is the point when the waste of wealth of North America started, showing its close connection to the idea of American Dream.

The following quotation from Andrew Jackson captures the way of thinking about Native Americans, the natural resources of North America and inevitable expansion of civilization: “What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive republic, studded with cities, towns and prosperous farms occupied by more than 12 million happy people?”<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2 The Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence is one of the most significant and influential documents of history of the United States of America that officially declared the concept of the American Dream.

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<sup>5</sup> “Timeline of Paspahegh-English Interaction,” Archaeology of the Paspahegh Settlement, accessed January 30, 2017, <http://www.virtualjamestown.org/paspahegh/timeline.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Captain John Smith, *A True Relation of Virginia* (Boston: Wiggin and Lunt, 1866), 6.

<sup>7</sup> “Timeline of Paspahegh-English Interaction,” Archaeology of the Paspahegh Settlement, accessed January 30, 2017, <http://www.virtualjamestown.org/paspahegh/timeline.html>.

<sup>8</sup> *Earth and the American Dream*. Directed by Bill Couturié. Los Angeles: Direct Cinema Limited, 1992.

The Declaration of Independence was adopted on 4 July 1776 by the Second Continental Congress and stated the independence of the thirteen American colonies. The United States of America was officially formed. The Virginia Declaration of Rights, written by George Mason, served as a source of inspiration for drawing up the Declaration of Independence as can be seen from the following sample which has lots of in common with example 13 adapted from the Declaration: “the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.”<sup>9</sup> However, both these documents had taken inspiration from John Lock's book *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which John Lock used the phrase ‘pursuit of happiness’.<sup>10</sup>

The reasons for creation of the Declaration of Independence should be comprehended to grasp the idea of the American Dream included in the Declaration. Thirteen American colonies called for independence, because they had no representation in the Parliament of the United Kingdom and high taxes were imposed on various commodities which were imported there. Moreover, the British army was still presented on the territory of American colonies even though there was no reason for it when Seven Years' War (1756–1763) was over. From these statements it can be inferred that money played a crucial role in this conflict.

The United Kingdom desperately needed money to pay debts resulting from the Seven Years' War and wanted American colonies to take part in it, as Jim Cullen states: “The British, laboring under a mountain of debt, thought it only natural that the colonists help bear the cost of the war and their future protection.”<sup>11</sup>

The American colonists did not want to be under the supervision of the United Kingdom—after all the first founders of the American colonies came there to get rid of the British political and social systems to gain freedom. The Declaration of

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<sup>9</sup> “The Virginia Declaration of Rights,” America's Founding Documents, accessed October 9, 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/virginia-declaration-of-rights>.

<sup>10</sup> “John Lock,” The Pursuit of Happiness, accessed April 9, 2017, <http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/john-locke/>.

<sup>11</sup> Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 42.

Independence contained complaints of colonists about the way of the reign of King George III. Examples of their complaints from the Declaration of Independence follow:

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. ... He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures. ... For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent. ... He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.<sup>12</sup>

It is obvious that the American colonists were not contented with the political situation and hence wanted political independence. The idea of the American Dream had changed since the first settlement in North America and arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers, political independence became part of their American Dream as it is written in the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>13</sup>

It is noticeable that the idea of the American Dream evolved from a simple form to a more complex one and embodied new ideas such as political freedom.

### 1.3 The United States Constitution and The Bill of Rights

The United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights naturally follow the legacy of the Declaration of Independence. These two documents that are closely related to each other could be perceived as an extension of the Declaration of Independence.

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<sup>12</sup> “The Declaration of Independence,” America's Founding Documents, accessed October 9, 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

The United States Constitution was ratified in 1788. The ratification of the Bill of Rights followed in 1791 that serves as the first complex amendment to the United States Constitution.

The United States Constitution is a legal document that represents the supreme law in the United States of America. The United States Constitution states a wide range of legal acts and rules for federal government, office of president, judicial branch, etc. The United States Constitution is more about the internal structure of the United States of America rather than about the declaring of personal freedoms. However, the Preamble of the United States Constitution explains why it was decided to create a document that deals with the political structure of the United States of America.

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.<sup>14</sup>

The content of Preamble shows to be a kind of condensed form of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence and the Preamble contain the same idea about freedom, bliss and fortunes.

However, the Preamble does not explicitly state various rights and obligations of the inhabitants of the United States of America and hence the Bill of Rights was drawn up.

The Bill of Rights is a crucial amendment of the United States Constitution that proclaims the rights of inhabitants of the United States of America. It gives formal, legal and clear form of the rights. Here are a few extracts from articles from the Bill of Rights to illustrate the basic notion of it and demonstrate the declared freedoms:

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<sup>14</sup> “The Constitution of the United States,” America's Founding Documents, accessed October 16, 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble ... the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed. ... The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated ... In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial ... Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.<sup>15</sup>

The United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights are documents that were drawn up to make the idea of American Dream perfect and also to have it legally ratified. But this idea of American Dream is not finite as the rights of African Americans, Native Americans and women were still questioned.

The United States Constitution did not treat African Americans as full persons, but regarded them to be three-fifths of a person as it was expressed in the first article of the Constitution:

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.<sup>16</sup>

The American Civil War represented the escalation of questions regarding slavery and rights and freedoms of African Americans. Finally, the Thirteenth Amendment that abolished slavery was ratified in 1865 and invalidated “a collective agreement ... that for the moment, at least, freedom was to be a relative and racially limited term”<sup>17</sup> which the historian Jim Cullen mentions in relation to this topic.

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<sup>15</sup> “The Bill of Rights,” America’s Founding Documents, accessed October 16, 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript>.

<sup>16</sup> “The Constitution of the United States,” America’s Founding Documents, accessed November 11, 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.

<sup>17</sup> Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 44.

The Fourteenth Amendment, which was ratified in 1868, followed and granted American citizenship to African Americans. The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution ratified in 1870 guarantees the right to vote to male African Americans.

Until this point there had not been almost any attempt to provide female citizens with the right to vote. The first wave of feminism dates back to 1840 when feminists started demanding equal rights for men and women in the voting area. Finally, in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified and gave the right to vote to American female citizens: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”<sup>18</sup>

The rights of Native Americans remained unnoticed until 1924, when the Indian Citizenship Act was enacted: “... that all non-citizen Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States be, and they are hereby, declared to be citizens of the United States: Provided, That the granting of such citizenship shall not in any manner impair or otherwise affect the right of any Indian to tribal or other property.”<sup>19</sup> Native Americans in the United States of America obtained not only citizenship but also rights that were closely attached to the status of being an American citizen (e.g. the right to vote).

The idea of the American Dream had been radically changed. The idea of the American Dream could be shared by the whole American nation. Moreover, the notion of American Dream became a legal legacy and an important subject of politics, one that modifies the political life in the United States of America and determines the political path of the whole American nation.

#### 1.4 The American Dream of Climbing the Social Ladder

The idea of the American Dream also includes the image of equal opportunity which precedes and enables personal fulfilment. This kind of dream concerning

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<sup>18</sup> “Amendments,” America’s Founding Documents, accessed November 20, 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/amendments-11-27#14>.

<sup>19</sup> “Act of June 2, 1924,” Archives, accessed January 31, 2017, <https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/?dod-date=602>.



personal success does not apply only to a certain ethnic or religious minority, but should be available to everyone regardless of their sex, age, ethnicity, religion or background. It is a mass dream that can be enjoyed by everyone as it is described by James Truslow Adams:

It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.<sup>20</sup>

The history of the United States of America provides us with many inspiring stories which prove that this dream of personal fulfilment can be realized by everyone who puts effort into it. The life stories of Benjamin Franklin, Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King are, without a doubt, perfect examples of living for the idea of the American Dream.

Benjamin Franklin was the youngest of seventeen children who grew up in poor rather than a wealthy background. He received minimum education, but his hunger for knowledge made him into a notable man. He made discoveries in the field of electricity, he helped to found the American Philosophical Society, a hospital, a school and a library in the state of Pennsylvania, and he became a member of the Continental Congress.<sup>21</sup>

Benjamin Franklin states that personal fulfilment can be achieved by everybody who has particular abilities and who is fully devoted to their idea of the American Dream as it is described in his work:

... as I have always thought that one man of tolerable abilities may work great changes, and accomplish great affairs among mankind, if he first forms a good plan, and, cutting off all amusements or other employments that would divert

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<sup>20</sup> John Kenneth and Sandra L. Hanson White, editors, *The American Dream in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: P F Collier & Son Company, 1909), 3–4.

his attention, makes the execution of that same plan his sole study and business.<sup>22</sup>

Benjamin Franklin and Horatio Alger Jr. shared the same attitude towards the issue of becoming successful. This idea is captured in Horatio Alger Jr.'s boys' novels such as *Ragged Dick: Or, Street Life in New York With the Bootblacks*. This novel describes a life of the main protagonist Dick who is a poor boy living in the streets working as a bootblack. But he desires to “grow up 'spectable,”<sup>23</sup> so he decides to follow a piece of advice which was given to him by Mr. Whitney: “Save your money, my lad, buy books, and determine to be somebody, and you may yet fill an honorable position.”<sup>24</sup> Finally, Dick's behaviour is changed and he becomes successful.

However, Benjamin Franklin's idea of personal success is also related to the idea of communitarian bliss as his opinion of sharing inventions without having them patented illustrates: “That, as we enjoy great advantages from the inventions of others, we should be glad of an opportunity to serve others by any invention of ours; and this we should do freely and generously.”<sup>25</sup>

Benjamin Franklin emphasizes not only a personal fulfilment but also one's opportunity to promote the general welfare and he puts the ideas of communitarian bliss and personal success together when he asks a question: “What good have I done today?”<sup>26</sup>

The combination of ideas of equality and communitarian bliss is thoroughly portrayed by the life story of Booker T. Washington. Although he was born in a plantation cabin in poor conditions and later on he worked in coal mines, he managed to accomplish great enterprises and became an influential figure.<sup>27</sup> He followed the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>23</sup> Horatio Alger Jr., *Ragged Dick: Or, Street Life in New York With The Bootblacks* (Philadelphia: Polyglot Press, 2002), 38.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: P F Collier & Son Company, 1909), 116–117.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>27</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2009).

instructions of Benjamin Franklin, thus materializing his dream of personal fulfilment.

One idea of the American dream was highlighted by Booker T. Washington. It was the idea of equality between people regardless of ethnicity. In his autobiography *Up From Slavery* he put stress on the fact that people who treasure and exercise the idea of equality create a homogeneous body whose task is to advance the general welfare. He expressed his views on that subject when delivering the Atlanta Compromise Speech: “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress. ... Nearly sixteen millions of hands will aid you in pulling the load upward, or they will pull against you the load downward.”<sup>28</sup>

Booker T. Washington explains the importance of mutual collaboration and respecting the equality which prove to be beneficial to the whole American society: “My friends, we are one in this country. ... We rise as you rise; when we fall you fall. When you are strong we are strong; when we are weak you are weak. There is no power that can separate our destiny. The Negro can afford to be wronged; the white man cannot afford to wrong him.”<sup>29</sup>

Martin Luther King followed the legacy of Booker T. Washington and blossomed into an eminent figure who also underlined the need for racial equality and mutual cooperation. In 1963 Martin Luther King delivered his famous address entitled “I Have a Dream” at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. As the title implies, the central idea of the address is an idea of the American Dream. Martin Luther King referred back to the documents that legally anchored the ideas of the American Dream in political lives of the American nation and indicated the interconnection of the American Dream and the history of the United States of America:

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 236–237.

<sup>29</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Selected Speeches of Booker T. Washington*, ed. E. Davidson Washington (New York: Doubleday, Doran, & Co., 1932).

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, Martin Luther King highlighted that the dream of equality is an inherent part of the American Dream as it follows: “I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’”<sup>31</sup>

Benjamin Franklin and Horatio Alger Jr. described their views of the idea of the American Dream with respect to the moral qualities of the people. Benjamin Franklin introduced his “man of tolerable abilities”<sup>32</sup> and Horatio Alger Jr. presented us with the morally pure character of bootblack Dick. And Booker T. Washington's and Martin Luther King's analyses of the idea of the American Dream was based on the morals of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution.

However, the development of the American Dream clearly shows what happens when the morals are excluded from the concept of the American Dream. The idea of general welfare is converted into a chase after money, material things and one's own success as the novel *The Great Gatsby* illustrates.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* pictures the manners of society at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The novel depicts the living of the American Dream which consists of being young, rich and successful. Nick, who is the narrator of the story, focuses on making money as a stockbroker on Wall Street and the main character Gatsby hints that his fortune is bound up with illegal enterprises.<sup>33</sup> The characters of Tom and Daisy also gives us a picture of the society at that time: “They

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<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther King, “I Have a Dream,” King Institute, accessed February 3, 2017, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: P F Collier & Son Company, 1909), 95.

<sup>33</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2001).

were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made ... .”<sup>34</sup> Their lives simply revolve around getting money quickly and effortlessly without any thought of promoting general welfare. But this notion of the American Dream is in complete contradiction to the idea of communitarian bliss which was presented by Benjamin Franklin.

The following quotation from a chairman of General Motors John J. Raskob supports F. Scott Fitzgerald's description of society and shows that the idea of materialism became the central idea of the American Dream: “And I am firm in my belief that man not only can be rich, but ought to be rich.”<sup>35</sup>

## **2. The Idea of the American Dream in the Novel *All the King's Men***

*All the King's Men* is a novel written by American poet and novelist Robert Penn Warren. The purpose of this novel, which was published in 1946, is to portray a symbolic thing—a myth—that is more important than the novel's realistic description of political issues set at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup>

The myth represents the ideas of the American Dream that embrace all the characters and all their steps that lead them towards the fulfilment of their own version of the American Dream. Moreover, the ideas of the American Dream influence and shape the minds of the characters to that extent that it brings a tragic ending.

The very beginning of the story provides us with the description of the untouchable nature of the myth and also with the warning how treacherous it can be if one does not watch their back. The following quotation compares the American

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>35</sup> *Earth and the American Dream*. Directed by Bill Couturié. Los Angeles: Direct Cinema Limited, 1992.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, 2001).

Dream to a car ride during which a driver is hypnotized by looking at a line on a road: "... and if you don't quit staring at that line and don't take a few deep breaths and slap yourself hard on the back of the neck you'll hypnotize yourself ... ." <sup>37</sup> And when the driver loses control over the car, it can result in a serious accident which is represented by the ending of the novel. But the idea of the American Dream occurs throughout the whole novel like a mirage which a reader can see and feel, but cannot touch it: "You'll go whipping toward it, but it will always be ahead of you, that bright, flooded place, like a mirage." <sup>38</sup>

The credibility of the story is supported by the fact that the main character Willie Stark is based on a real political figure of Huey Pierce Long whose life followed the ideas of the American Dream and tested the importance of morals rooted in some ideas of the American Dream.

## 2.1 Life of Huey P. Long and the Character of Willie Stark

The character of Willie Stark, who is the main protagonist of the novel *All the King's Men*, tries to capture the myth of the American Dream that was created by Huey Pierce Long. The American Dream represented by Huey P. Long and by Willie Stark evolved in the course of time and included wide range of ideas such as general welfare, equal opportunity, personal fulfilment and equality. These ideas usually referred back to the Declaration of Independence. Moreover, the novel shows that the ideas can be realized in very different ways with respect to the moral code of the characters.

### 2.1.1 The Idea of Equal Opportunity

The American Dream of Huey P. Long and Willie Stark begins with their belief in achieving personal fulfilment through the idea of equal opportunity

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 2.

suggested by Benjamin Franklin: "... one man of tolerable abilities may work great changes, and accomplish great affairs among mankind ..."<sup>39</sup>. Huey P. Long grew up on a farm in a poor part of Louisiana, but "Long's childhood was not humiliating or harsh; in fact, it was a soft upbringing by the standards of that time and place"<sup>40</sup>. Despite not growing up in excellent living conditions, he did not give up the idea of equal opportunity and thanks to his determination to work and study he became a respectable man. The character of Willie Stark, who also grew up in rather poor conditions, highlights the power of belief in equal opportunity that anybody can become a respectable member of society: "He was just a human, country boy, who believed like we have always believed back here in the hills that even the plainest, poorest fellow can be Governor if his fellow citizens find he has got the stuff and the character for the job."<sup>41</sup>

Willie Stark is well aware of the nature of equal opportunity and later on he uses its sparkling power to shape the minds of the public. The scene of visiting his father on a farm only for being photographed in poor conditions of his upbringing shows Willie's intention to recycle the idea of equal opportunity and enhance his image. He addresses his assistant Jack Burden to arrange the scene where his old dog is a part of it: "... get the hairy bastard up here and make him look like he was glad to see me."<sup>42</sup> The novel also describes the final impact of such photographs on the public and it implies how powerful the created illusion was: "... the pictures of the family and the white leghorns gave the voters a nice warm glow, it made them feel solid, substantial, and virtuous, it made them think of gingerbread and nice cold buttermilk."<sup>43</sup>

Huey P. Long used the idea of equal opportunity in the same way when he emphasized the background of his upbringing: "I was born on a farm, am a common

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<sup>39</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: P F Collier & Son Company, 1909), 95.

<sup>40</sup> William Ivy Hair, *The Kingfish and His Realm: The Life and Times of Huey P. Long* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 41.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 129.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 457.

man, and my sympathies have always been with the masses.”<sup>44</sup> In comparison with Willie's mild profiting from it, Huey P. Long took it to the extreme when he started making up fictitious stories from his childhood: “I have seen my mother cry ... because I did not have shoes to wear.”<sup>45</sup> This statement by Long was later on opposed by his brother Julius: “Nothing could better portray [Huey's] true character, his lack of love ... to tell such a falsehood about his dead mother.”<sup>46</sup>

The hard beginnings of Willie Stark's and Huey P. Long's careers show how devoted they were to their dream of becoming a successful man. Their occupation of a travelling salesman tested their determination. The following example shows Willie's temporary way of life as a salesman: “... stopping at the farmhouses in between, knocking on the door and tipping his hat and then showing the woman how to fix a pot.”<sup>47</sup> Huey P. Long went through similar situations and when he did not succeed in his enterprises he “was forced to sell his possessions, including the coat off his back.”<sup>48</sup>

Willie Stark also had to tackle a lack of his education. He studied at a college, but he had to leave the college, because his family was not able to support him financially any more. However, he faced this challenge and started studying on his own: “He sat up nights and studied books and studied law ... He didn't study that law in any man's school or college. He studied it nights after a hard day's work in the field.”<sup>49</sup> Huey P. Long was also fortunate in his movements and after one year at Tulane University Law School in New Orleans he passed the examination and became a lawyer when he was only 21 years old.<sup>50</sup> Huey P. Long commented on his achievement and revealed his formula for success: “I studied law as much as from

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<sup>44</sup> “Entry Into Politics,” Huey P. Long, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.hueylong.com/life-times/entry-politics.php>.

<sup>45</sup> William Ivy Hair, *The Kingfish and His Realm: The Life and Times of Huey P. Long* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 17.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 87.

<sup>48</sup> “Early Career,” Huey P. Long, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.hueylong.com/life-times/early-career.php>.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 128.

<sup>50</sup> “Education,” Huey P. Long, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.hueylong.com/life-times/education.php>.



sixteen to twenty hours each day.”<sup>51</sup> However it seems exaggerated, it is probably true as William Ivy Hair says: “As a political leader he often followed an even longer work schedule, leaving only two or three hours for sleep.”<sup>52</sup> Their determination and effort which they put into their beginnings of political career prove that they truly were Benjamin Franklin's “man of tolerable abilities”<sup>53</sup> and that they followed Franklin's advice how to accomplish the goal of personal fulfilment.

The idea of equal opportunity stayed with Willie and Huey P. Long for all their political careers and reminded them of their difficult times. Later on they realized that the idea of equal opportunity was not as equal for anybody as it should have been. This realization probably led them to the idea of promoting general welfare.

Huey P. Long's famous address called “Every Man a King” emphasizes and describes the problem of not so equal opportunity as it follows:

Did that mean, my friends, that someone would come into this world without having had an opportunity, of course, to have hit one lick of work, should be born with more than it and all of its children and children's children could ever dispose of, but that another one would have to be born into a life of starvation?<sup>54</sup>

Notwithstanding the methods, which they both used to benefit from the idea of equal opportunity, which was formerly promoted by Benjamin Franklin and Horatio Alger Jr., they definitely popularized the idea of equal opportunity and revived it in minds of the public.

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<sup>51</sup> William Ivy Hair, *The Kingfish and His Realm: The Life and Times of Huey P. Long* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 53.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: P F Collier & Son Company, 1909), 95.

<sup>54</sup> Huey P. Long, “Every Man a King,” Share Our Wealth Speech, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.hueylong.com/programs/share-our-wealth-speech.php>.

### 2.1.2 The Idea of General Welfare

The idea of general welfare, which is an inherent part of the American Dream, is portrayed in the novel, too. The author used the character of Willie Stark to demonstrate the process of promotion of general welfare in political background when the morals of Willie Stark are tested.

At the very beginning of the story when Willie was working as a municipal treasurer, he discovered that substandard material was going to be used for school building. He tried to draw attention to that fraud, but he was immediately dismissed. However, he did not regret it, because "... you didn't want to be mixed up with them anyway. Not after you found out they were dishonest and crooked."<sup>55</sup> His behaviour shows that he followed certain moral code and cared about the general welfare. Still, he tried to inform the public as it follows: "You could see Willie standing on a street corner ... working out figures to explain what he was squawking about ... ."<sup>56</sup> And he also expresses his desire to change the situation and make it more beneficial for everybody: "I am going back to Pappy's farm and milk the cows and study some more law for it looks like I am going to need it."<sup>57</sup>

Huey P. Long used his law education in the same way as Willie was willing to use it. Huey P. Long usually defended poor people in need against the interest of companies. William Ivy Hair claims that Huey P. Long "was a young warrior of and for the plain people, battling the evil giants of Wall Street and their corporations."<sup>58</sup> It is obvious that he cared about the general welfare as much as Willie Stark did.

Willie Stark and Huey P. Long continued with their efforts to promote the general welfare which brought them the position of governor. Willie Stark clearly stated points of his political programme. "... what this State needs is a new tax program. And the rate ought to be raised on the coal lands the State's got leased out. And there's not a decent road in the State once you get in the country. And I could

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 87.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>58</sup> William Ivy Hair, *The Kingfish and His Realm: The Life and Times of Huey P. Long* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 88.

save this State some money by merging some departments.”<sup>59</sup> This political programme was almost entirely consistent with the programme of Huey P. Long. Huey P. Long fought for free education and healthcare, building new roads and bridges, and for lower property taxes.<sup>60</sup> Willie Stark summarised the entire idea of general welfare in quite expressive when he was talking about building a new hospital: “... and any poor bugger in this State can go there and get the best there is and not cost him a dime.”<sup>61</sup>

Lots of people supported decisions made by the Governors Willie Stark and Huey P. Long, because they acted in the interest of the public. Cheering crowds listening to Willie's speeches and people commenting on the political behaviour of Huey P. Long are the proofs of it. There are a few commentaries on political activity of Huey P. Long: “My dad was able to get a high school education and go on to college because of the free public education made possible by Governor Long.”<sup>62</sup> And Dr. Dan Gremillion said: “It is remarkable he accomplished so much. He was a genius. Say what you will about his motives, clothes, speaking manner, roots, whatever, this man changed it all in favor of the Louisiana citizen.”<sup>63</sup>

### 2.1.3 The Importance of Morals

However, not everybody liked the means which were used by Willie Stark and Huey P. Long to accomplish their goals.

The novel presents us with Willie's methods when he had to solve a problem in the political field. When Willie needed the endorsement from Judge Irwin, who was not willing to do it, Willie simply told his assistant Jack Burden to dig up dirt on

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<sup>59</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 110.

<sup>60</sup> “Programs,” Huey P. Long, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.hueylong.com/programs/index.php>.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 323.

<sup>62</sup> Glenda B. Turner, comment on Governor Huey P. Long, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.hueylong.com/perspectives/share-your-stories.php>.

<sup>63</sup> Dr. Dan Gremillion, comment on Governor Huey P. Long, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.hueylong.com/perspectives/share-your-stories.php>.

Judge Irwin and use it in his favour.<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, this task became a part of a chain of events that finally led to Willie's assassination.

Actually, Willie Stark confessed to using immoral methods when he said: "... buy 'em and you can't tell how long they'll stay bought. I bought too many already."<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, he justified his behaviour and explained that he was forced to use those methods. He expressed the idea that when one wants to achieve something, one has to do the dirty work, too: "He resigned because he wanted to keep his little hands clean. He wanted the bricks but he just didn't know somebody has to paddle in the mud to make 'em."<sup>66</sup>

Willie's use of immoral methods was not a secret. The character of Mr. Patton, who is a friend of Jack Burden's mother, raised the question concerning Willie's immorality and apprehension about possible consequences of such a behaviour: "Free this and free that and free other. Every wool-hat jack-ass thinking the world is free. Who's going to pay? ... He'll have half the State on a pay-roll and the other half will be afraid to vote. Strong-arm, blackmail, God knows what."<sup>67</sup>

Huey P. Long used the same methods as Willie Stark, as the following statement describes it: "One legislator believed that some of his colleagues sided with Long because they were blackmailed by threats to reveal things in their past, or situations concerning their relatives."<sup>68</sup> But Huey P. Long justified himself in the same way that Willie Stark did and stated that he was forced to use those methods for good things to be done:

They say they don't like my methods. Well, I don't like them either. I really don't like them either. ... I'd much rather get up before the legislature and say, 'Now this is a good law and it's for the benefit the people, and I'd like you to

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<sup>64</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, 2001).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 173–174.

<sup>68</sup> William Ivy Hair, *The Kingfish and His Realm: The Life and Times of Huey P. Long* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 163.

vote for it in the interest of the public welfare.’ Only I know laws ain’t made that way. You’ve got to fight fire with fire.<sup>69</sup>

Huey P. Long also referred back to the Declaration of Independence in his address “Every Man a King” and hinted that its ideas had not been taken into account so far: “We have everything here that we need, except that we have neglected the fundamentals upon which the American Government was principally predicated.”<sup>70</sup> It implies that he wanted to put the society on the right track again for its own benefit even though it meant for him to use immoral methods.

Willie’s and Huey P. Long’s behavior show that they followed a certain kind of moral code, but they also broke its rules. However, they also did a lot for the welfare of society.

#### 2.1.4 The Idea of Equality

The novel *All the King’s Men* also touches the issue of equality. Willie Stark and Huey P. Long tried to promote the general welfare and reduce the gap between the rich and the poor people. They wanted the less-privileged to become equally privileged to more fortunate members of society. Huey P. Long’s address “Every Man a King” criticised the social inequality and outlined its main cause:

They own the banks, they own the steel mills, they own the railroads, they own the bonds, they own the mortgages, they own the stores, and they have chained the country from one end to the other until there is not any kind of business that a small, independent man could go into and make a living ...<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Huey P. Long, “Huey P. Long on His Political Methods,” Huey P. Long, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.hueylong.com/perspectives/huey-long-quotes-in-his-own-words.php>.

<sup>70</sup> Huey P. Long, “Every Man a King,” Share Our Wealth Speech, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.hueylong.com/programs/share-our-wealth-speech.php>.

<sup>71</sup> Huey P. Long, “Every Man a King,” Share Our Wealth Speech, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.hueylong.com/programs/share-our-wealth-speech.php>.

How Willie Stark and Huey P. Long wanted to promote general welfare and provide fair conditions for anybody was described in the previous chapter “The Idea of General Welfare”.

It is noticeable that they both were interested in the idea of equality in general. But Huey P. Long also discussed the topic of racial equality and supported it: “Treat them just the same as anybody else, give them an opportunity to make a living, and to get an education.”<sup>72</sup>

Willie Stark does not deal with this topic, but the idea of racial equality is described in the novel. The story about Cass Mastern, who was a relative of Jack Burden, and his secret love to Annabelle Trice, who was married to Cass's friend Duncan, raised the question of racial equality when African-American maid Phebe was sold, because she found out that Duncan committed suicide when he discovered that Annabelle was in love with Cass.<sup>73</sup> But Cass could not bear the fate of Phebe and he decided to “find her and buy her and set her free.”<sup>74</sup>

Even though that Willie Stark and Huey P. Long did not highlight the importance of racial equality, they were devoted to the idea of equality in general, which applied to all the people regardless of ethnicity.

### **3. The American Dream and the Presidential Background**

The concept of the American Dream also enters the presidential office of the United States of America. This concept is literally omnipresent in this political field. The ideas of the American Dream can be found in various presidential campaigns, presidential addresses and even in inaugural speeches of American presidents. The reason why the concept of the American Dream is used so often is that concept

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<sup>72</sup> Huey P. Long, “Huey P. Long on Racism and African Americans,” Huey P. Long, accessed April 23, 2017, <http://www.hueylong.com/perspectives/huey-long-quotes-in-his-own-words.php#racism>.

<sup>73</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, 2001).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

appears in the text of the United States Constitution and its ideas can affect private, social and political life of any American citizen.

The following excerpt from the United States Constitution provides us with the text of the oath that the American presidents take on their Inauguration Day on 20<sup>th</sup> January. “Before he enter on the Execution of his Office, he shall take the following Oath or Affirmation:—‘I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.’”<sup>75</sup> The American presidents swear to “preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States”<sup>76</sup>, the legal document where the ideas of the American Dream are legally anchored and preserved. In other words the American presidents swear to defend the ideas of the American Dream, such as the idea of equality, general welfare, equal opportunity and freedom regardless of ethnicity, sex, denomination, age, etc.

A study made by Penn, Schoen, and Berland Associates (2008) presents concrete examples how the concept of the American Dream can influence lives of American citizens and how important the whole concept is.

Substantial majorities considered the following items to be a "major part" of the American Dream:

- 1 Having a good family life, 93 percent
- 2 Having quality health care for myself and my family, 88 percent
- 3 Being able to speak your mind regardless of the positions you take, 85 percent
- 4 Having a comfortable and secure retirement, 85 percent
- 5 Being able to succeed regardless of your family background or where you come from, 82 percent

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<sup>75</sup> “The Constitution of the United States,” America's Founding Documents, accessed March 23, 2017, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.

<sup>76</sup> “The Constitution of the United States,” America's Founding Documents, accessed March 23, 2017, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.

6 Being economically secure and not having to worry about being able to afford things, 81 percent

7 Achieving peace in the world, 63 percent

8 Having the time to enjoy the good things in life without having to work too many hours, 59 percent

9 Reducing the effects of global warming, 56 percent<sup>77</sup>

The responses of respondents can be categorized into several groups according to the ideas of the American Dream. The responses number 1, 2, 4, 6 and 8 fit the group sharing the idea of general welfare, the response number 3 falls into the group of the idea of freedom, the response number 5 is in the group of the idea of equal opportunity and the responses number 7 and 9 fit the group of general welfare in the global sense.

The findings of the study also imply that the fulfilment of the ideas of the American Dream is very closely connected with the politics of the United States of America. The fulfilment is usually the task of people actively engaged in politics, such as governors, senators, members of the United States House of Representatives and mainly presidents.

### 3.1 President Bill Clinton

Bill Clinton was born in 1946 in Arkansas. His parents were not wealthy, his father worked as a salesman and his mother worked as a nurse. His father died early and his family had had to cope with unpleasant economic consequences of the Great Depression. Bill Clinton recalls his childhood in his autobiography called *My Life* and commented it as it follows: “Later, when I got into politics, being able to say I had lived on a farm with an outhouse made a great story, almost as good as being

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<sup>77</sup> John Kenneth and Sandra L. Hanson White, editors, *The American Dream in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 10.



born in a log cabin.”<sup>78</sup> When Bill Clinton was a child, he spent some time on a farm of his grandfather. He highlighted this fact in his autobiography, because rather poor background is connected with the concept of the American Dream. It refers back to the idea of Benjamin Franklin that “one man of tolerable abilities”<sup>79</sup> can achieve anything when he is fully devoted to his work regardless of his background.

It can be said that Bill Clinton was devoted to his work. During his study at Georgetown University, he worked as a bartender and in summer he took up a summer job to support himself financially as he said: “I also figured out how to live on twenty-five dollars a week.”<sup>80</sup> Later he received a Rhode's scholarship that enabled him to study two years at Oxford. He did not give up his devotion when he became the president: “As President, I worked hard to schedule my time so that I’d have a couple of hours a day alone to think, reflect, plan, or do nothing.”<sup>81</sup> Bill Clinton tried to follow the piece of advice of Benjamin Franklin: “... he first forms a good plan, and, cutting off all amusements or other employments that would divert his attention, makes the execution of that same plan ... .”<sup>82</sup>

Bill Clinton believed in the power of the idea of equal opportunity like Huey P. Long or Willie Stark. This idea contributed to his becoming a respectable man. But he was also aware of the "inequality" of the equal opportunity and he worked to change it: “I have believed passionately in the cause of equal opportunity, and I will do what I can to advance it.”<sup>83</sup>

Bill Clinton also strongly emphasized the importance of the founding documents of the United States of America. He talked about the legacy of the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights when he made a speech about Affirmative Action in July 1995:

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<sup>78</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 22.

<sup>79</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: P F Collier & Son Company, 1909), 3–4.

<sup>80</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 72.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>82</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: P F Collier & Son Company, 1909), 3–4.

<sup>83</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 263.

Emancipation, women's suffrage, civil rights, voting rights, equal rights, the struggle for the rights of the disabled, all these and other struggles are milestones on America's often rocky but fundamentally righteous journey to close the gap between the ideals enshrined in these treasures here in the National Archives and the reality of our daily lives.<sup>84</sup>

Bill Clinton in this speech pointed out some ideas of the American Dream: the idea of equal opportunity and equality. He also implied that the legacy of the founding documents was not fully realized. So he tried to promote its legacy by the Family Medical Leave Act, Medicare project and school reform. He tried to enhance the general welfare.

However, Bill Clinton was not only loved by people for what he had done, but he was also criticised. The Whitewater affair and his lying about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky showed him in a bad light. The question of the importance of morals was raised and the possibility of his impeachment was questioned. This shows that morals are a really important part of the concept of the American Dream.

Finally, Bill Clinton's summary of his presidential career emphasized the goal of his work and the importance of having the American Dream: "America gave me the chance to live my dreams. And I have tried as hard as I knew how to give you a better chance to live yours."<sup>85</sup>

### 3.2 President George W. Bush

George Walker Bush was born in 1946 in Connecticut. He grew up in a financially secure background, as his father successfully entered the world of the oil business. Their family is sometimes referred to as family of aristocracy, because they stressed their English aristocratic roots. "The Bushes themselves proudly drew

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<sup>84</sup> Bill Clinton, "Address Affirmative Action," Miller Center, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/july-19-1995-address-affirmative-action>.

<sup>85</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 919.

attention to their English royal blood, a lineage upheld by the arbiters in London.”<sup>86</sup> This seems to be the exact opposite of Bill Clinton's childhood family conditions. There was emphasized the aristocratic origin, whereas Bill Clinton discussed the importance of equal opportunity. Even though George Bush did not grow up on a farm as Bill Clinton did, he was aware of the importance of the idea of equal opportunity and he mentioned it in his first inaugural speech: “The grandest of these ideals is an unfolding American promise that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, that no insignificant person was ever born. ... And this is my solemn pledge: I will work to build a single nation of justice and opportunity.”<sup>87</sup>

George W. Bush highlighted the legacy of the founding documents as Bill Clinton did. “When the Declaration of Independence was first read in public and the Liberty Bell was sounded in celebration, a witness said, ‘It rang as if it meant something.’ In our time it means something still.”<sup>88</sup> This underlines the significance of the documents and its legacy.

George Bush worked with respect to these documents and he tried to promote the general welfare by the No Child Left Behind Act and school and health care reform, etc. But after the terrorist attacks in September 2001, George Bush's main task was to defend the idea of freedom. And he talked about it in almost all his speeches: “Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.”<sup>89</sup>

It is obvious that historical development challenged different ideas of the American Dream. Bill Clinton was more concerned with the idea of equality when he dealt with the issue of affirmative action, whereas George Bush was more concerned

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<sup>86</sup> Kevin Phillips, *American Dynasty: Aristocracy, Fortune, and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush* (New York: Viking, 2004), 18.

<sup>87</sup> George W. Bush, “The First Inaugural Address,” Miller Center, accessed March 21, 2017, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-20-2001-first-inaugural-address>.

<sup>88</sup> George W. Bush, “The Second Inaugural Address,” Miller Center, accessed March 21, 2017, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-20-2005-second-inaugural-address-0>.

<sup>89</sup> George W. Bush, “Terrorist Attacks Address,” Miller Center, accessed March 21, 2017, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/september-11-2001-address-nation-terrorist-attacks>.

with defending the idea of freedom. The ideas of the American Dream are historically and legally preserved, but future development can challenge them in various possible situations.

However, George W. Bush was also criticized for his activity and inactivity. Some did not like that George Bush did not keep his promises: “It is no exaggeration to say that lying has become Bush's signature as president.”<sup>90</sup> Others, like Michael T. Klare, the resource-war theorist, criticised Bush for attacking Iraq because of his involvement in the oil business: “Controlling Iraq is about oil as power, rather than oil as fuel. Control over the Persian Gulf translates into control over Europe, Japan and China. It's having our hand on the spigot.”<sup>91</sup> So the importance of morals played here a major role, too.

### 3.3 President Barack Obama

Barack Obama was born in 1961 in Hawaii. His mother Ann Dunham was a native Kansan and his father, Barack Obama Sr., came from Kenya. He grew up in Hawaii and Indonesia, where he lived with his stepfather until he was ten years-old, when he was sent back to Hawaii to live there with his grandparents.<sup>92</sup> Barack Obama got an opportunity in his childhood to encounter various cultures, values, habits, ways of living and denominations. This experience has had a strong influence on him. Barack Obama commented on the nature of this influence in his book *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* as it follows:

As the child of a black man and a white woman, someone who was born in the racial melting pot of Hawaii, with a sister who's half Indonesian but who's usually mistaken for Mexican or Puerto Rican, and a brother-in-law and niece

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<sup>90</sup> Kevin Phillips, *American Dynasty: Aristocracy, Fortune, and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush* (New York: Viking, 2004), 82.

<sup>91</sup> Michael T. Klare, *Resource Wars* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001).

<sup>92</sup> “Barack Obama: Life Before the Presidency,” Miller Center, accessed March 29, 2017, <https://millercenter.org/president/obama/life-before-the-presidency>.

of Chinese descent ... I've never had the option of restricting my loyalties on the basis of race, or measuring my worth on the basis of tribe.<sup>93</sup>

Barack Obama was aware of the importance of equality of rights and equal opportunity and he had fought for them. In his "Election Night Victory Speech" in 2012 he referred back to the legacy of the Declaration of Independence and to the idea of the hard-working man of Benjamin Franklin:

I believe we can keep the promise of our founding – the idea that if you're willing to work hard, it doesn't matter who you are, or where you come from, or what you look like, or where you love – it doesn't matter whether you're black or white, or Hispanic or Asian, or Native American, or young or old, or rich or poor, abled, disabled, gay or straight ... .<sup>94</sup>

Not only Barack Obama but also Bill Clinton, George W. Bush emphasized the legacy of founding documents and its ideas. They referred back to them in their presidential speeches, because those ideas are the ideas of the American Dream that unite all citizens of the United States of America.

Barack Obama also wanted to enhance the general welfare. He described in detail how he wanted to do it in his book *Change We Can Believe In: Barack Obama's Plan to Renew America's Promise*. He discussed various kinds of topics. He paid attention to the economic revival and economic future, foreign policy, terrorism and domestic issues such as immigration system, environment and strengthening families.<sup>95</sup>

However, he did not manage to fulfil all his proposed suggestions and he was criticised for some of his decisions concerning domestic and foreign policy.

Barack Obama summarized in his farewell speech the most significant ideas for the United States of America, the idea of the American Dream: "I am asking you

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<sup>93</sup> Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming on the American Dream* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 231.

<sup>94</sup> Barack Obama, "Election Night Victory Speech," Miller Center, accessed April, 6, 2017, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/november-6-2012-2012-election-night-victory-speech>.

<sup>95</sup> Barack Obama, *Change We Can Believe In: Barack Obama's Plan to Renew America's Promise* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008).

to hold fast to that faith written into our founding documents; that idea whispered by slaves and abolitionists; that spirit sung by immigrants and homesteaders and those who marched for justice ... .”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Barack Obama, “Farewell Speech,” Telegraph, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/11/barack-obamas-farewell-speech-full/>.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis is to capture the beginning and the development of the American Dream and its basic ideas in the field of politics of the United States of America.

The first part of the thesis describes the historical background of the American Dream. I discuss the contradictory purposes of the establishment of the Plymouth Colony and the Virginia Colony and I use the Mayflower Compact to demonstrate the early idea of general welfare that became part of the American Dream. I also point to the dark side of the colonisation of America which is connected with the demise of Native American tribes (e.g. the Paspahegh tribe) and wasting of natural resources. This shows that the idea of the American Dream in its early days was only the American Dream of colonists.

I also cover the significant documents: the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution and The Bill of Rights. The Declaration of Independence is not only connected with the idea of political freedom but also with the idea of equality. The historical development of the United States Constitution and The Bill of Rights show how the issue of the equal rights was treated. Finally the question of equal rights for African Americans, Native Americans and women was solved and the idea of the American Dream became the idea of the whole nation.

Then I discuss the idea of general welfare and equal opportunity of the American Dream. I demonstrate these two ideas using the life stories of Benjamin Franklin, Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King. Benjamin Franklin provided us a plan how to handle these ideas and how to achieve them in his autobiography. He treated this topic mostly in general sense. However, Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King pointed to the importance of racial equality and its connection with these two ideas. They emphasized the equal opportunity for all and mutual cooperation for promotion of general welfare. Here I stress the importance of morals on which these figures based their opinions and I provide the

example of a situation when the morals were excluded from the idea of American Dream. For that purpose I used the novel *The Great Gatsby*.

In the second part of the thesis I describe the ideas of the American Dream in the novel *All the King's Men*. The topic is introduced by the quotations from the novel which describe the untouchable nature of the American Dream. I try to discuss these ideas of the American Dream: the idea of equal opportunity, general welfare, importance of morals and equal rights. The ideas are described with the respect to the main character Willie Stark whose character is based on the real political figure of Huey P. Long. This enables me to compare ideas of the American Dream presented in the novel with the ideas of the American Dream supported by Huey P. Long. They both wanted to make equal opportunity more equal and they tested the importance of morals when they were forced to do something immoral to promote general welfare. They did not touch the topic of equality, but the novel uses the character Jack Burden who told us story how his ancestor dealt with the topic of racial equality.

The final part of the thesis describes the ideas of the American Dream during the presidencies of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama. All three presidents emphasized the legacy of the founding documents where the ideas of the American Dream are stated. They also pointed to the fact that the American Dream has not been fulfilled yet and that new situations occur and test the basic ideas of the American Dream. This is demonstrated by the fact that each president emphasized different ideas: Bill Clinton was mainly interested in equal opportunity, George W. Bush in freedom and Barack Obama in equality.

In the final part I use a study made by Penn, Schoen, and Berland Associates that show what people include in the concept of the American Dream. Their responses correspond to the ideas of equal opportunity, freedom and general welfare. It also shows how important the American Dream is for the United States.



## Resumé

Cílem této práce je čtenáře blíže seznámit s pojetím amerického snu v politice Spojených států amerických. Práce zachycuje vývoj amerického snu od dob kolonizace amerického kontinentu až po prezidentská období Billa Clintona, George W. Bushe a Baracka Obamy.

První část práce se věnuje počátkům amerického snu v době, kdy byly na americkém kontinentu zakládány první kolonie. Je zde také nastíněn dopad tehdejšího pojetí amerického snu na původní obyvatelstvo Ameriky. Dále práce popisuje ukotvení konceptu amerického snu v Deklaraci nezávislosti, Ústavě a Listině práv Spojených států amerických. Následně jsou zde ve spojení s americkým snem zmíněny životní osudy a názory Benjamina Franklina, Bookera T. Washingtona a Martina Luthera Kinga. Není opomenut ani Jazzový věk, doba, ve které peníze a sláva hrály podstatnou roli a značně tak ovlivnily vnímání amerického snu.

Druhá část práce zachycuje pojetí amerického snu v novele Roberta Penna Warrena. Novela *All the King's Men*, která je zasazena do 30. let 20. století v Louisianě, vypráví o politickém životě Willieho Starka. Postava Willieho Starka vychází ze skutečné postavy amerického politika Hueyho P. Longa. Práce zdůrazňuje abstraktní povahu amerického snu v této novele a některé jeho aspekty jakými jsou rovnoprávnost, rovnost příležitostí, veřejné blaho a důležitost morálky.

Závěrečná část práce popisuje americký sen v prezidentském prostředí. Bill, Clinton, George W. Bush a Barack Obama se v období svého prezidentského mandátu setkali s různými aspekty amerického snu. Práce se snaží zachytit, jak tito prezidenti ke konceptu amerického snu přistupovali a jaké jeho aspekty upřednostňovali. V této části je také zveřejněn výsledek průzkumu. Odpovědi respondentů tak potvrzují celkovou důležitost amerického snu v politice Spojených států amerických.

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## **Annotation**

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### **Abstrakt**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je blíže čtenáře seznámit s pojetím amerického snu v politice Spojených států amerických a jeho historickým vývojem. Nejdříve se práce zaměřuje na počátky amerického snu v období kolonizace Ameriky, pak rozebírá jeho ukotvení v Deklaraci nezávislosti, Ústavě a Listině práv Spojených států. Dále jsou zde rozebrány názory Benjamína Franklina, Bookera T. Washingtona a Martina Luthera Kinga. V další kapitole se práce věnuje zachycení amerického snu v díle *All the King's Men*, kde jsou rozebrány některé aspekty amerického snu. Závěrečná kapitola pojednává o americkém snu v prezidentských obdobích Billa Clintona, George W. Bushe a Baracka Obamy.

### **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to introduce the concept of the American Dream in the politics of the United States of America and its historical development. The first part of the thesis describes the early beginnings of the American Dream connected with the colonisation. Then it shows how the American Dream is represented in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and The Bill of Rights. Ideas of Benjamin Franklin, Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King are highlighted

here. Next chapter captures the concept of the American Dream in the novel *All the King's Men*, where some aspects of the American Dream are described. The final chapter describes the American Dream during presidencies of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama.